

# Zohran Mamdani's establishment credibility gets a boost from Obama

Daniel de Vries  
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The revelation that former President Barack Obama held a lengthy call with Zohran Mamdani following the mayoral candidate's victory in June is the latest indication that a powerful section of the Democratic Party establishment is prepared to back the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member in the November election in New York City.

It also provides a clear signal that Mamdani, whatever his rhetoric, represents the same fundamental profit interests that Obama so steadfastly defended while in office.

According to the *New York Times*, which broke the news in an opinion piece published Wednesday by Mara Gay, during the call "Mr. Obama congratulated Mr. Mamdani, offered him advice about governing and discussed the importance of giving people hope in a dark time."

Obama has not issued a formal endorsement, something he has largely shied away from since leaving office in 2016. Nevertheless, it is clear that the former president has embraced Mamdani. Obama's former chief adviser and proxy, David Axelrod, visited Mamdani's campaign headquarters in June and spoke of the candidate in glowing terms.

"What I found when I went over to that office was a familiar spirit that I hadn't seen in a while of just determined, upbeat idealism," Axelrod said. "You may not agree with every answer [Mamdani's] giving, or every idea he has, but he's certainly asking the right questions, which is how do we make the country work for working people?"

Mamdani's dominant primary victory threw the Democratic Party establishment and its sponsors on Wall Street and in corporate boardrooms into turmoil. More than the improbable promises to enact a modest tax on the wealthy to fund free childcare and buses, the

party's leadership fears that encouraging opposition to inequality and war could create explosive conditions transgressing the party's control.

Nearly two months after the primary election, virtually all of New York's Democratic leadership, including New York Governor Kathy Hochul, Senators Chuck Schumer and Kristin Gillibrand, and House Minority leader Hakeem Jeffries, have continued to withhold endorsements in the race. Only four of 10 House Democrats in New York City have endorsed the party's candidate.

Obama's intervention might help to change that. So too might the lack of viable alternatives. New York's party machine and its favored candidate, Andrew Cuomo, proved incapable of landing any appeal with significant sections of the electorate despite the tens of millions of dollars at its disposal during the primary.

Cuomo, who has stayed in the race as an independent, is showing few signs of altering his fate come November, despite a shift in tactics. Underscoring the desperate character of his campaign, the former governor attempted to gain traction by attacking Mamdani for supposedly depriving a homeless family of shelter by living in a rent-stabilized apartment, which makes up half of New York's rental market, despite earning over \$140,000 a year as a state assemblyman.

Another of Mamdani's challengers in the general election, current Mayor and Democrat-turned-independent Eric Adams took a hit when the news site Gothamist revealed earlier this month that Adams submitted fake and fraudulent signatures in his petition to run for office.

The New York City mayoral election reflects a deepening crisis within the Democratic Party and bitter divisions about how to respond.

The party is deeply discredited, responsible for decades of stagnating wages and social cuts, while the amount of wealth accumulated at the top has reached obscene levels. Amid this poisonous growth of extreme inequality, the central focus has been on pursuing disastrous wars abroad.

Obama himself was emblematic of this process. He came into office amid mass opposition to the criminal wars of the Bush administration and the financial collapse in 2008, offering “hope” and “change” as the first African American president.

Obama’s time in office, however, accelerated the transfer of wealth from the working class to the super-rich. The fresh face of the Democratic Party continued illegal wars throughout his entire term, deported more immigrants than any president before him, and tore up bedrock democratic rights with targeted assassinations, including against US citizens, paving the way for the emergence of Donald Trump.

Jeffrey Lerner, an Obama White House veteran now functioning as Mamdani’s communications director, highlighted the similarities between the former president and the mayoral candidate. “Much like my former boss, Zohran embodies thoughtful leadership, moral courage and a unique ability to inspire hope in those who’ve been left behind by politics as usual,” he said.

Mamdani, however, has emerged amid a crisis far more advanced than 2008. Years of pandemic, genocide, and declining standards of living, and a surge in prices have heightened social tensions immensely. The political situation has likewise intensified, personified by the criminal oligarch Trump seeking to consolidate a presidential dictatorship.

Obama’s embrace of Mamdani reflects the party’s desperate need for a pseudo-left makeover, one that appeals to those becoming radicalized by the crisis while covering up the fundamental capitalist character of the party. The content of Mamdani’s proposals can be brushed aside by the likes of Obama and Axelrod because, in the end, they don’t amount to much. The danger of encouraging opposition outside the Democratic Party’s control is weighed against Mamdani’s ability to appeal to youth, especially those facing economic uncertainty, and persuade them to avoid more radical alternatives.

Restoring illusions in the Democratic Party is a role

that Mamdani, along with the DSA, is eager to fill. Mamdani has spent the past two months providing reassurances to the corporate oligarchy and the Democratic establishment that he can be trusted, offering concessions amid weaponized antisemitism hysteria and indicating he is open to compromising on his campaign promises.

The fact that a major section of the Democratic Party establishment is now prepared to make use of Mamdani and the DSA underscores that they are no threat to capitalism. They are, rather, a safety valve to be utilized at a time of increasing pressure.



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