

## **The Guardian view on Zohran Mamdani's victory in New York: the Democrats can build on an uplifting night**

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Since the re-election of Donald Trump last November, a demoralised Democratic party has struggled to reverse a palpable sense of downward momentum. At a grassroots level, amid plunging poll ratings, there has been a yearning for renewal and a more punchy, combative approach in opposition. Against that bleak backdrop, the remarkable election of Zohran Mamdani to the New York City mayoralty is a moment for progressives to savour.

Mr Mamdani entered the mayoral race last October as a socialist outsider with almost zero name recognition. He won it with more than 50% of the vote after the highest turnout in more than half a century, and despite the best efforts of billionaires to bankroll his chief rival, the former New York governor Andrew Cuomo, to victory. That achievement makes him the youngest mayor of the US's largest city for more than 100 years and the first Muslim to occupy the role.

New York is a traditional Democratic stronghold and is in no sense a national bellwether. Nevertheless, faced with a Maga movement that has based its success on the support of working-class voters, the Democratic party can learn much from Mr Mamdani's extraordinary triumph. Leaving culture-war politics to his increasingly desperate opponents, he campaigned relentlessly and almost exclusively on the theme of affordability.

Charges of ideological extremism failed to stick because pledges of free childcare, free buses and a rent freeze spoke to an essentially social democratic message, offering public solutions to years of rising inequality. That vision persuaded a vast army of 100,000 volunteer canvassers to knock on millions of doors, more than offsetting Mr Cuomo's far greater financial resources. The central insight was that values-driven opposition to Maga populism can succeed when supplemented by a positive offer to voters whose living standards have been steadily eroded.

On an uplifting night for Democrats, a similar pattern was seen in New Jersey and Virginia, where more centrist-leaning candidates won gubernatorial races by impressive margins. Cost-of-living pledges were again to the fore, including a proposed freeze on electricity prices and a focus on housing costs. California offered further grounds for a cautious rebirth of optimism; after Republican gerrymandering of congressional boundaries in Texas, voters backed countermeasures to redress the balance ahead of next year's midterm elections.

As the Democratic party journeys through the wilderness of a second Trump term, it would be fanciful to believe that a corner has been definitively turned. For New York's mayor-elect, the hard yards are yet to begin. Mr Trump has already threatened to withhold federal funds from an administration he will do his utmost to discredit, undermine and disrupt. More broadly, the reluctance of senior Democratic figures to endorse Mr Mamdani's campaign confirms that internal divisions over strategy are a long way from being resolved.

However, it would be churlish to ignore green shoots of political recovery when they appear. As Mr Trump's popularity sinks amid ongoing cost-of-living concerns and high inflation, the hollowness of Maga pledges to improve blue-collar living standards is a major zone of vulnerability. An emerging focus on affordability anchors Democrats in the preoccupations of their lost voters, as well as those who have remained loyal. By campaigning on that basis with elan and conviction, Mr Mamdani has blazed an inspiring trail.