

# Zohran Mamdani's democratic primary win and the banality of voting for evil

By Lev Tsitrin

Google's "AI Overview" thusly explains the term "banality of evil" – it "refers to the idea that horrific acts of evil, like those carried out during the Holocaust, can be committed by ordinary people who are not necessarily inherently evil, but who are simply following orders or conforming to social pressures without critical thinking or moral reflection. It suggests that evil is not always the product of monstrous individuals, but can also arise from the mundane and thoughtless actions of everyday people within structured systems"

Yet committing crimes on industrial scale – in Nazi death camps, in Soviet Gulag, in Mao's "cultural revolution," or in the aftermath of Iran's Islamic one – requires more than just passivity of participants. It would be impossible without the enthusiastic initial empowerment of the ruling clique by the larger populace. Needless to say, once the dictatorship is established and the new rulers' control of state's coercive machinery – its police forces – is firm, public support becomes irrelevant; it is maintained by basic coercion. The trick is not to be a Hitler, a Stalin, or a Mao, or Khomeini (in America, like in the rest of the world, prisons are full) – but to ascend to the seat of power. This done, the rest is easy – the "banality of evil" will turn any careerist eager to feather his nest into a thug, since thuggery is what is demanded by the higher-ups, and there is complete impunity for committing it. The combination of zero risks with plethora of benefits will tempt plenty of "ordinary people who are not necessarily inherently evil" to participate.

But since ascending the throne does require initial public support, the question is, how to gain it? Well, as every politician knows, it is done by fanning discontent with the status quo, combined with promised solutions that would result in future public bliss. The discontented will flock to your banner – and the more areas of discontent the agitator rails against and promises to fix, the wider his tent, the greater his following.

And this following has priorities – and accordingly, is willing to close its eyes on more problematic parts of a candidate's program. If your main grievance is that trains don't run on time, than why not support Mussolini who proverbially "made the trains run on time"? Who cares if government no longer plays by the rules, but rules with an iron fist? If that's not a concern, than what is wrong with making Hitler a Chancellor? Why not support Stalin or Mao or Khomeini? Any solution, be it purity of Aryan race, or Communism, or Islam, will bring happiness.



We just saw this very dynamic play out in New York of all places, where the Democratic primary in mayoral race was won not by a mainstream candidate, the ex-governor Andrew Cuomo – but by a young (he is just 33) firebrand antisemitic Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani who promised everything to everyone – to stop the rent (and, needless to say, oceans) from rising, climate from changing, Israel from winning (or for that matter, existing).

And the democrat-registered populace followed. Even his obvious antisemitism (which he denies, so let me step back and say that, on the scale of 0 to 10 it measures only at 9.9, so technically Mamdani may be right – he is not there all the way, but is just more that a little pregnant with it) did not

stop major unions – like the United Federation of Teachers – or major New York politicians like the leader of its Hispanic community Congressman Adriano Espaillat, and even a Jewish congressman, Jerold Nadler (though ten years ago this character voted for Obama’s Iran deal too, so no surprise here, perhaps) from endorsing him.

What we saw unfolding in New York answers the puzzling historical question of “how could Hitler ever come to power?” It is not that difficult, it turns out. A charismatic demagogue promising skies to “ordinary people who are not necessarily inherently evil, but who are simply following orders or conforming to social pressures without critical thinking or moral reflection” will do the trick – they will close the eyes to the evil warts (like the candidate’s antisemitism) and vote to put that evil candidate in the seat of power, allured by promises of upcoming bliss – and will later let that evil from on-high make them evil, too.

We are not at the latter point here in New York – and we are still a November election away from the former one. Let’s hope that it will not come to pass – but the lesson here is simple: the rise of evil right here in the US is not beyond the realm of the possible. What happened in Germany, Russia, China, and Iran where befuddled thoughtless masses brought evil to power, and got corrupted into becoming evil as a result, may happen here, too – because of the banality of voting for evil.

This is a lesson for us all – including teacher-members of the UFT who teach history to school kids, yet whose endorsement of Mamdani for the mayor of New York teaches us that they have not internalized the lessons of history they claim to teach. Nor were those lessons internalized by the majority of New York Democrats who, “conforming to social pressures without critical thinking or moral reflection” voted in mayoral democratic primary for evil called Zohran Mamdani.