

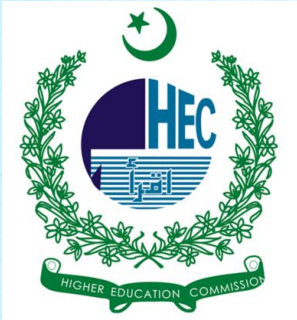
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**Us and Them Redefined: A Critical Discourse Analysis of
Socialist Identity and Counter-Narrative in Mamdani's 2025
Mayoral Victory Speech**



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Abstract

This qualitative study conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Zohran Mamdani's 2025 New York City mayoral victory speech, examining how language constructs socialist political identity through an "Us versus Them" binary. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, the analysis reveals how Mamdani systematically builds a positive "US" representing working-class people, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ individuals, and other marginalised communities and constructs a negative "THEM" defined by wealth, political power, and exclusionary practices, not by race, religion, or nationality. The speech employs nomination, predication, and metaphorical strategies to promote class-based solidarity and counter Islamophobic narratives prevalent in the post-Trump era. Findings demonstrate that the "Us vs. Them" framework can serve progressive, counter-hegemonic purposes by uniting diverse coalitions against economic and political elites rather than targeting vulnerable communities. Mamdani's inclusive rhetoric actively bridges internal differences within his coalition by redirecting tensions toward a common enemy and redefining political legitimacy on inclusive terms. This study contributes to CDA scholarship by examining left-wing populist discourse as an alternative to right-wing exclusionary rhetoric, offering insights into how political language can challenge existing power structures and build collective solidarity across identity divides.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, political discourse, socialist identity, Us vs Them, counter-narrative, Mamdani, populism

Introduction

The election of Zohran Mamdani as Mayor of New York City in 2025 represents more than a routine transfer of executive power; it signifies a profound discursive rupture in the landscape of American urban politics. Delivered on November 5, 2025, his victory speech was not merely a ceremonial acceptance of office but a strategic ideological intervention. In a political era deeply scarred by the nativist populism of the Trump era, characterised by the mainstreaming of Islamophobia and xenophobic rhetoric, Mamdani's speech offered a systematic counter-narrative. As a democratic socialist

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and the son of Ugandan-Indian immigrants, his very position as a political victor served as a direct challenge to the exclusionary logic of the preceding political dispensation. This speech, therefore, provides a critical site for examining how language is deployed to dismantle a dominant ideological framework and construct a new, inclusive political bloc from the fragments of a divided polity.

This article presents a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Mamdani's mayoral victory address, aiming to dissect the specific linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms through which this counter-hegemonic project is advanced. Drawing upon the dialectical-relational approach to CDA, which posits a constitutive relationship between discourse and social reality (Fairclough, 2003), this study argues that Mamdani's speech ideologically invests in a sharp Manichaean polarity, a discursive construction of an "Us" and a "Them." However, this is not a simple reversal of the exclusionary binaries of his predecessors. Rather, it is a sophisticated act of discursive redefinition. The study aims to show how Mamdani's "positive discourse of US" is deliberately expansive, weaving together his own identity as a democratic socialist with the struggles and aspirations of the multi-ethnic working class and the immigrant communities so often targeted by right-wing populism. Simultaneously, the "negative discourse of THEM" is meticulously crafted not around race or faith, but around a political project: the "Trump reign," defined by its systematic production of economic disparity, its assault on minorities and immigrants, and its weaponisation of Islamophobia.

Problem Statement

Most research on political speeches focuses on how right-wing populists use "us vs them" language to divide people by race, religion, or nationality. Less attention has been given to how left-wing politicians use similar language more inclusively. This raises an important question: can "us vs them" rhetoric be used not to exclude, but to unite different groups against economic and political elites? Zohran Mamdani's 2025 mayoral victory speech provides a useful example. He creates an "us" that brings together people across race, religion, and class, and a "them" defined by wealth and power rather than identity. This study explores how this kind of language builds a shared progressive identity and holds together a diverse political coalition.

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Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the linguistic strategies Mamdani's victory speech employs to construct a positive representation of "US" and a negative representation of "THEM," and to examine how these strategies work to promote a socialist political identity.
2. To examine how the "US" versus "THEM" division in Mamdani's victory speech functions to bridge internal differences within his diverse coalition and present it as a cohesive and morally legitimate majority.

Research Questions

1. How does Mamdani's victory speech use language to create a positive "US" and a negative "THEM" to promote a socialist political identity?
2. How does Mamdani's victory speech use the positive "US" and negative "THEM" division to heal divisions within his own diverse coalition and present it as a unified moral majority?

Significance of the Study

First, it contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by examining a left-wing, socialist "Us" versus "Them" construction. Much existing CDA research focuses on right-wing populist discourse. This study provides a counter-example, showing how binary self/other representation can serve progressive, counter-hegemonic purposes. Second, it offers insight into how political language builds and holds together diverse coalitions. By analyzing how Mamdani's speech bridges differences among working-class, immigrant, and leftist groups, the study sheds light on the discursive mechanics of solidarity and collective identity formation. Third, it documents a historically significant moment: the first South Asian American and Muslim mayor of New York City claiming victory in a political climate still marked by Trump-era Islamophobia. The study preserves and analyzes this unique instance of marginalized identity narrating its own political triumph.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design centered on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate the ideological dimensions of the selected text. The methodology is structured as a systematic, three-tiered investigation that moves from linguistic description to socio-political explanation.

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Research Paradigm and Approach

The research is grounded in the critical realist paradigm, which recognizes that while social reality is discursively constructed, these constructions have real, material effects on power relations and social structures. Consequently, the study adopts the dialectical-relational approach to CDA, principally associated with Norman Fairclough. This approach is particularly suited to the research aims because it views discourse as both socially constituted and socially constitutive, language shapes and is shaped by the social world

Data Selection and Corpus

The data for this study consists of a single, purposively selected text: the complete, official transcript of Zohran Mamdani's victory speech delivered on November 5, 2025, following his election as Mayor of New York City. The selection is justified by the text's unique status as a "decisive moment" of political communication. A victory speech is a liminal genre, marking the transition from campaign outsider to institutional insider, and is thus a privileged site for the articulation of a new political common sense. The transcript was obtained from The Guardian Newspaper.

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the theoretical foundation for examining how language constructs power, inequality, and ideology in political speech. Van Dijk (2001b) defines CDA as an analytical framework concerned with revealing how dominance and control are enacted, reproduced, and resisted through text and talk. Mamdani's victory speech, with its sharp focus on class division and elite power, presents a rich site for such analysis. As Fowler (1991), Fairclough (1993), and Batstone (1995) argue, the role of the critical discourse analyst is to uncover hidden ideologies embedded in texts and make them visible to readers. Trask (2007) adds that CDA seeks to answer key questions about political texts: Why was this text created? Who is the intended audience? What hidden motives, assumptions, and biases shape its content? These questions are directly relevant to understanding Mamdani's speech, which addresses a diverse electorate while simultaneously promoting a socialist political agenda. Joseph (2006) further demonstrates that politicians strategically use language to serve political goals and undermine opponents, a dynamic clearly visible in Mamdani's positive construction of "US" and negative construction of "THEM."

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The concept of ideology is central to this study. Shelby (2003) identifies several defining properties of ideology: it transforms false assumptions into perceived truths for manipulative ends, serves as "meaning in the service of power," justifies the interests of dominant groups, and often distorts reality to protect ruling classes. However, this study extends the understanding of ideology by examining how counter-hegemonic discourse, the speech of a socialist challenger rather than a dominant elite can also deploy ideological strategies. Mamdani's speech does not serve ruling-class interests but actively works against them. His ideological construction redefines who belongs in power and who constitutes the legitimate political community. Luke's (1974) classic understanding of power, where Y compels Z to act according to his wishes through manipulation, deception, and propaganda, applies in reverse here: Mamdani accuses the billionaire class of exercising such power over ordinary people and uses his speech to expose and break that control.

Van Dijk's (2000) discursive strategies of "Positive Self-Presentation" and "Negative Other-Presentation" provide a direct analytical lens for this study. These strategies manifest in what Van Dijk calls the "Ideological Square": emphasizing the good qualities of "Us" while de-emphasizing our bad ones, and emphasizing the bad qualities of "Them" while de-emphasizing their good ones. Mamdani's speech follows this pattern systematically. His "US" is presented as brave, inclusive, hardworking, and morally legitimate. His "THEM" is presented as corrupt, divisive, and self-serving. However, this study aims to go beyond merely identifying this binary. It examines how this polarization specifically serves a socialist political identity one rooted in class consciousness rather than racial or religious division and how it functions to unify a diverse coalition that includes workers, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ individuals, and Black communities.

Previous CDA research on political discourse has focused extensively on right-wing populism and its exclusionary rhetoric, particularly around Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. Trump's political communication, for instance, has been widely analyzed for how it misrepresents Muslims as threats and spreads anti-Muslim sentiment. Mamdani's speech offers a direct counter to this tradition. Where right-wing discourse constructs "THEM" along identity lines, Mamdani constructs "THEM" along class and power lines. His themes of inclusion deliberately name and

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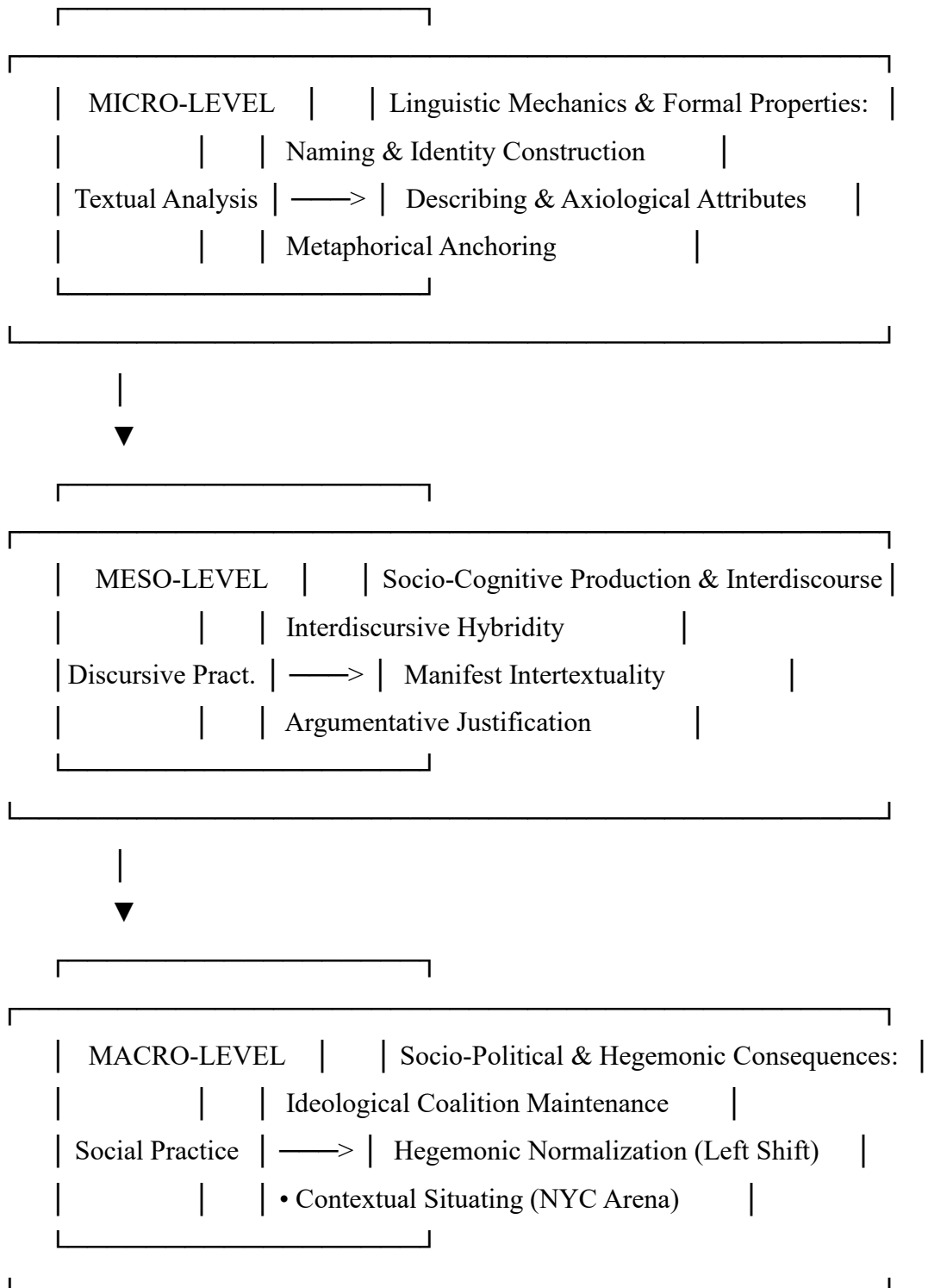
claim groups that have been targeted by exclusionary politics. This study therefore contributes to a growing but still underdeveloped body of research on how left-wing, progressive politicians use CDA's familiar strategies for counter-hegemonic rather than oppressive ends.

In summary, the existing literature establishes CDA as a powerful tool for analyzing political discourse, ideology, and power. Van Dijk's model of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation offers a clear framework for examining Mamdani's "US" and "THEM" construction. However, there remains a need for closer examination of how these strategies are deployed by left-wing, socialist politicians, and how they work not only to attack opponents but to build and hold together diverse coalitions. This study addresses that gap by analyzing Mamdani's victory speech as a case of counter-hegemonic discourse that constructs a class-based, inclusive "US" and a power-based, elite "THEM" in service of a socialist political identity and a unified moral majority

Analytical Framework

This study uses Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which looks at discourse in three connected ways: as text, as discursive practice, and as social practice. To do this properly, I draw on tools from the Discourse-Historical Approach, which helps connect the small details of language to the bigger social and political picture.

FIGURE 1



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Textual Analysis

The first step is a close reading of the speech itself. I pay attention to three main things. First is naming: how does the speech label people? For example, "we," "our New York," and "working families" are used for the US side, while "they," "the reign of Trump," and "forces of bigotry" refer to THEM. Second is describing: what qualities are attached to each group? The US group gets words like "resilient" and "deserving," while THEM gets words like "divisive" and "cruel." Third is metaphor: the speech uses familiar images like city as family, politics as war, and election as a reckoning to make the US/THEM divide feel natural and emotionally powerful.

Discursive Practice Analysis

The second step looks at how the speech is put together and what other voices and ideas it draws on. I examine how Mamdani mixes different kinds of talk socialist ideas about class, civil rights language about justice, and personal stories about immigrant families to build a broad "US" that many different people can see themselves in. At the same time, he ties his opponents firmly to Trumpism. I also look at the arguments the speech makes to justify its claims: the idea that the struggles of workers and immigrants make their victory morally right, and the idea that the Trump legacy is a dangerous and unnatural chapter that must be rejected.

Social Practice Analysis

The final step places the speech in its wider social and political context. Here I look at the ideological work the speech does. The strong "US versus THEM" framing does more than just describe two sides; it helps hide any cracks within the US coalition like tensions between class interests and identity-based concerns—by giving everyone a common enemy to stand against. I also analyze the speech as an attempt to shift what feels normal and legitimate in politics. Instead of the left being a minority voice on the defensive, the speech places it at the center, as the main character in a story about democratic renewal. All of this is understood against the backdrop of a New York City election that served as a direct symbolic rejection of the Trump era.

Data Analysis

The analysis that follows moves through Fairclough's three dimensions in a connected way, looking at the textual features of Mamdani's speech, how they work as discursive practice, and what they mean as social practice.

Constructing the Elite versus the Working Class

The construction of social inequality is immediately visible in the way Mamdani sets up a clear opposition between ordinary people and the powerful. In quotation 1, he draws a sharp line between "working people" and "the wealthy and well-connected." This is a binary contrast that positions political elites as deceptive figures who oppress citizens. At the same time, Mamdani places himself firmly alongside working people, creating a sense of shared identity and common cause. This move embeds him within the in-group rather than above it. The verb phrase "have been told" implies that the public has been subjected to a prolonged ideological campaign, suggesting manipulation rather than honest disagreement. In quotation 2, the pronoun "we" works to build in-group cohesion and shared social cognition. The metaphor "toppled" reinforces Mamdani's counter-hegemonic role, and by using the term "political dynasty," he frames previous governments as undemocratic, hereditary, and fundamentally illegitimate.

In quotation 3, setting "the many" against "the few" taps into familiar and deep-seated ideas about social and economic division. The claim that the system "answers only to" a small group presumes that power is corrupt and concentrated within a privileged elite. Rather than targeting specific individuals, the criticism focuses on the systems of power themselves, reinforcing a shared cognitive dissatisfaction with neoliberal governance associated with Trump and Cuomo, which Mamdani elsewhere labels undemocratic, oppressive, and corrupt. These views are solidified in quotation 4, where the statement presupposes as an accepted fact that a corrupt system already exists. It does not argue whether this happens but asserts how long it has happened: "For years." Corruption is framed as a permanent condition rather than an occasional failing. The sentence uses active voice to clearly identify the actor, those in city hall, and the beneficiary, those who can help them. The primary victim, the people or "us," is omitted from the sentence structure, appearing only implicitly. This focuses the audience's attention on attacking them rather than pleading for us.

The next quotation offers a clear example of what Van Dijk calls ideological manipulation. This is not accidental but a strategic shaping of public ideologies by the dominant, which in this case is the billionaire class. The word "convinced" suggests a

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deliberate strategy to divide people. By saying this, Mamdani attempts to break that illusion. His goal is to shift the focus of blame upward, toward the powerful few, and build a sense of shared interest among all workers who are not at the very top. The statement aligns with the divide-and-rule strategy of elites and calls for unity among the working class. Similarly, in quotation 5, ideological polarization and the manipulation of social cognition create a clear Us versus Them binary where Them is the manipulators and Us is the manipulated in-group, the masses. The phrase "fight among ourselves" presupposes the existence of manufactured conflicts based on race, class, or ideology that serve the interests of the powerful. The metaphor "look up" symbolizes class consciousness, directing attention toward those who actually hold power.

In the quotation that follows, Mamdani creates a definitive Us versus Them polarization. "We" is the empowered in-group, now claiming agency through the active verb "refuse." "Them" is the established out-group, whose historical power is framed solely as the unfair ability to "dictate the rules of the game." This metaphor of a game is crucial because it presupposes that the political and economic system has been an unfair competition with rigged rules set by the powerful for their own benefit. The declaration "any more" marks an intentional break, delegitimizing the past and present order as unjust. The second sentence, "They can play by the same rules as the rest of us," performs a radical role reversal. It strips Them of their privilege to act as rule-makers and redefines justice as a single, common set of rules for all. This is a powerful statement and a driving force for the in-group to resist and claim agency. Across quotations 1 through 7, Mamdani's views on capitalism and the ruling class's unfair policies become clear. He repeatedly uses discourse to reframe the ideologies of the masses and empower the working class. He identifies himself among the oppressed working class who now hold the power to overthrow political dynasties and an unfair, rigged system that benefits only the wealthy and the elites.

Constructing Inclusivity and Countering Islamophobia

The themes of inclusivity are central to Mamdani's counter-hegemonic political discourse, which actively rejects Islamophobia and affirms inclusive belonging. In many of his statements, he broadens the in-group by explicitly mentioning marginalized communities, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ members, immigrants, and Black

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people across New York and its suburbs. In quotation 8, he condemns antisemitism and reaches out inclusively to the Jewish community. In Van Dijk's terms, this is a strategy of positive in-group expansion, countering exclusionary discourses by normalizing minority presence within governance.

Focusing on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment, Mamdani declares in quotation 9: "A city where over one million Muslims know that they belong in the halls of power." This is a powerful statement about positive self-identification of a major marginalized group and a negative representation of the exclusionary out-group. By quantifying the group as "over one million Muslims," the statement establishes that Muslims are a major political force, not a minority to be overlooked. The key ideological word is the verb "know," which functions as a presupposition of a new reality. It asserts that the rightful belonging of Muslims in positions of authority is not a future request but a present, accepted fact. The metaphor "halls of power" represents the central institutions from which this group has historically been excluded. To declare that they belong there is to perform a radical act of legitimization and de-legitimization simultaneously. It legitimizes the in-group's claim to full political agency and de-legitimizes any social or political barriers that have previously denied them access. This discourse aims to transform social cognition by replacing a mental model of Muslim exclusion with a new, assertive model of rightful inclusion and ownership.

In quotation 10, Islamophobia is framed as a deliberate political strategy through the verb "traffic." This negative other-presentation delegitimizes hate-based discourse and reshapes public cognition by presenting it as morally unacceptable and politically ineffective. Mamdani condemns its ideological circulation, stripping it of legitimacy as a political tactic to defame Muslims. In the quotation that follows, he unites all marginalized groups into one collective. This statement functions as a deliberate act of inclusive identity construction. Rather than relying on a simple oppositional divide, it widens the boundaries of Us by naming multiple identity groups, immigrants, Muslims, Jewish people, and transgender individuals—and bringing them together as a single collective with equal claim to the city. The central ideological force lies in the assertive statement "this city is yours," which implicitly acknowledges that the belonging of these groups has often been challenged. By

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presenting their ownership as an unquestionable reality, Mamdani actively counters exclusionary narratives that position them as outsiders. The sequence of identities moves across legal status, religion, and gender identity, highlighting a shared experience of marginalization rather than a single defining trait. Inclusivity is framed here not as an aspiration but as an inherent and defining characteristic of New York City itself.

One of the most powerful statements of inclusion appears in quotation 12, where Mamdani uses an Arabic proverb: "ana minkum wa alaikum," which translates as "I am from you and with you." This is a profound move toward showing solidarity, condemning Islamophobia and Muslim marginalization, and reasserting his identity as a Muslim. At the textual level, the first-person singular "ana" personalizes the statement, while "minkum" (from you) and "wa alaykum" (and with you) signal both origin and solidarity. This dual positioning dissolves distance between speaker and audience, linguistically embedding the speaker within the community rather than above or outside it. Unlike conventional political language that often asserts leadership through hierarchy, this phrasing emphasizes shared belonging and collective presence. In Van Dijk's terms, this supports positive self-presentation by portraying the speaker as embedded within the group's lived experience. By using Arabic in a public political setting, the speaker normalizes Muslim linguistic and cultural identity. This helps reshape shared social knowledge, encouraging audiences to reinterpret Muslim presence as familiar, legitimate, and integral to civic life. English typically functions as the default language of power while minority languages remain marginalized; by introducing Arabic, Mamdani symbolically redistributes discursive access and affirms Muslim identity as compatible with political authority.

In quotation 13, Mamdani presents immigration as an essential and lasting part of New York's identity. By stating the city will continue to be "a city of immigrants," he removes immigration from the realm of debate and treats it as a settled reality. Immigrants are not described as outsiders but as a core part of the collective "we," reflecting strong positive in-group construction. The repeated emphasis on immigrants as those who have built and sustained the city highlights their economic and social contributions, working ideologically to counter dominant discourses that portray immigrants as a burden. The final claim that the city is now led by an immigrant

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directly challenges traditional power hierarchies. Mamdani also reasserts his own identity as an immigrant and refuses to be apologetic for it.

In quotation 14, the declaration "this city is your city, and this democracy is yours too" performs significant ideological work. The repeated possessive "yours" functions as a redistribution of power, symbolically transferring ownership of both urban space and democratic authority to ordinary citizens. This phrasing presupposes that access may have been uneven or contested, and counters such assumptions by presenting ownership as a given rather than a privilege. Later in this quotation, Mamdani uses the example of Wesley, a healthcare organizer, to illustrate broader social realities. This is what Van Dijk calls actor description, where a specific individual represents wider social truths. By identifying Wesley as both a worker and a New Yorker, Mamdani constructs a relatable and morally legitimate figure who embodies the struggles of the working class. The mention of Wesley's two-hour commute highlights the housing crisis and unaffordable rent. The statement constructs a cognitive framework in which working-class citizens are central to political life, legitimizing marginalized voices while critiquing structures that limit access to urban space and democratic participation.

In quotation 15, Mamdani directly confronts dominant norms about political legitimacy and respectability. By openly naming his youth, religious identity, and political ideology, he brings together characteristics often treated as disadvantages in mainstream political discourse. Within Van Dijk's framework, this is a deliberate strategy of positive self-presentation, where potentially stigmatized identities are reclaimed rather than concealed. Each sentence introduces an identity commonly framed as problematic, being young, being Muslim, being a democratic socialist, thereby activating shared social knowledge and existing stereotypes in the audience's mental models. His refusal to apologize for any of it is significant because it avoids self-sabotage and reclaims the authority to hold power on behalf of the marginalized. The phrase "most damning of all" uses irony to expose how these identities are often framed as faults while simultaneously stripping that framing of its power. The statement functions as a form of ideological resistance, normalizing marginalized identities and redefining political legitimacy on inclusive terms.

In quotation 16, Mamdani constructs a strong contrast between past failure and future

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possibility. Declaring that "mediocrity" belongs to the past negatively evaluates earlier political performance without naming specific individuals. This allows negative other-presentation to operate indirectly, assigning failure to an undefined "before." The reference to no longer needing "a history book" implies that Democratic greatness has become distant or outdated, presupposing a shared understanding that the party has recently fallen short. The repeated use of "we" creates a collective in-group that includes speaker and audience, suggesting shared responsibility for moving beyond average leadership. The final rejection of "abstract" greatness narrows the meaning of success to tangible outcomes, subtly critiquing symbolic politics and redirecting attention toward practical achievements.

In quotation 17, the statement reinforces shared ownership and inclusion, suggesting that the city belongs to the people who live in it rather than to the wealthy, corporations, or political elites. This direct message responds to feelings of exclusion and displacement, making belonging sound natural and unquestionable. In quotation 19, though very short, the sentence carries strong meaning by directly addressing the audience and making power feel real and reachable. Instead of presenting authority as something held by politicians, it is handed back to ordinary people, encouraging them to see themselves as active participants. In quotation 20, Mamdani reflects a feeling many recognize, sharing someone else's words to show that frustration is not personal but widely felt. The contrast between loving the city and merely living in it suggests emotional distance caused by economic pressures. The message points to larger systems that have made city life exhausting, preparing the audience to think about social and economic change as necessary.

Across these statements, Mamdani's inclusive and anti-elite discourse operates through a clear Us versus Them contrast. Crucially, his discourse does not construct "Them" along racial or religious lines but along class, power, and exclusion. "Us" is defined as broad, diverse, and inclusive, while "Them" is associated with wealth concentration, political control, and social division. Unlike exclusionary populism, the in-group here expands rather than narrows, reflecting an ideological commitment to solidarity over separation. At the level of social practice, this discourse functions as a counter-hegemonic project. It attempts to shift the moral and political center by positioning the socialist left not as a marginal faction but as the protagonist of

democratic renewal, all within the concrete context of a New York City election that served as a symbolic repudiation of the Trump era.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of Mamdani's victory speech reveals a consistent and deliberate use of language to construct two opposing groups and to mobilize them for a clear political purpose. The findings are organized around the two research questions that guided this study.

Answer to Research Question 1: How does Mamdani's victory speech use language to create a positive "US" and a negative "THEM" in order to promote a socialist political identity?

The analysis shows that Mamdani builds the positive "US" and negative "THEM" through three main linguistic strategies. First, through nomination, he carefully chooses how to name each group. The "US" group is labelled with inclusive and everyday terms like "working people," "our New York," and "the many." These names feel familiar, collective, and grounded in ordinary life. In contrast, the "THEM" group is named through terms that carry negative weight and distance: "the wealthy and well-connected," "political dynasty," and "forces of bigotry." These labels strip the out-group of warmth and legitimacy.

Second, through predication, he attaches very different qualities to each side. The "US" group is described as resilient, diverse, deserving, and hardworking. The "THEM" group is characterized as corrupt, divisive, cruel, and deceptive. This is not balanced description; it is a consistent pattern of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. For example, the statement that the system has been rigged by those who "dictate the rules of the game" attributes active, malevolent agency to "THEM," while "US" is framed as the victim finally standing up.

Third, through metaphor, the speech makes this division feel emotionally real and urgent. The metaphor of the "game" with rigged rules frames the entire political and economic system as fundamentally unfair. The metaphor of "toppling" political dynasties frames the election not just as a win but as a reckoning. The metaphor of the "halls of power" turns an abstract idea of government into a concrete space from which ordinary people have been locked out. These metaphors do not just describe reality; they invite the audience to feel it, to feel cheated, to feel angry, and to feel

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ready for change.

What makes this "US" versus "THEM" construction distinctly socialist is how the line is drawn. The division is not based on race, religion, or nationality. It is based entirely on class and power. "THEM" is the billionaire class, the political elites, the corrupt system. "US" is everyone else, workers, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ people, Black communities. By defining the enemy as economic and political power rather than any identity group, Mamdani anchors his socialist political identity in a moral critique of capitalism and elite rule. The promotion of socialism here is not abstract; it is woven into every description of who is to blame and who deserves power.

Answer to Research Question 2: How does Mamdani's victory speech use the positive "US" and negative "THEM" division to heal divisions within his own diverse coalition and present it as a unified moral majority?

The findings show that the "US" versus "THEM" division does more than just identify an enemy. It actively works to hold together a coalition that might otherwise fragment. Mamdani's "US" includes working-class voters, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ individuals, and Black New Yorkers. These groups do not always share the same immediate interests or experiences. The speech manages this diversity through several careful moves.

First, the speech names each group explicitly and gives each a place in the story. Muslims are told they belong in the halls of power. Jewish communities receive direct condemnation of antisemitism. Immigrants are framed as the builders and sustainers of the city. Transgender individuals are included in the collective "yours." By listing these groups one after another, the speech signals that no one is secondary, no one is an afterthought. Everyone is named, and everyone is claimed.

Second, the speech uses the common enemy to redirect internal tensions outward. The phrase "fight among ourselves" directly acknowledges that conflicts exist within the working class, along lines of race, religion, or ideology, but immediately reframes these conflicts as manufactured by the elite. The real fight, the speech insists, is not between workers of different backgrounds but between all workers and the powerful few above them. The metaphor "look up" captures this perfectly: stop looking sideways at your neighbor and look upward at those who benefit from your division. This is a classic solidarity-building move. A common

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enemy makes internal differences feel smaller and less important.

Third, the speech uses personal identity to model the coalition itself. Mamdani does not hide his own identities but names them openly: young, Muslim, democratic socialist, son of immigrants. The phrase "most damning of all" uses irony to mock the very idea that these identities disqualify him from power. By refusing to apologize, he demonstrates that the coalition does not require people to leave parts of themselves behind. He embodies the message that difference and leadership are compatible. When he switches into Arabic to say "ana minkum wa alaikum" "I am from you and with you", he performs solidarity rather than just describing it. Language itself becomes the proof of belonging.

Finally, the speech presents the "US" group not as a collection of victims but as a moral majority with rightful claim to power. Words like "refuse," "topple," and "belong" are active, not passive. The coalition is not asking for inclusion; it is announcing its arrival. The repeated possessive "yours", this city is yours, this democracy is yours, transforms marginalized groups into rightful owners. This shift from pleading to claiming is what turns a diverse coalition into a unified force. The "US" group is presented as the true representation of the city's values, while "THEM" is framed as an aberration from what New York really is. This morally legitimizes the coalition and delegitimizes its opponents in a single move.

Taken together, these strategies suggest that Mamdani's speech does not treat unity as something that already exists; it treats unity as something that must be built through language. The positive "US" and negative "THEM" division is the tool that makes this construction possible. It provides the emotional glue, shared grievance, shared enemy, shared identity, that holds the coalition together long enough to present itself as a single, morally legitimate majority ready to govern.

Concluding Thought

This study examined how Zohran Mamdani's 2025 mayoral victory speech constructs a positive "Us" and a negative "Them" to promote a socialist political identity and unite a diverse coalition. The findings show that Mamdani uses class-based divisions, portraying ordinary people as "Us" and the political and economic elite as "Them." Unlike exclusionary populist rhetoric, his discourse emphasises inclusion and solidarity among marginalised groups. The study highlights that the "Us vs. Them"

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framework can serve progressive goals by mobilising support without targeting vulnerable communities. It also demonstrates how political language can actively create unity by fostering a shared sense of identity and purpose. However, this research is limited to a single speech and context. Future studies could compare Mamdani's rhetoric with other left-wing leaders or examine audience responses to such discourse. Overall, Mamdani's victory speech presents an alternative vision of political belonging, using inclusive language to challenge existing power structures and build collective solidarity.

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Appendix

Selected Quotations from Zohran Mamdani's 2025 Mayoral Victory Speech

Quotation 1: "...the working people of New York have been told by the wealthy and the well-connected that power does not belong in their hands."

Quotation 2: "Tonight, against all odds, we have grasped it. The future is in our hands. My friends, we have toppled a political dynasty."

Quotation 3: "...as we turn the page on a politics that abandons the many and answers only to the few."

Quotation 4: "For years, those in City Hall have only helped those who can help them."

Quotation 5: "The billionaire class has convinced people making \$30 an hour that their enemy is someone making \$20 an hour."

Quotation 6: "They want us to fight among ourselves so we don't look up."

Quotation 7: "We refuse to let them dictate the rules of the game anymore."

Quotation 8: "We will build a City Hall that stands alongside Jewish New Yorkers."

Quotation 9: "A city where over one million Muslims know that they belong in the halls of power."

Quotation 10: "No more will New York be a city where you can traffic in Islamophobia and win."

Quotation 11: "Whether you are an immigrant, Muslim, Jewish, or transgender—this city is yours."

Quotation 12: "Ana minkum wa alaikum."

Quotation 13: "New York will remain a city of immigrants: a city built by immigrants, powered by immigrants and, as of tonight, led by an immigrant."

Quotation 14: "...this city is your city, and this democracy is yours too. This campaign is about people like Wesley, an 1199 organizer I met outside of Elmhurst Hospital on Thursday night. A New Yorker who lives elsewhere, who commutes two hours each

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way from Pennsylvania because rent is too expensive in this city.”

Quotation 15: “I am young, despite my best efforts to grow older. I am Muslim. I am a democratic socialist. And most damning of all, I refuse to apologize for any of this.”

Quotation 16: “We will leave mediocrity in our past. No longer will we have to open a history book for proof that Democrats can dare to be great. Our greatness will be anything but abstract.”

Quotation 17: “I used to love New York, but now it’s just where I live.”

Quotation 18: “This city belongs to you.”

Quotation 19: “This power—it’s yours.”

Quotation 20: “I used to love New York, but now it’s just where I live.”