

## The Election of Zohran Mamdani

*We will prove that there is no problem too large for government to solve, and no concern too small for it to care about* — Zohran Mamdani; election night victory speech

Today is Friday, January 2nd, 2026. Zohran Mamdani has just taken the oath of office as Mayor of New York City. Although I harbor no *personal* animosity toward the man, his elevation to the post of Mayor of America's greatest city is something I find myself extremely unsettled by. I would like to sketch out some thoughts on the matter that might help some people see more clearly why his election is not only bad for NYC, but a dangerous sign for America in general.

For me, Mamdani's election signals two things: the degradation of mores in the United States, and the increasing gullibility of the public — both of which ought to yield a sense of foreboding in minds of those who cherish their liberties. I'll begin with the first theme.

### 1) Degradation of Mores

Zohran Mamdani represents a familiar type that has been foreseen by those who understand democratic norms and the tendencies of democratic societies. For Alexis de Tocqueville, Mamdani may well embody soft despotism, the outcome of the people's forfeiture of self-determination in exchange for the schoolmaster government that takes care of them. Here we see an apathetic people, indifferent and even hostile to the rights of their neighbors, that seek, above all, the satisfaction of their material interests. Please bear with a lengthy passage that will illuminate this point:

Although the principle of the sovereignty of the people is intended to establish and justify self-government by individuals who "associate" for common purposes, in practice, it makes a new mild despotism seem desirable. Democratic individuals who begin with an exaggerated self-confidence and self-importance may in the end be overwhelmed by their sense of weakness and insignificance ... passionate about little else but securing their comfort, they will be tempted to surrender responsibility for making their own decisions, and simply follow public opinion .... Preoccupied with the well-being of themselves and their family, never as successful as they might hope in securing either the material goods they desire or keenly crave, keenly aware of the needs all men share and forgetful of the strengths that some, or even each of them, can muster, they will find it quite reasonable to trade much, if not all, of their independence to a government that can meet the needs for them... but by relieving individuals of the necessity of thinking and acting on their own, it gradually "rob[s] each of them of several of the principal attributes of humanity" and finally "reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd."<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt precisely encapsulates what is happening, not just in NYC, but across metropolitan areas in the United States. A popular current is beginning to prevail mightily among large swaths of the population that reflects a degradation of mores. As religious devotion declines and people begin to look to this life for their ultimate gratification, they are drawn into the insatiable vortex of materialism, "the care of satisfying the least needs of the body and of providing the smallest comforts of life preoccupies minds universally."<sup>2</sup> Paired with an inflated

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<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, Alexi de. Democracy in America. Translated and edited by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. University of Chicago Press, 2000. Editor's Introduction pp. lxix - lxx.

<sup>2</sup> DA II 2.10

view of self that conflates “all men are created equal” with the notion that all men ought to enjoy equal results, jealousy emerges that begets an impetus to fleece the haves of their possessions and redistribute the plunder amongst themselves — the have-nots.

Tocqueville warned that the people, bogged down and discouraged by their malcontent, would become apathetic and “forgetful of the strengths that … [they] … can muster” to provide for their own well-being. They then look to the government to satisfy their material interests, subjecting themselves to “soft despotism,” the “schoolmaster” or “shepherd government” — a singularly effective recipe for economic stagnation, the exact opposite of what Mamdani voters are expecting.

John Adams once famously said,

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by … morality and religion. Avarice, ambition [and] revenge or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.<sup>3</sup>

There are many attempts to explain why he thought this was true, but for me, the explanation is fairly straightforward. The Constitution of the United States granted enormous rights to the people. The right to freedom of speech, the right to freedom of the press, the right to freely exercise their religious convictions, even the right to bear arms. These rights give massive power and latitude to the people. A society that affords such wide-ranging rights to self-determination *must* have a virtuous citizenry — rights and virtue go hand in hand.<sup>4</sup> If the people are virtuous, they exercise their rights with restraint; they take an interest in the welfare of both those in their immediate circles, but also those of the greater body politic. They see beyond themselves to the interests of the aggregate. A society formed by these kinds of individuals can grant enjoy profound rights to all sorts of freedoms, and yet prosper.

Now substitute into that same society a people who are selfish, consumed by jealousy and hatred, having no fear of answering to anyone or anything beyond government, and given the same rights and freedoms as the moral people. What can be expected is all manner of excess in violation of the rights of those outside of the “tribe.” Zero-sum thinking will abound, civility will break down, unrest and disorder will follow. Faction will rise against faction with ever higher stakes each election cycle. In short, you have a society that will tear itself apart as each uses his liberties to detriment of his neighbor’s.

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<sup>3</sup> “From John Adams to Massachusetts Militia, 11 October 1798,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102>.

<sup>4</sup> DA I 2.6

What we have in Mamdani's election is a warning that we're trending in this latter direction. Nearly 75% of young voters (ages 18-29) voted for Mamdani.<sup>5</sup> Tufts University's Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), released a report that found the majority of young people "support democracy in principle, but believe that the democracy they are experiencing today cannot solve the nation's problems and is not working well for their generation." They also found that "nearly a third of young people express lower support for core democratic principle; they are 'checked out' of a democracy that has not served them well or met their needs."<sup>6</sup>

## 2) Voter Gullibility

Much of the dissatisfaction comes from the difficulties young people face in affording to buy a home, or even affording rent. Additionally, there is a large number of young people with crushing debt that they incurred through student loans, which *may* explain, at least in part, why Mamdani won over 62% of college-educated voters, compared to Cuomo's 38%,<sup>7</sup> as the former made repeated overtures to student-loan forgiveness during his campaign.

This gets us into the gullibility of the voting public. The plain fact is that virtually everyone one of the issues that young people cite as a reason for their discontent with the American way of life is a byproduct of government involvement. Take the housing market for example. There are myriad reasons why housing is so expensive, but some of the biggest contributors are government policy — the mere existence of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; the government's fiscal mismanagement that led to a massive inflation in all prices (including housing) and therefore higher interest rates; restrictive Land Use Law; etc.

In terms of the costs of college tuition and student debt, a major contributor to ever increasing tuition costs are federal student loans, which lead more people to enroll in college and/or accept higher tuition prices than they otherwise would. On the other side of the equation, this easy access to credit also enables the colleges to consistently raise tuition in response without fear of losing enrollment. A study conducted by economists at the New York Federal Reserve found that every additional dollar in federal student loans, college tuition rises by about 60 cents.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Source: CIRCLE analysis of the 2025 voter Poll conducted by SSRS.

<sup>6</sup> Apau, D., Suzuki, S., Medina, A., Booth, R.B. (March, 2025). How Does Gen Z Feel About Democracy? Insights from Three profiles of Youth and Democracy. CIRCLE (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) & Protect Democracy.

<sup>7</sup> Emerson College Polling. New York City Mayoral Poll: Mamdani Catches Cuomo in Rank Choice Voting.

<sup>8</sup> Credit Supply and the Rise in College Tuition: Evidence from the Expansion in Federal Student Aid Programs. David O. Lucca, Taylor Nadauld, and Karen Shen. Federal Reserve Bank of New York Staff Reports, no. 733 July 2015; revised February 2017 JEL classification: G28, I22.

When the Federal Family Education Loan Program was instituted under the Higher Education Act of 1965, the federal government began guaranteeing privately issued student loans to encourage the extension of credit by banks for this purpose. This program was ended in 2010. What were its effects? “Between 1995 and 2017, the balance of outstanding federal student loan debt increased more than sevenfold, from \$187 billion to \$1.4 trillion (in 2017 dollars).”<sup>9</sup>

So here we are, with major affordability problems that harass the wits of America’s youth, and what is the solution Mamdani provides? More government. More of the very thing that creates these issues in the first place. Thomas Sowell has described this phenomenon in detail in books like “Intellectuals and Society,” where he shows that, when a government program produces disastrous results, the response by government officials is to say that the reason for the failure is owing to there not having been enough government involvement.

Another dimension of the illusions many voters carry around is illustrated by what Mamdani said in the quote at the top of this paper: “there is no problem too large for government to solve.” That line of thinking is utterly at odds with our historical experience. The frequency with which government involvement aims at “remedying” some societal ill and, by so doing, makes that exact issue worse, enabled Milton Friedman to conjure up the phrase: “the invisible foot of government,” a play on words with Adam Smith’s invisible hand. Student loans are a perfect example; so are price controls, rent controls, minimum wage laws, mortgage subsidies, financial regulations, etc.

This knowledge, which ought to be commonplace among the people, is something that young voters in particular seem entirely unaware of. Besides young people who are inexperienced, there are growing numbers of people that sympathize with the Mamdani big-government way of thinking, as proved by his election victory. The seeming lack or even disregard of this basic knowledge makes the electorate gullible. Moreover, it makes them vulnerable to the designs and ambitions of enterprising individuals that do *not* value America’s core principles and institutions.

I wish nothing but the best for NYC, and even Zohran Mamdani, but his election is something that the American people ought to be wary of. It ought to wake up Americans to the fact that, not only are mores in decline, but many people are completely ignorant of basic facts that could’ve stopped a Mamdani campaign before it even got off the ground. So what can be done? As John Adams said, our Constitution was “made only for a moral and religious people.” For an increasingly secularized society, it’s important to recall the net benefits that religion can provide.<sup>10</sup> Virtue can be a difficult thing to come by, but hopes turned towards the hereafter can temper passions in the present, which is what our country so desperately needs at the moment: moderation. Additionally, our education system has been in decline for decades. Our republic

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<sup>9</sup> The Volume and Repayment of Federal Student Loans: 1995 to 2017. Congressional Budget Office. 2020.

<sup>10</sup> John Adams certainly meant the Judeo-Christian tradition in this regard.

faces destruction from within the classroom. It was Thomas Jefferson himself who said: "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty." Swift reform to our education system is perhaps the most expedient remedy to the ills a Mamdani victory reveals our nation to be suffering from.