

Hope vs Fear is Defining New York's Mayoral Campaign

In New York City's mayoral race, voters are not just choosing between two candidates - they're channeling two competing visions of what's at stake: hope versus fear.

In conversations with hundreds of New Yorkers, this contrast emerges as a defining fault line of the 2025 election. This emotional divide offers a distinct lens for understanding the race, and one that may prove more revealing than progressive-versus-moderate framing.

This analysis is based on new research from [Beacon Research](#) and [CloudResearch](#), which interviewed a representative sample of more than 650 New York City voters using CloudResearch's conversational AI platform, [Engage](#). The platform combines the precision of traditional surveys with the nuance of in-depth interviews, allowing us to hear how voters explain their choices in their own words – insight that standard polling can't capture.

On one side are New York City voters energized by Zohran Mamdani's ground-breaking candidacy. More than two-thirds of Mamdani's voters say they are more enthusiastic about voting this year than in past elections, and they're far more likely to say they are voting for their candidate than against his opponent. One respondent said, "We need to phase the old guard of Democrats out. We need a fresh new face who understands what it's like to be a young adult in NYC and have modern ideas." Another explained, "I have been a lifelong Democratic voter, but it wasn't until this election that I fully believed we have a fighter for the working class...we have it in candidate Mamdani."

Hope is the defining quality of these voters. They are energized by Mamdani's proposals to tackle the city's perpetually high cost of living. One voter said, "He's the first candidate in a long time that genuinely wants to help New Yorkers thrive." Another praised his "economic plan for the city, making it more affordable for residents, corporate tax hikes, public grocery stores, rent freeze, etc."

They describe Mamdani as "not corrupted by outside influences," a phrase that recurs in different forms. For some, the appeal is his integrity – the belief that he is "for the people, not for his own pockets." For others, it is his willingness to challenge "entrenched political interests."

Among Andrew Cuomo's supporters, a different current runs strong: fear. For some, the fear feels existential. As one Cuomo supporter put it, "I feel that a lot is on the line in this election. Not like the end of the world but definitely something close to it." Another described feeling "existential dread. I feel if the wrong candidate gets elected then we as a city are very much doomed." The fear extends beyond policy to personal consequences. As one voter who plans to vote for Cuomo said, "I am very concerned about the effects of a Mamdani victory on my family's future and quality of life. If he wins we will probably end up leaving NYC."

The intensity of the fear expressed by these voters cannot be overstated. “He [Mamdani] will bankrupt our city. The plans he has for our city are not practical, not sustainable, and we will be bankrupt. He does not know what he’s talking about. Socialism will not work. It never has worked.” For some Jewish voters, the concerns are particularly acute: “As a Jewish woman, I’m scared anti-Semitism will rise even more than it already has.”

With fear being the primary motivator of Cuomo’s backers, they are far less likely to be enthused about the election, and are as likely to say they’re voting against Mamdani as for Cuomo. This refrain – voting against rather than for – echoes through interviews with Cuomo’s base. Many of these voters do not appear animated by his past leadership, nor by personal loyalty; their driving force is apprehension about what they see as Mamdani’s radicalism.

As one respondent said, “I am worried that Mamdani will win. I don’t like Cuomo either, but at least he’s not a socialist.” Another said, “Absolutely need for myself, my people and family to come out and vote and STOP another potential disastrous de Blasio 2.0 mayorship (Mamdani) that my once beautiful city absolutely cannot afford again and are still reeling from.”

After the votes are tallied in November, much will be made of campaign strategies, the candidates’ platforms, their personalities and baggage, but commentators and future candidates shouldn’t overlook the emotional pull voters feel. Hope and fear are driving people to the polls in New York City in equal measure, and the not-too-distant midterm elections could be shaped by a similar dynamic.

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