

## Who Represents Me?

In every democracy, one of the enduring puzzles is who embodies and speaks on behalf of the population. It transcends the election and vote garnering; it demands leadership that is committed to serving the public interest, particularly the marginalized and disenfranchised groups. Representation in any society requires active commitment and tangible achievements. As far as America is concerned, this issue becomes critical grappling with acute political polarization, socio-economic inequality, stagnating trust in civic institutions, and growing apprehension about their cutoff from governance structures. The examination of current Mayor of New York City Eric Adams; newly elected Democratic nominee Zohran Mamdani; and the sitting President Donald J. Trump provides three distinct frameworks on governance, public service and “people” representation.

Selected as New York City’s mayor in 2021 and currently serving his second term, Eric Adams exemplifies a political philosophy based on pragmatism. Having served as NYPD captain and later senator for New York State, he styles himself as a moderate solution-driven leader with an intimate understanding of...

His leadership priorities have been public safety, mental health reform, early childhood education, and affordable housing. One of his core slogans has been making New York "the best place to raise a family," touting in particular the administration’s investment in child care services along with expanded libraries and enhanced mental health support for families as well as senior programs. In the 2026 city budget, he again reflected his preference for gradual evolution over rampant overhaul by increasing funding to essential services while exercising fiscal restraint.

Even with tangible efforts to balance and further develop the city, stabilizing to visibly progressive policies is often viewed as lacking by structural equity forwards further lacking progress lack policy. Vulnerable communities are overlooked due to centrist prioritization and business class interests surging dominant narrative frameworks. For example, stronger rent restrictions alongside more aggressive tenant rights movements have been largely dismissed. Compounding these issues, the administration's approach toward ‘public safety’ which incorporates heightened policing and surveillance is interpreted more as heavy-handed control stripped of empathy instead compassion devoid methodology meant for sensitive engagement. Adams’ self-image as ‘New Yorkers' Mayor’ alienates many progressives who respond strongly towards his moderate political stance concerning deeper pressing metropolitan crises around inclusive housing policy, cost-of-living affordability challenges facing residents daily interaction alongside racial inequity framework dialogues entwined systemically into society fabric unfurling multilayered complexity.

In stark contrast, Zohra Mamdani is 33 years old and from queens where he serves as an assembly member, recently emerging as the democratic nominee for mayor of New York City. His primary election win over former Governor Andrew Cuomo turned out to be a shock for the political class and

marked a tremendous shift in New York's politics claiming that Mamdani is politically living through a revolution. He also happens to be new wave of New Yorkers which advocates for rent freezes on over one million apartments, construction of two hundred thousand low cost homes, universal childcare among others. This framework captures consists of progressive ideas aligned around empowering the government hand out resources such as childcare groceries amongst other essentials to citizens.

The backbone of Mamdani's campaign was a group collection consisting of youth voters, immigrants who lived working and small class level rentals along with political activists. It catered outsiders like students and young workers who were tired of poorly paid jobs alongside ever growing rents without affordable services offered by the government foundationalivebus private transport fully equipped supermarkets alongside unprocessed public grocery stores welcoming children officially elevating their importance in society.

He has selected inequalities as the central issue of his campaign portraying himself as a selfless savior of the oppressed. Supporters point to an established need for bold action, whether it is economically savvy or not, while critics note fiscal irresponsibility stemming from lack of realism. That vision offers governance, but it also offers hope—a future radically different where public policy prioritizes everyday New Yorkers instead of corporate landlords.

Nonetheless, there is controversy around Mamdani's rise. Primary voter turnout was just 17%, sparking debates about the legitimacy of his mandate. Mainstream economists and political commentators have raised red flags too, claiming his policies pose risks of stalling investment or upsetting housing market stability. In the realm of governance, there are questions trying to enacting such an ideologically zealous and ambitious agenda poses; one needs coalitions and a complex bureaucratic structure to execute campaign promises. These issues remain unresolved on Mamdani's side—his newly formed narrative in city leadership debate amidst stark inequality highlights some paradigm shifts worth considering.

The policies implemented by Donald Trump have altered the unsolved matter of representation at the national level. He returned to the White House in 2025 and is currently serving his second non-consecutive term as President. We are witnessing another surge in populist nationalism alongside heightened policy disruption, Trump's immoderate rhetoric, and increased divisiveness within political frameworks. He has taken it upon himself to represent “forgotten Americans,” or the people who believe themselves to be distanced from the economic benefits of globalization and gently liberal societal norms along with government overspending. His policies stem from an America first doctrine which seeks to fortify borders, dismantle progressive legislation, reduce taxes, and escalate military spending.

Trump's 2026 Federal budget continues prioritizing these issues. Its main goal is permanently extending tax cuts issued in 2017 while concurrently reducing social welfare programs such as Medicaid and SNAP, cutting investments into education and clean energy research, all while ramping

up funding for defense contracting and immigration enforcement agencies. Regardless of whether they support or oppose these proposals, scholars seem to blame conservatives for abandoning civil responsibility by fully distorting fiscal reality without any regard for social-strategic reasoning behind public welfare programs like Medicaid or SNAP.

As per the independent analysis, Trump's budget—along with other executive orders—has been shown to... dismantle DEI initiatives...and suspend refugee admissions. All of this supporting the prediction that undone healthcare reforms could strip coverage from 11 to 16 million people by 2034 and significantly increase national debt. It is notable how divided public opinion remains surrounding the continuation of his policies. For instance, die-hard fans strongly criticize liberal elites for what they perceive as governing waste, placing suffocating bureaucratic structures, and rampant identity politics on American soil. The same die-hard proponents keep steadfast admiration towards Trump under his vision of restoring national integrity (adopted by mostly rural anti-establishment gain) ensuring loyalty from an entire white working-class sector.

However, for millions of other Americans, Trump's presidency is a catastrophe. Civil rights organizations, economists, healthcare sector advocates, and public sector unions claim that his policies have an unusually high impact on the poor and marginalized groups. Combined with his harsh leadership style and press attacks, there are growing concerns about executive branch authoritarianism. The administration's approach to immigration—with mass deportations and family separations—strikes many as lacking basic human compassion. It remains highly contested whether he truly represents the interests of the nation as a whole.

Analyzing Eric Adams, Zohran Mamdani alongside Donald Trump reveals three disparate interpretations of representing one's constituents. While separated from the daily life of New Yorkers due to persisting crime rate challenges, Adams provides measured guided focus upon safety service delivery alongside economic growth and promotion stimulating job creation. Further reinforcing normalcy coupled with gradual progress resonates deeply. Mamdani represents a bold departure from the politics as usual with a call for change that is transformative, and equitable and rooted in justice. His politics contest status quo conservatism. Trump, on the other hand, continues to govern by way of polarized populism and identity politics through tearing down liberal institutions while embracing nationalist principles.

Each one of these leaders claims to do so in favor of “the people,” but they each have their own definition of “the people.” For example, Adams addresses the city's mainstream center and tries to maintain it while Mamdani advocates for those who have been marginalized by both capitalism and bureaucracy. And Trump supports a certain segment of the population, primarily conservative Americans who view themselves as besieged. The conflicts arising out of competing visions illustrate problems of representation within a rich yet divided democracy.

Who speaks for the people? The answer shifts depending on the questioner, the values they hold, and the future they imagine. Genuine representation stretches beyond winning elections or sitting in the

Capitol; it means carrying the dreams and burdens of a fractured society. It asks for trust, empathy, honesty, and the courage to face messy realities. In a nation as large and varied as the United States—where class, race, region, and belief pull in different directions—no one person can capture every voice. That gap explains why some voters cheer pragmatic leaders like Eric Adams, who focus on public safety, daily administration, and steady, small gains. Others follow Zohran Mamdani, whose progressive platform calls for sweeping economic reforms intended to lift the most forgotten. Meanwhile, millions still stand with Donald J. Trump, because his populist, nationalist language speaks to people who feel dismissed by experts and distant cultural norms.

The balancing act between public trust and partisan loyalty lies at the heart of any meaningful attempt to represent a pluralistic electorate. John Quincy Adams typifies a moderate, managerial approach, emphasising administration over dramatic programmes; Mahmood Mamdani exemplifies a grassroots, reformist idealism, seeking structural changes from the bottom up; Donald Trump channels disruptive energy, framing loyalty to a narrowed constituency as authenticity. Though these styles differ, their capacity to embody the people's will depends less on labels than on a reciprocal willingness to listen, engage, and recalibrate.

In an age marked by widening inequality, rapid digital innovation, and deepening cultural fault-lines, leaders must translate goodwill into sustained practices—careful urban-planning consultations, algorithmic audits, or open fiscal reviews—rather than settle for slogans or rehearsed media moments. Until boarded voices are heard, and systemic disparities confronted, the perennial question who speaks for the people will endure. Authentic representation resides not in courting a dominant faction, nor in defending incumbency, but in persistent efforts to grasp a shifting common good. That task demands courage, strategic foresight, and a daily readiness to acknowledge one's own blind spots. Unless politicians of every stripe privilege such humanity above transient partisanship, the quest for inclusive, responsive governance will remain a test—one of the most urgent and recurrent challenges democratic societies face today.