

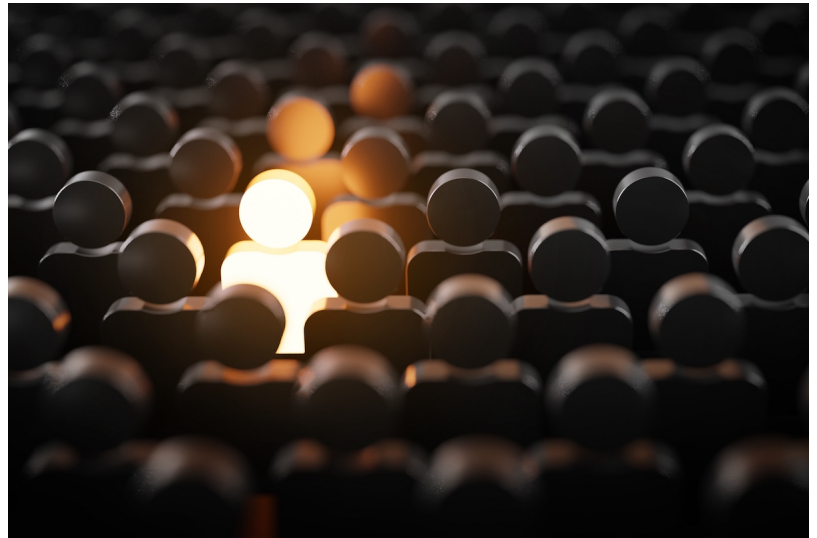


Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on June 29, 2025

The Untold Reason for Mamdani's Mayoral Win

There's a reason why, historically, demagogues have been so successful. It's one we ignore at our own peril, too, because it holds the key to future political victory.

New York City's mayoral Democratic [primary race results](#) have shaken the political world. Candidate Zohran Mamdani, described as a Marxist Muslim, was five months ago languishing in also-ran territory at one percent in the polls. A more recent poll then showed him, to pundits' surprise, beating erstwhile front-runner (a whole week ago) Andrew Cuomo after the eighth round of ranked-choice calculations. But it was wrong.



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Mamdani won the first-round tally by more than seven points and will assuredly be the Democrat nominee.

How did this happen? There are many reasons, but the overriding one is something overlooked, something indispensable, something that is a gift: charisma.

This is where those who dislike Mamdani — and I'm one of them (I actually consider him immoral) — must be careful. People are generally loath to give those they dislike credit; they view them through tinted glasses. But studies have shown what the Throughline media-training blog [stated](#) years ago in no uncertain terms: "The Most Charismatic Candidate Always Wins."

I suspect the hard Left has discovered this truth, too. Why do you think suburban girl Sandy Cortez (aka AOC) was chosen to be the Justice Democrats' candidate in 2017 via what essentially was an *audition*? Yeah, she really was.

Style Over Substance

Now, again, multiple factors contributed to Mamdani's victory. He went the Full Monty on socialism, promising everything from freezing rent to defunding the police to free mass transit to a \$30 minimum wage to city-owned grocery stores (yeah, the Soviets had those, too). He captured fellow Asian-descent residents, left-wing whites, and (mis)educated voters, and the latter two groups do just love the latest shiny "progressive" thing.

It's also true that only about 20 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. This means that the ones who did were, inordinately, those passionate about politics — and few were passionate about traditionally corrupt Andrew Cuomo. Many, however, were passionate about ideologically corrupt Mamdani. (Yes, embracing evil ideology is a form of corruption).

Nonetheless, even all these factors taken together can't explain his meteoric rise. Charisma does, though.

In 2011, I [wrote](#) "That Presidential Look: The Bad, the Beautiful and Voting-booth Realities," which



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explained the importance of candidates' appearance in our TV age. Charisma goes along with that. As Throughline pointed out in 2012, the more charismatic candidate had prevailed in *every* presidential election since 1980. Just consider:

- 1980 and '84 — Ronald Reagan defeated, respectively, Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale.
- 1988 — George H.W. Bush bested the even less charismatic Michael Dukakis.
- 1992 and '96 — Bill Clinton won over, respectively, G.H.W. Bush and Bob Dole, the latter of whom was, as pundit Pat Buchanan put it, "like Richard Nixon — without the charm."
- 2000 and '04 — George W. Bush defeated, respectively, Al Gore and John Kerry.
- 2008 and '12 — Barack Obama bested, respectively, cranky John McCain and stately looking but somewhat stiff Mitt Romney.
- 2016 — In a historic upset, Donald Trump toppled Hillary Clinton, the antithesis of charisma.

2020 and 2024

This brings us to 2020 and '24, where Trump and Joe Biden each captured one contest. Biden did have some charisma in his prime, but in 2020 was a mere shell of his former self. But I'm convinced that year's election was stolen, so I don't consider it an exception to the rule. (If you do, fine; call it an anomaly.)

Now, again, this is where I must caution partisans against reacting emotionally. The Trump Derangement Syndrome types will recoil at associating Trump with charisma. And, yes, he does get testy sometimes. Watch one of his rallies, however, and you'll see how he masterfully works a crowd. I've never seen anyone do it better.

On the other side, many may, as I do, find Obama and Bill Clinton (and any other left-wing demagogue) nauseating. But this is because such observers are looking *beneath the surface* and/or are conceiving of the person based on his policies. This is a mistake professional pundits often make, too. They're politics wonks and project their own mindset, as humans will do, onto others.

Yet most voters aren't conversant with politics; they make decisions on *emotional bases*. For example, if you knew little about Obama's background or policies in 2008 and merely looked at and listened to him, you saw this: a decent-looking guy with a nice, resonant voice — and some charisma. Note when assessing this, too, that it's as with what's said about when you and a companion are fleeing from a vicious grizzly. You don't have to outrun the bear.

You just have to outrun your companion.

(I.e., Obama's competitors weren't exactly charm-school valedictorians.)

Mamdani's Charm

As for Mamdani, he not only could outrun Cuomo; he may leave the bear eating dust. Just consider, for instance, the first few minutes of the below interview with him. And imagine watching it as, let's say, a kindly, apolitical grandmother who doesn't know his positions or background.

Grandma's first thought likely would be, "What a nice young man! He'd be perfect for my granddaughter!" Mamdani is photogenic enough, has an easy, contagious smile — and has loads of charisma. As one commenter under the video put it, "I see how he beat Cuomo now. Wow[,] is he smooth!"

My point, again, is not to sing his praises, but to sound an alarm and send a message. Mamdani is



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dangerous not just because his policies and attitudes are toxic, but because he's a quintessential wolf in sheep's clothing. It also occurs to me that, just as sports competition is tougher than ever with today's deep talent pools, so may competition in the political arena be because of high-tech media. The TV age made appearance and personality important; now the internet and social media age, with video exposure ad infinitum, have made those qualities imperative.

Sadly, Ideological Soundness Isn't Enough

So the message is this: If Republicans want to win elections, ideological soundness is not enough (though it's a prerequisite for governing). They also should choose candidates possessing that star quality, that special something, that charisma. If the person couldn't conceivably carry a podcast, he perhaps can't carry an election.

This said, I certainly wish the above weren't so. I wish people would vote based on knowledge and wisdom and not fancies and fandom. But too many don't. Consequently, nominating a candidate competent but as exciting as drying paint just won't cut it.

Charisma is the one thing Trump, Mamdani, and Cortez all have in common. Never underestimate such a person, either. Because in politics, charisma is king.



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