

## **“Both Sides of the Issue”**

# **Mamdani for Mayor?**

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## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- summarize the opposing views of Zohran Mamdani's candidacy and platform presented in the two videos.
- investigate the real-world examples each video uses to support or challenge democratic socialist policies.
- appraise the economic arguments each video makes about wealth taxes, price controls, and city-owned services.
- construct a written position on whether Mamdani's proposals would address New York City's affordability problems, drawing evidence from both videos.

## Concepts & Key Terms

The following terms appear across both videos in this pairing. Understanding them will help students follow the arguments and engage in discussion.

**Affordability Crisis:** a period marked by rapidly rising costs for housing, food, and other essentials that outpace income growth, leaving many residents struggling to cover basic needs.

**Centrist:** a political stance that avoids ideological extremes and typically favors moderate, incremental policy change.

**Democratic Socialism:** a political ideology that seeks to achieve socialist goals, such as public ownership of certain industries and expanded government services, through democratic elections rather than revolution.

**Laffer Curve:** an economic theory, associated with economist Arthur Laffer, that describes the relationship between tax rates and tax revenue, suggesting that raising rates beyond a certain point causes revenue to fall as taxpayers change their behavior to avoid the tax.

**Means of Production:** the tools, factories, land, and other resources used to produce goods and services; socialist theory calls for these to be owned collectively or by the state rather than by private individuals.

**Price Gouging:** the practice of raising prices sharply, often during shortages or emergencies, to a level many consider unfair or exploitative.

**Profit Motive:** the incentive that drives businesses to produce goods and services efficiently in order to earn money; supporters argue this incentive keeps shelves stocked and prices competitive.

**Progressive:** in current American politics, a label for candidates and policies that favor significant government action to address economic inequality, expand social programs, and advance causes such as affordable housing and climate action.

**Rent Freeze:** a government policy that prohibits landlords from raising rents on certain units for a set period, intended to protect tenants from rising housing costs.

**Subsidy:** a payment from the government, funded by taxpayers, that lowers the cost of a good, service, or activity for consumers or producers.

**Upzoning:** a change to local zoning laws that allows denser housing, such as larger apartment buildings, in areas previously limited to smaller structures.

**Wealth Tax:** a tax on the total value of an individual's assets, such as stocks, real estate, and cash, rather than on income earned during the year.

## Discussion Questions

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video. Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

### Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. In the CNN video, Elle Reeve described Zohran Mamdani as “an unapologetic progressive.” What does “progressive” mean in this context?
3. In the Stossel video, Zohran Mamdani called himself a democratic socialist. What is a democratic socialist?
4. In the CNN video, Zohran Mamdani said that leadership in the Democratic Party “helped give rise to Donald Trump....” What did he mean by this? Do you agree? Why/Why not?
5. In the Stossel video, Zohran Mamdani described democratic socialism as “the commitment to dignity, a state that provides whatever is necessary for its people to live a dignified life.” Do you think that's a fair definition? Why/why not?
6. In the CNN video, a Zohran Mamdani supporter said he's “sick of the status quo.” What did he mean by this? Is it a good reason to support Mamdani? Why/Why not?
7. John Stossel said: “[T]he profit motive is exactly what keeps stores stocked, and why we spend much less on food than we did a hundred years ago.” What did he mean by this? Do you agree? Why/Why not?

8. In the CNN video, a Zohran Mamdani supporter said he thinks Mamdani's opponent Andrew Cuomo "doesn't know how much a dozen eggs cost." What point was he making?
9. What was John Stossel's main argument against wealth taxes? Do you agree with the argument? Why/Why not?
10. In the CNN video, Elle Reeve asked Zohran Mamdani if Democrats in Congress who are over the age of 80 should retire. How would you answer this question?
11. The Stossel video showed a chart labeled "the Laffer curve." What is the Laffer curve?
12. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
13. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
14. Had you heard of Zohran Mamdani before watching these videos?
15. What makes Zohran Mamdani appealing as a candidate?
16. What makes Zohran Mamdani unappealing as a candidate?
17. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
18. What else would you like to learn about this topic?

## **Activities**

### **Activity 1: Venn Diagram Plus**

Teacher Instructions: Students will use a three-zone Venn diagram to compare the CNN profile with the Stossel critique. The overlap represents points where the two videos agree, the unique outer zones represent what each video argues alone, and the space outside the circles represents important questions neither video addresses. Distribute the worksheet on the following page and allow students fifteen to twenty minutes to complete it individually before group discussion.

Student Directions: Use the worksheet provided to structure your response. In the left zone, list Zohran Mamdani's own arguments as they appear in the CNN interview with Elle Reeve. In the right zone, list John Stossel's critiques of Mamdani's ideas from the Stossel video. In the overlap, note any points on which both videos agree, such as the existence of an affordability crisis in New York City or the fact that Mamdani is a popular candidate.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

### Venn Diagram Plus: Mamdani for Mayor?

<b>CNN / Mamdani (alone)</b>	<b>BOTH agree</b>	<b>Stossel (alone)</b>

## **Activity 2: Strongest Argument Challenge**

Teacher Instructions: This activity pushes students to engage substantively with each side rather than dismiss one out of hand. Each student must identify the single strongest argument from each video, then defend both choices in a short written response and a class discussion. Allow fifteen minutes for writing and another fifteen to twenty for the discussion.

Student Directions: From each video, select the ONE point that you believe makes the strongest case — whether or not you personally agree with it. Write a paragraph of five to seven sentences for each video. Each paragraph should state the argument in the speaker's own words (quote a short phrase if possible), explain WHY you see it as the strongest point in that video, and cite at least one specific piece of evidence or example from the video that supports the claim. Be prepared to share your choices and respond to classmates who selected different arguments.

## **Activity 3: Socratic Seminar Prep**

Teacher Instructions: In a Socratic seminar, students lead the conversation with open-ended questions rather than defending preset positions. This prep activity guarantees students arrive at the seminar having engaged with both perspectives. After students complete the prep, run the seminar in a fishbowl or full-class format.

Student Directions: Review your notes from both videos, then write the following five questions on a single sheet of paper or a digital document:

- Two questions that challenge a claim or assumption made in the CNN video — for example, what specific evidence supports Mamdani's claim that upzoning wealthier neighborhoods will produce affordable housing?
- Two questions that challenge a claim or assumption made in the Stossel video — for example, if wealth taxes underperformed in New York and Maryland, does that prove they would fail everywhere, or might local conditions matter?
- One question that invites the class to find common ground between the two videos.

Every question must be open-ended (no yes/no answers) and should push the conversation deeper. Bring your questions to the seminar.

## **Activity 4: Fact vs. Opinion Sort**

Teacher Instructions: Campaign coverage and political commentary often blend verifiable facts with opinions, predictions, and value judgments. Students will classify specific statements from both videos. The list below can be projected, read aloud, or printed and cut into strips for small-group sorting. Pay particular attention in debrief to statements where a speaker presents an opinion as if it were an established fact.

Student Directions: For each statement below, label it as:

- **F – Fact:** a verifiable claim that can be checked against evidence.
- **O – Opinion:** a value judgment, belief, or prediction about the future.
- **M – Mixed:** a statement that contains both a factual claim and an opinion.

After labeling each statement, be ready to explain your reasoning.

**Statements to sort:**

1. "Zohran Mamdani built a following with viral videos." (CNN video)
2. "Democratic socialism just means a commitment to dignity, a state that provides whatever is necessary for its people to live a dignified life." (Mamdani, Stossel video)
3. "The vacancy rate was just 1.4%, and the city says average housing costs rose 68% from 2011." (CNN video)
4. "Everywhere it's been tried, government ownership wrecks lives." (Stossel video)
5. "I don't think that we should have billionaires." (Mamdani, Stossel video)
6. "The profit motive is exactly what keeps stores stocked and why we spend much less on food than we did a hundred years ago." (Stossel video)
7. "Cuomo doesn't know how much a dozen eggs cost." (Mamdani supporter, CNN video)
8. "We projected that we'd get \$4 billion and we actually got well short of it." (Stossel video, on a high-tax revenue shortfall)
9. "I think Andrew Cuomo is the perfect representation of the politics of the past." (Mamdani, CNN video)
10. "Tuesday's primary is a test of the Democratic Party's direction following President Donald Trump's victory last November." (CNN video)
11. "Rich people work hard to escape high taxes." (Stossel video)
12. "New York City is under attack from both of those things." (Mamdani, CNN video, referring to President Trump and the affordability crisis)

## Activity 5: Exit Ticket Reflection

Teacher Instructions: A structured exit ticket ensures every student leaves the lesson having synthesized both perspectives into a personal takeaway. Five to seven minutes of quiet writing is usually sufficient. Collect tickets at the door and use them to shape the next day's opening discussion.

Student Directions: On a half-sheet of paper or an index card, complete these three prompts:

1. One claim from the CNN video that I want to investigate further is \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.
2. One claim from the Stossel video that I want to investigate further is \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.
3. After watching both videos, the question I am most uncertain about is \_\_\_\_\_.

Your exit ticket should be four to six sentences in total. Do not restate the videos — the goal is to capture where the two perspectives have genuinely challenged your thinking.