

Jews are worried about Zohran Mamdani. Here's why they shouldn't be

Mamdani is ready to handle the challenges of the city — and build lasting partnerships with its Jewish community



Zohran Mamdani, the Democratic candidate to be New York City's mayor, participates in a debate on Oct. 22. Photo by Hiroko Masuike/Pool/AFP/Getty Images

By [Victor Kovner](#) October 23, 2025

As New York City's mayoral election moves ahead, there appear to be three major issues that trouble many of my friends within the Jewish community about Zohran Mamdani, the Democratic candidate and frontrunner.

Will Mamdani take pains to appropriately protect the city's Jewish community during this period of heightened antisemitism, they ask? Should his views on the Middle East disqualify him from the support of Jewish voters? And is he sufficiently experienced to serve as mayor of the largest and most complex city in the nation?

As a one-time city official deeply involved in the city's Jewish community, I think each of those questions is valid — and each easily answerable, in Mamdani's favor.

Concerns about antisemitism

There are understandable fears within the Jewish community about our safety at a time of rising antisemitism. To that, I say: It's hard to imagine a stronger program of protection against hate than that which Mamdani has outlined.

Mamdani has proposed a 800% increase for funding hate crime prevention — a comprehensive investment that should reassure those of us who are most alarmed. Antisemitism “is a real crisis that we have to tackle, and one that I’m committed to doing so through increased funding for actually preventing hate crimes across the city,” Mamdani [told NPR](#) this summer, adding “my commitment is to protect Jewish New Yorkers and that I will live up to that commitment through my actions.”

Compare that to the plans put forward by Mamdani’s opponents, former Gov. Andrew Cuomo — who is running as an independent, after Mamdani defeated him in the Democratic primary — and Curtis Sliwa, a Republican. Cuomo has promised to prioritize fighting antisemitism, but has [focused on forms of antisemitism](#) more associated with the political left, in a fashion that leaves open the question of whether he’s prepared to address the often-more-violent threats of right-wing antisemitism. And Sliwa, who has a [record of offensive statements](#) about Jews, appears to be less interested in having the city directly involved in Jewish safety. “I, unlike any of the candidates, have said Jews must protect themselves,” he said in an [interview](#) with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. “If you depend strictly on gentiles, history is replete with instances where you’re going to be horribly disappointed.”

Notably, Mamdani’s proposals appear to be resonating with Jewish voters: Despite concerns about his positions when it comes to the Middle East, a [new poll](#) suggests his support among Jewish New Yorkers is effectively equivalent to Cuomo’s.

The Middle East

Jewish New Yorkers are not single-issue voters living in fear. We are looking for a mayor who can build a coalition to improve our already great city.

As for the Middle East, it is true that Mamdani has been harshly critical of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government. What’s also true: Most American Jews agree with him. According to a recent [Washington Post poll](#), a majority of American Jews believe Netanyahu’s government has overseen war crimes in Gaza, and almost 40% believe Israel has committed genocide.

In that context, Mamdani seems like a candidate much more aligned with Jewish perspectives on Israel than Cuomo, who joined one of Netanyahu’s legal defense teams pro bono. In the weeks leading up to the current ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, Cuomo expressed some concern about the shocking events in Gaza — but continued to [broadly](#)

[align himself](#) with Netanyahu's talking points. While his position might be reassuring to the majority of American Jews who feel a close attachment to Israel, it doesn't suggest that he's ready or able to handle the nuances of today's changing environment — and changing Jewish perspectives.

I am a founding member of J Street, a Zionist, pro-peace organization that supports a two-state solution and opposes the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. I differ with some of Mamdani's views about the future for Israelis and Palestinians, including his [failure to vocally support](#) a two-state solution.

But one doesn't have to agree with all of his views about the Middle East to conclude that he is the best candidate for mayor. As Mamdani himself [said](#) in a recent appearance, "We're not looking for a litmus test that we feel the same way we do on every single issue, and that includes Israel and Palestine."

"There may be a Jewish New Yorker who will not see themselves in me because of a disagreement we have on that question," he added, "but I want to make sure they still see themselves in the city."

The issue of experience

I served as corporation counsel, the city's chief legal officer, under former Mayor David N. Dinkins, which means I have some experience with the challenges facing any new administration. Upon taking office, I found that with the assistance of experienced managers in the city's civil service, I could bring myself up to date quickly. That leads me to believe that if Mamdani is elected as mayor, he will find that, with the right help, learning the ins and outs of the city's many agencies will be strenuous but doable.

Mamdani has been taking significant steps toward crafting a transition team that should comfort any New Yorkers concerned about his youth and relative inexperience. (It's worth remembering that Mamdani is already well acquainted with how complicated it can be to work within a government, with his six years' experience as a New York Assemblyman from Queens.) According to public reports, the transition efforts have already included meetings with plenty of experienced public servants, including Dan Doctoroff, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg's former deputy mayor for economic development; Janette Sadik-Kahn, Bloomberg's former commissioner of transportation; and Alicia Glen, who served as deputy mayor for housing and economic development under former Mayor Bill De Blasio. Doctoroff, for example, has been quoted saying, "I will help him in any way possible."

What this shows me: Mamdani knows he's going to need a crack team to be a successful mayor. True leadership isn't about being personally able to take on every challenge; it's about knowing how to assemble and run a team that has that ability.

Notably, Bloomberg — to my view the most successful mayor we have had in this century — had no governmental experience and little familiarity with the complexity of the city's public administration before taking office.

Yet through the selection of an outstanding group of municipal leaders and public servants, he was able to assemble a first-rate administration. He led the city's amazing and effective efforts to recover quickly from 9/11, in part by attracting outstanding and often non-political experts to serve as senior members of his administration.

In contrast, De Blasio, former Mayor Rudy Giuliani and current Mayor Eric Adams each came into the role with many years of governmental experience. Yet the record of each was, shall we say, unsuccessful. The Adams administration is known for serious allegations of corruption at the highest levels. The De Blasio administration, after a promising start, deteriorated, as the mayor was too often distracted by other political ambitions, and proved prone to confusion and dispiriting inefficiency. The Giuliani administration was marred by racial insensitivity and defense of unacceptable police misconduct.

Why should we have less hope for Mamdani than we did for Bloomberg? And why should we expect that, in light of the ineffective recent mayoralities, a more traditional candidate would be more effective?

Mamdani has told those with whom he is consulting that he admired many of the accomplishments of the Bloomberg administration — a strong sign that he's noticed the most important lesson of Bloomberg's mayoralty. With the aid of experienced and well-qualified city officials, such as former Comptroller Brad Lander, and with the active support of experienced public officials like Rep. Jerry Nadler, Assemblyman Micah Lasher and Gov. Kathy Hochul, there is every reason to hope his administration will be thoughtful about hiring experienced managers, and crafting a new generation of dedicated New Yorkers to lead us into the future.

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