

Gaza and Rent

Declining Public Opinion on Israel and Zohran Mamdani's Victory

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Introduction

For decades, American public and elite support for Israel was very strong. When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7th, 2023, President Joe Biden “swiftly condemned the October attacks, reaffirmed Israel’s right to self-defence, and pledged both diplomatic and military support to Israel.”¹ However, in the years since the attack, Israel has been accused of genocide in their conduct of the war. Now, “half of voters in the United States believe Israel is committing genocide in Gaza,”² losing Israel much of the American public’s previously high support. Recent polling suggests that younger Americans, especially Democrats, are far less sympathetic to Israeli policy,³ creating a partisan realignment within the Democratic Party’s base. In the years since October 7th brought Israel and Gaza to one of the brightest spotlights of American politics, the crisis has been a thorny issue for candidates and a wedge issue within the party. Examples of this wedge include the uncommitted movement during the 2024 Democratic primary, as well as potential protest votes for candidates like Jill Stein or Cornel West or potential Democratic voters staying home during the general election. In the 2024 election, the Democrats were caught flat-footed on the issue, with the party elites generally

1 Nils Lukacs and Corina Lozovan, “America’s 2024 Election and Europe’s Middle East Dilemma,” *German Institute of Global and Area Studies* (2024), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep64407>, 2.

2 John Power, “Half of US Voters Believe Israel Committing Genocide in Gaza, Poll Says,” *Al Jazeera*, August 28, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/28/half-of-us-voters-believe-israel-committing-genocide-in-gaza-poll-says>.

3 Maya Sweedler, “How American Views on Israel and Antisemitism Have Changed Since Oct. 7,” *The Associated Press*, October 6, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/poll-october-7-israel-hamas-american-jews-059d4fd0232a9c5958b89f6e193a4873>.

not evolving their position in the face of changing public opinion. Now, looking at the 2025 Democratic primary for Mayor of New York City, we see Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani winning both the primary and the general election against former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. Mamdani made headlines for calling Israel's actions in Gaza "genocide."⁴ Meanwhile, Cuomo "cast himself as a champion of Israel's war effort and Jewish New Yorkers," even "[volunteering] to defend Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, in international criminal court."⁵ Mamdani's support rose with his focus on affordability and careful rhetoric addressing Democrats' concerns about Gaza. To the surprise of many Democrats, Mamdani ended up winning the primary, showing that Democrats can win elections while criticizing Israel. In the words of Benjamin Oreskes, "Mamdani's victory in... [the] election... may have scrambled what had been a clear political imperative for candidates in the city: the need to support Israel."⁶ Indeed, Mamdani's anti-Israel stance isn't just 'not disqualifying,' but to many voters a sign of character and a reflection of public opinion.

Essay Outline

To understand this shift in perception of Israel and American support for Israel, and how this shift has both negatively and positively affected Democratic campaigns in the past year, I will first touch on how foreign policy issues broadly impact American elections and how this connects to Israel and Gaza. I will then examine the perception of Israel and American support during the pre-October 7th status quo, as well as the aftermath of Hamas' October 7th attack. I will then show that, since the October 7th attack, public opinion on Israel and supporting Israel has gone considerably down, as well as examining the demographic data behind this trend. I will look at the 2024 presidential race and how the Democrats' position on Israel not being tuned to public opinion hindered their chances in the election. I will then turn to New York City, examining its politics and demographics, as well as New Yorkers' public opinion on Israel. I will focus on New York because, due to its status as the largest city in the country, as well as "a major cultural capital of America, what happens in New York has the potential to affect the shape of change elsewhere in the nation."⁷ Finally, I will show how these factors allowed Zohran Mamdani to win the Democratic primary for New

4 Jeffery C. Mays, "Israel and Antisemitism Loom Large as Issues in the N.Y.C. Mayor's Race," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/nyregion/israel-gaza-antisemitism-mayor-nyc.html>.

5 Nicholas Fandos and Dana Rubinstein, "Mamdani's Comment on 'Intifada' Motto Fuels Tension in Mayor's Race," *The New York Times*, June 21, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/19/nyregion/mamdani-globalize-intifada.html>.

6 Benjamin Oreskes, "Challengers Take on N.Y. House Democrats, Targeting Their Ties to Israel," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/25/nyregion/israel-congress-mamdani-challengers.html?smid=threads-nytimes>.

7 Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 184.

York Mayor despite (or, in some cases, even because of) his positions on Israel, showing that support for Israel is no longer a necessity for Democratic politicians in the 21st century.

Foreign Policy's Impact On Elections

The relationship between foreign policy and public opinion has been well fleshed out. For example, Holsti argues that “because voters are perceived as punishing incumbent candidates or parties for foreign policy failures... or rewarding incumbents for successes... decisions by foreign policy leaders may be made in anticipation of public reactions.”⁸ The incumbent’s handling of salient foreign policy issues can certainly impact voters’ choices. Focusing on terrorism as the salient foreign policy issue in the 2004 presidential election, Nicholas F. Martini and Samuel Schutt found that “salient foreign policy issues viewed to be favorably handled by the incumbent have the potential to alter voting calculations to favor the incumbent.”⁹ Though “the potency of [Gaza] is... limited and not the main deciding factor,”¹⁰ Mohammed Sinan Siyech and Akanksha Narain assert, “the war in Gaza has made foreign policy an important determining factor in US elections.”¹¹ As such, if voters see the incumbent Democratic party as having failed in the Middle East, they may punish them by withholding their vote. While most voters won’t be swayed by this single issue, in elections as close as 2024 it’s absolutely worth noting the subset of voters that did punish Democrats.

Measuring Opinion On Israel

Opinion on Israel can be divided into a number of different aspects. We can gauge the public opinion on these different aspects by asking a variety of questions to poll takers. One question is about whether someone approves or disapproves of how Israel is conducting the War in Gaza. Another question (that, anecdotally, seems to have been asked more recently compared to other questions) is about whether someone believes Israel is committing a genocide against the people of Gaza. Yet another question is if the respondent believes the United States should provide more, less, or the same amount of arms to Israel, or if the U.S. should condition aid. It follows that, if someone believes Israel is committing genocide, then they would want the United States to stop arming Israel or to condition the aid. Then, there’s the broad question of which side of the conflict

8 Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 60-61.

9 Nicholas F. Martini and Samuel Schutt, “Diverted from the ‘Correct Vote’? Foreign Policy Influence on Electoral Behavior,” *Social Science Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2019): 259-71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26613236>, 259.

10 Mohammed Sinan Siyech and Akanksha Narain, “How the Gaza Conflict Influenced Trump’s Victory,” *Observer Research Foundation*, December 7, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/how-the-gaza-conflict-influenced-trump-s-victory>.

11 Siyech and Narain, “How the Gaza Conflict.”

someone sympathizes with more. It would follow that if someone believes that Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza, they would lean more to the Palestinians and away from Israel. Israel would also see less support if someone disapproved of the way in which Israel is conducting the war, though not necessarily to the Palestinians. Therefore, though these different factors don't all mean the same thing, in sum they comprise Israel's public support.

National Public Opinion Before And Following October 7th

Since the events of October 7th, 2023 brought much more public attention to the Middle East, it's worth examining what national public opinion thought of Israel both before and immediately after the attack. "Over the last few decades, Americans of both parties have generally been more sympathetic toward the Israelis than the Palestinians."¹² For the 20 years before the attack and Israel's response, over 50% of Americans sympathized more with Israel, with the amount sympathizing more to the Palestinians never went above 26%.¹³ Elite rhetoric spoke highly of continuing to support Israel militarily and diplomatically, citing "unbreakable bonds,"¹⁴ with the nation. Pro-Israel lobbies, like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and Christians United for Israel (CUFI), "express unequivocal support for U.S. security assistance to Israel,"¹⁵ with "near congressional unanimity in support of providing aid to Israel without conditions or use limitations."¹⁶ For a long time, "aid to Israel was the third rail; it wasn't even in the frame of discussion."¹⁷ Politicians could feel the power of the pro-Israel lobby, in a 2009 interview, Jimmy Carter said "it's politically impossible... for any member of Congress to make a public statement condemning or criticizing the policies of Israel."¹⁸ The former President said, "it would be political suicidal for them to do so."¹⁹ If members of congress came out publicly about this situation, "their seats would be in danger,"²⁰ he continued. This support served as a strong

12 Sweedler, "How American Views."

13 Sweedler, "How American Views."

14 Barack Obama, "Remarks of President Barack Obama To the People of Israel," *The White House: Office of the Press Secretary*, March 21, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/21/remarks-president-barack-obama-people-israel>.

15 Jeremy M. Sharp, "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel," *Congressional Research Service*. February 18, 2022, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/RL/PDF/RL33222/RL33222.49.pdf, 1-2.

16 Sharp, "U.S. Foreign."

17 Hadar Susskind, "For the Good of Both Countries, U.S. Military Aid for Israel Must Be Conditional," *Time*, June 16, 2021, <https://time.com/6073637/u-s-military-aid-israel-must-be-conditional/>.

18 Philip Weiss, "Carter Describes 'Political Suicide' of Criticizing Israel," *Mondoweiss*, January 29, 2009, <https://mondoweiss.net/2009/01/carter-describes-political-suicide-of-criticizing-israel/>.

19 Weiss, "Carter Describes."

20 Weiss, "Carter Describes."

foundation for even higher support after October 7th. One week after the attack, “two-thirds of Americans [said] the United States should publicly support Israel in the war.”²¹

National Public Opinion Since Gaza

Public opinion on Israel and support for Israel has evolved dramatically since the October 7th attacks. According to a Times/Siena poll “American support for Israel has undergone a seismic reversal, with large shares of voters expressing starkly negative views about the Israeli government’s management of the conflict.”²² Lisa Lerer and Ruth Igielnik (2025) note that “much of the shift in views on Israel has been driven by a sharp decline in support by Democratic voters.”²³ This is especially pertinent context to Mamdani’s victory in the primary. What caused this downward shift? By late August, 2025, “half of voters in the United States believe Israel is committing genocide in Gaza,”²⁴ according to a Quinnipiac poll.

Public Opinion and Demographics Behind This Change

There are many demographic aspects of this decline in support for Israel. According to a Pew Research Center poll from April 2024, “younger Americans are more likely to sympathize with the Palestinian people than the Israeli people.”²⁵ According to the same poll, 41% of young Democrats or lean-Democrats sympathize with the Palestinians more, with only 7% sympathizing with Israel more. This decline in views on Israel is seen in Jewish Americans as well; according to a poll by the Washington Post, “many American Jews sharply disapprove of Israel’s conduct of the war in Gaza, with 61 percent saying Israel has committed war crimes and about 4 in 10 saying the country is guilty of genocide against the Palestinians.”²⁶

Effects of Gaza on the 2024 Election

For Joe Biden and, later, Kamala Harris, Democrats’ opinion on Gaza was

21 Montanaro Domenico, “Americans Strongly Support Israel, But There Are Generational and Racial Divides,” *NPR*, October 13, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/13/1205627092/american-support-israel-biden-middle-east-amas-poll>.

22 Lisa Lerer and Ruth Igielnik, “Americans’ Support for Israel Dramatically Declines, Times/Siena Poll Finds,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/29/polls/israel-gaza-war-us-poll.html/>.

23 Lerer and Igielnik, “Americans’ Support.”

24 Power, “Half of U.S.”

25 Laura Silver, “Younger Americans Stand Out in Their Views of the Israel-Hamas War,” *Pew Research Center*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/younger-americans-stand-out-in-their-views-of-the-israel-amas-war/>.

26 Naftali Bendavid, Scott Clement, and Emily Guskin, “Many American Jews Sharply Critical of Israel on Gaza, Post Poll Finds,” *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/10/06/jewish-americans-israel-poll-gaza/>.

a real issue. Andrea Shalal examined the results of the 2024 presidential election in Michigan and noted that besides economic concerns, “local opposition to U.S. support for Israel’s wars in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon also loomed over the campaign.”²⁷ The disconnect between the Democrats and their voters was not only over Gaza, but its impact also cannot be ignored. Bursts of this could be seen in the ‘uncommitted movement’ that protested Biden’s policy on the war, winning 700,000 ballots in the primaries.²⁸ This is noteworthy, as large portions of these votes came from “swing states where elections have been determined by as few as 10,000 or 20,000 votes.”²⁹ While there were many voters who picked ‘uncommitted’ in the primary, it’s hard to say if Gaza alone was enough to lose Democrats the state. However, the movement was a sign of discontent in the base and the Democrats should’ve heeded said discontent. Shalal (2024) examines exit polling and notes sharp changes from between 2020 and 2024, including a 29% decrease in Dearborn votes for Democrats.³⁰ This loss of Dearborn is crucial to note, as it is “the biggest U.S. city with a majority-Arab population.”³¹ During the general election, the Trump campaign “blasted text messages and mailers to... mostly Democratic-leaning Arab Americans in Michigan in the last months, portraying Trump as a ‘president of peace.’”³² This emphasis on Trump as a candidate who would end the war is a crucial aspect. This is not to say that Kamala Harris lost Michigan entirely from Arab Americans’ anger about Gaza, but in margins as thin as the 2024 election, it would be foolish to ignore this factor. Beyond Michigan, Halah Ahmad argues that “the true electoral impact of the genocide was its contribution to a plunge in voter turnout.”³³ According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “not liking the candidates was the most common reason given by youth who did not vote in 2024.”³⁴ Of the college-educated youths who didn’t vote, 28% cited their distaste for both of the candidates. Overall, of Americans “who voted for Biden in 2020 and cast a ballot for someone besides Kamala Harris in 2024,” 29% cited ‘ending Israel’s violence

27 Andrea Shalal, “Kamala Harris’ Michigan Loss Highlights Democrats’ Weak Spots,” *Reuters*, November 10, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/harris-michigan-loss-highlights-democrats-many-weak-spots-2024-11-10/>.

28 Halah Ahmad, “Depressing the Vote: Genocide and 2024 US Presidential Race,” *Al-Shabaka*, February 25, 2025, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/depressing-the-vote-genocide-and-2024-us-presidential-race/>, 1.

29 Ahmad, “Depressing,” 1.

30 Shalal, “Kamala Harris”

31 Shalal, “Kamala Harris’

32 Shalal, “Kamala Harris’

33 Ahmad, “Depressing,” 3.

34 Alberto Medina, Kelly Siegel-Stechler, and Sara Suzuki, “Young People and the 2024 Election: Struggling, Disconnected, and Dissatisfied,” *Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*, January 15, 2025, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/2024-poll-barriers-issues-economy>.

in Gaza.³⁵

New York Politics and Demographics

Something I did not at all understand until I actually spent time in the city is that New York's size and diversity goes beyond description. As such, I can only highlight the major trends affecting the primary, though there is likely much that will be missed. New York's 2025 elections are fascinating, public opinion-wise, due to a combination of having a much higher Democratic voter base (around 60% in September 2025)³⁶ as well as its large Jewish and Muslim populations. Partisan-wise, the city really is a Democratic stronghold. In the 2024 election, which Democrats lost nationally, a total of 1,903,344 New Yorkers voted for Harris, outpacing Trump's 838,838 votes,³⁷ a ratio of over 2-1. The city's strong support for Democrats continues at the congressional level. According to the 2025 Cook Partisan Voting Index, 10 of the 11 congressional districts in New York City are represented by Democrats, with 9 of those 10 having a Democratic lean of +19 or above.³⁸ Racially, the city is very diverse. In the 2020 census, just under 2.5 million New Yorkers (~28%) identified as Hispanic or Latino, just under 1.8 million (~20%) identified as non-Hispanic Black, and just under 1.4 million (~16%) New Yorkers identified as non-Hispanic Asian.³⁹ Turning to age, about 80% of New Yorkers are over the age of 18, with 14% of New Yorkers are in their 20s.⁴⁰ 14% of the population isn't high, but young voters had an outsized role in the primary; "voters aged 18 to 29 had the highest turnout of any age group at 35.2%."⁴¹ New York has a lot of religious diversity; the city is home to the largest Jewish popula-

35 *IMEU Policy Project*, "New Poll Shows Gaza Was a Top Issue for Biden 2020 Voters Who Cast a Ballot for Someone Besides Harris," *Institute for Middle East Understanding Policy Project*, 2025, <https://www.imeupolicyproject.org/postelection-polling>.

36 "Cross-Tabs: September 2025 Times/Siena Poll of the New York City Mayoral Election," *The New York Times*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/09/09/polls/nyc-mayor-poll-likely-voters.html>.

37 Board of Elections in the City of New York, *Statement and Return Report for Certification: General Election 2024 – President/Vice President (Citywide)*, December 3, 2025.

38 *The Cook Political Report* and David Wasserman, "2025 Cook PVISM: District Map and List (119th Congress)," *The Cook Political Report*, April 3, 2025, <https://www.cookpolitical.com/cook-pvi/2025-partisan-voting-index/district-map-and-list>.

39 *U.S. Census Bureau*, "New York City: Race," *data.census.gov*, 2025, <https://data.census.gov/table?q=new+york+city+r>.

40 "New York, NY." *Census Reporter*, 2023, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US3651000-new-york-ny/#:~:text=New%20York%2C%20NY%20%2D%20Profile%20data,80+>.

41 Madonna Hernandez, "Voter Turnout in NYC's 2025 Primary Hits Decade-High," *NYC Votes*, October 16, 2025, <https://www.nycvotes.org/news-and-press/articles/2025-primary-election-turnout-soars/>.

tion outside of Israel⁴² and has a similarly-sized Muslim population.⁴³ Jewish New Yorkers represent a large amount of voters, especially the Hasidic community. According to Emma G. Fitzsimmons, “elected officials rarely embrace positions that could antagonize Hasidic leaders, who typically encourage their community to vote as a unified bloc.”⁴⁴ Candidates in city elections, such as Andrew Yang in 2022, will often make a “calculated investment,”⁴⁵ hoping this focus on issues prioritized by Hasidic New Yorkers, such as religious education, would “make meaningful inroads into the Hasidic Jewish community,” so “its bloc of votes could help carry him to victory.”⁴⁶ The Satmar Hasidic group’s endorsement of Eric Adams “may have helped him come out ahead in the [2021] crowded mayoral primary.”⁴⁷ Muslim New Yorkers also have, according to Moustafa Bayoumi, “steadily become a political force,”⁴⁸ since the post-9/11 Bush and Obama administrations, during which Muslim New Yorkers had “little influence in city politics.”⁴⁹ He notes that “Mamdani is their most accomplished expression.”⁵⁰

New York Public Opinion on Israel

Though New Yorkers contribute to the national public opinion, it’s worth examining public opinion on Israel within the city itself. For one, though New York has a large population of Jews, one must not assume, as seen in the perception of Israel by American Jews discussed above, that a large population of Jewish people means large support for Israel. Since we’re looking at New York in order to understand Zohran Mamdani’s victory, I will focus on New York public opinion on Israel around the mayoral election, which is worth noting as it exists in a different national and international context compared to the 2024 election. City-wide, a Times-Siena poll on the Mayoral election from September of 2025 asked New Yorkers whether they sympathized with Israel or Palestinians more. The poll reported that the net sympathy (adding up all the respondents who sympathized with one group over another) for Palestinians was 46%, compared to the

42 Mays, “Israel.”

43 Moustafa Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats to City Hall: How New York Muslims Built Power and Shaped Zohran Mamdani,” *The Guardian*, October 24, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/24/zohran-mamdani-muslim-new-yorkers-sept-11>.

44 Emma G. Fitzsimmons, “How the Hasidic Jewish Community Became a Political Force in New York,” *The New York Times*, 30 October, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/30/nyregion/hasidic-political-power-new-york.html>.

45 Fitzsimmons, “How the Hasidic.”

46 Fitzsimmons, “How the Hasidic.”

47 Julia Gergely, “From Borough Park to Upper West Side: How Jews Voted, and Fared, in NY Elections,” *The Times of Israel*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/from-borough-park-to-upper-west-side-how-jews-voted-and-fared-in-ny-elections/>.

48 Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats.”

49 Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats.”

50 Bayoumi, “From Scapegoats.”

net sympathy for Israel at 29%.⁵¹ Crossing this data over with the vote preference, we find that, among Mamdani voters, support for Palestinians trumps support for Israel 78% to 6%.⁵² Interestingly, Cuomo's supporters definitely have a lean, but not nearly as large as the one among Mamdani's supporters. Specifically, 41% of Cuomo supporters were more sympathetic to Israel than Palestinians, with 26% being the opposite.⁵³ Looking at the breakdown of New Yorkers' net support for Israel and net support for Palestine by age, we see that a whopping 69% of New Yorkers ages 18-29 side more with the Palestinians, with just 17% supporting Israel more.⁵⁴

Campaign Rhetoric on Israel and Antisemitism

Mamdani has long been advocating publicly for the Palestinian cause.⁵⁵ He even participated in “a hunger strike outside the White House to build support for a cease-fire, in November of 2023,⁵⁶ almost a year before he announced his candidacy. Mamdani was careful to frame his stance on Israel's conduct as genocide as not, as Cuomo asserted, antisemitism,⁵⁷ but as a response to the facts; “I will always be clear in my language and based in facts: Israel is committing a genocide,”⁵⁸ he wrote on X on Halloween, 2024, while sharing an interview in which he asserts that his use of the word genocide is backed up by both scholars and the majority of Democrats.⁵⁹ Mamdani focused on ensuring voters understood that his stance on Israel did not mean he would ignore the issues facing Jewish New Yorkers; responding to attacks from Cuomo, Mamdani “said fighting antisemitism would be a focus for him as mayor, and... pledged to increase funding for hate crime prevention by 800 percent.”⁶⁰ During the general election, Mamdani shifted his rhetoric on the controversial phrase ‘globalize the Intifada,’ telling business leaders he would “discourage,” it.⁶¹ Indeed, though the majority

51 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tabs.”

52 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tabs.”

53 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tabs.”

54 *Times/Sienna*, “Cross-Tabs.”

55 Nicholas Fandos, “How Zohran Mamdani Came to Embrace the Palestinian Cause,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/08/nyregion/zohran-mamdani-israel-palestine.html>.

56 Fandos, “How Zohran.”

57 Mays, “Israel.”

58 Zohran Kwame Mamdani (@ZohranKMamdani), “I will always be clear in my language and based in facts: Israel is committing a genocide,” *X (Twitter)*, October 31, 2025, <https://x.com/ZohranKMamdani/status/1852100165655802038>.

59 Mamdani, “Based in Facts.”

60 Liam Stack, “Mamdani Has Long Criticized Israel. His Opponents Attack Him for It,” *The New York Times*, June 25, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/25/nyregion/mamdani-gaza-israel.html>.

61 Gloria Pazmino, “In a Shift, Mamdani Tells Business Leaders He Will Discourage Use of the Phrase ‘Globalize the Intifada,’ Sources Tell CNN,” *CNN*, July 16, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/07/16/politics/mamdani-business-leaders-meeting-new-york>.

of Jewish voters went to Cuomo in the general election,⁶² “about one-third voted for Mamdani.”⁶³ Meanwhile, Cuomo sought to curb Mamdani’s support. Benjamin Balthasar highlights the “racialization of Mamdani’s religious identification as a Muslim,”⁶⁴ during the primary. In a campaign mailer in which Mamdani’s face was darkened and his beard “exaggerated,” Mamdani is portrayed as rejecting Israel (“supports the BDS movement against Israel”) and Jewish rights (“refuses to recognize Israel as a Jewish state”).⁶⁵

Affordability

While much national attention was focused on Mamdani’s position on Israel and Gaza, it was not the race’s deciding factor. Instead of focusing on foreign affairs, Mamdani spent much of his time focusing on affordability during the primary. Mamdani’s campaign website was filled with affordability-focused policy proposals, such as a proposal from early February that promises “Zohran will triple the City’s production of publicly subsidized, permanently affordable, union-built, rent-stabilized homes.”⁶⁶ This push responded to the high concerns about affordability in the city, with local journalist Pat Kiernan noting in late March that “affordability takes center stage in the mayoral race.”⁶⁷ Mamdani himself highlighted the importance his campaign’s focus on affordability had on the primary; in an interview on the day of the primary election, Mamdani said “what has powered our campaign’s rise from 1% in the polls to being just a hair’s breadth away from City Hall is this focus on an economic agenda that will deliver a New York City that working- and middle-class New Yorkers can actually afford.”⁶⁸ This focus on affordability, along with savvy political moves like cross-endorsing with Brad Lander,⁶⁹ carried Mamdani to a surprising primary victory. After the prima-

62 Eric Levenson, “From ‘Mazel Tov’ to ‘Conflicted,’ Jewish New Yorkers React to Zohran Mamdani’s Mayoral Win,” *CNN*, November 6, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/06/politics/jewish-new-york-mamdani-mayor>.

63 Levenson, “From ‘Mazel Tov.’”

64 Benjamin Balthasar, “Mamdani’s Judeo-Bolshevik Threat: On Islamophobia, Demographics, and Radical Politics,” *Spectre*, August 1, 2025, <https://spectrejournal.com/mamdanis-judeo-bolshevik-threat/>

65 Balthasar, “Mamdani’s.”

66 “Housing By and For New York,” *Zohran for New York City*, February 2, 2025, <https://www.zohranfornyc.com/policies/housing-by-and-for-new-york>.

67 Pat Kiernan, “Affordability takes center stage in mayoral race as New Yorkers struggle with living expenses,” *Spectrum News New York 1*, March 27, 2025, <https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/mornings-on-1/2025/04/02/affordability-takes-center-stage-in-mayoral-race->.

68 Amy Goodman, “NYC Mayoral Primary Day: Zohran Mamdani on Building a Movement & Campaigning for an Affordable City,” *Democracy Now!* June 24, 2025, https://www.democracynow.org/2025/6/24/zohran_mamdani_nyc_mayoral_race_cuomo.

69 Nicholas Fandos, Benjamin Oreskes, Emma G. Fitzsimmons, and Jeffery C. Mays, “How Zohran Mamdani Stunned New York and Won the Primary for Mayor,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/01/nyregion/how-mamdani-won-campaign-mayor.html>.

ry, the candidates were now campaigning for the New York vote, not just the New York Democrat vote. Joe Anuta (2025) highlights an evolution in Mamdani and Cuomo's rhetoric, noting that, after the primary, the "two contenders have each moderated their positions to different degrees as they seek to build a broader coalition of voters."⁷⁰ He also notes that "many voters have simply grown weary of the unrelenting discussion of something that has little to do with the practical realities of running city government."⁷¹ To paraphrase a number of social media comments, the candidates were for Mayor of New York, not Mayor of Tel Aviv. Like in the primary, affordability was high on voters' minds; "the cost of living was the most important issue to voters in New York City."⁷² Specifically, affordable housing was high on voters' priorities, with "seven in 10 voters in New York [saying housing cost] was a major problem where they live."⁷³ This included renters, "who made up more than half of the electorate,"⁷⁴ and who Mamdani won in the elections.⁷⁵ Mamdani campaigned even harder on affordability, with his social media accounts posting multiple videos a day highlighting the issue and his solutions. One such video, posted on his Instagram on October 29th, serves as a good example of this rhetoric; "politicians are not bystanders to the affordability crisis," reads the caption, "we can lower the cost of living and make life easier for New Yorkers in real and meaningful ways."⁷⁶ The video itself shows Mamdani mentioning the Adams' administrations rent hikes and highlighting three ways in which the city government can improve New York's affordability.⁷⁷ Mamdani's efforts paid off; in September, 49% of all likely voters said he would do the best job on affordability, 26% higher than the next highest candidate.⁷⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, negative or positive reactions to foreign policy often causes voters to either support or punish the incumbent. Israel's actions in Gaza broke the high standing it enjoyed for so long in American public opinion, especially within the Democratic party and among the youth vote. The Democrats were punished by voters who saw them as failing to end the crisis in Gaza, adding

70 Joe Anuta, "Israel, Gaza Take Back Seat to Affordability in NYC Mayoral Race," *Politico*, September 25, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/09/25/israel-gaza-take-back-seat-to-affordability-in-nyc-mayoral-race-00580990>.

71 Anuta, "Israel, Gaza."

72 Fred Backus and Jennifer De Pinto, "Here's What CBS News Exit Polls Told Us About the 2025 Elections," *CBS News*, November 5, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/exit-poll-2025-new-york-new-jersey-virginia-california/>.

73 Backus and De Pinto, "Here's What CBS."

74 Backus and De Pinto, "Here's What CBS."

75 Backus and De Pinto, "Here's What CBS."

76 Zorhan Kwame Mamdani (@zohrankmamdani), "Politicians are not bystanders to the affordability crisis," *Instagram*, October 29, 2025 [*Not Bystanders* 2025].

77 Mamdani, "Not Bystanders."

78 *Times/Sienna*, "Cross-Tabs."

to their many difficulties in the 2024 election. New Yorkers' support for the Palestinian cause has increased along with the rest of the country's, and the city's demographics and partisanship allowed Zohran Mamdani to be loudly critical of Israel without it being a dealbreaker for voters. This, paired with the amount of New Yorkers who actively agree with and support Mamdani's position on the conflict, allowed him to win against Andrew Cuomo by campaigning on affordability, which was a massive priority for New Yorkers. Mamdani's victory has created a new political ceiling for anti-Israel Democratic candidates. "In a number of congressional races across New York City, challengers are betting that the success of Mr. Mamdani... portends a potential vulnerability for pro-Israel incumbents."⁷⁹ Democratic elites must now face the fact that a pro-Israel stance is no longer assumed in voters or in candidates, and in some cases may even be a detriment to the campaign. The sooner Democratic leadership understands this shift, the sooner they can refine their strategies to keep up with this years-long development.

79 Oreskes, "Challengers."