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Andrew Cuomo

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# Cuomo courts clear racism against Mamdani in desperate bid to win NYC mayor | Opinion

*This is abhorrent behavior from a former elected official. It is embarrassing and deeply telling about how far Andrew Cuomo is willing to go to win over conservative voters.*

**Sara Pequeño** USA TODAY

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Disgraced former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo just displayed several instances of Islamophobia toward Democratic nominee Zohran Mamdani following the final New York City mayoral debate – making it clearer than ever that the city deserves better.

During the debate, Cuomo’s campaign posted an [artificial intelligence video](#) depicting Mamdani eating rice with his hands, a Black man in a keffiyeh shoplifting, another Black man trafficking white women, and other “criminals” voicing their support for the state legislator.

Then, on Oct. 23, Cuomo stopped by “[Sid & Friends In The Morning](#),” a conservative radio show hosted by Sid Rosenberg. Early in the interview, Rosenberg said he only speaks with Cuomo and Republican nominee Curtis Sliwa, before adding, “I don’t talk to the terrorist.”

Mamdani would be the [first Muslim mayor](#) in New York City history [if polls hold](#) until the Nov. 4 general election. It's a bad sign that Cuomo fails to challenge this clearly racist remark, but it gets worse. When Cuomo tried highlighting Mamdani's inexperience, it quickly veered into horrific territory.

"God forbid, another 9/11," [Cuomo said](#). "Can you imagine Mamdani in the seat?"

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"I could," Rosenberg replied. "He'd be cheering."

Instead of immediately calling out the host's Islamophobic remark, Cuomo chuckled.

"That's another problem," the former governor said.

This is abhorrent behavior from a former elected official and onetime leader within the Democratic Party. It is embarrassing and deeply telling about how far Cuomo is willing to go to win over conservative voters. Most of all, the fact that he has failed to call out racism against his opponent is indicative of his character – and a sign that he has no place in New York City politics.

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## Buckle up for more Islamophobia against Mamdani

This isn't even the first time Cuomo and his supporters have veered into Islamophobic territory. In a proposed mailer from a super PAC supporting the independent candidate, [Mamdani was depicted with a thicker, darker beard](#). While the image was never sent out, it doesn't change the fact that it existed in the first place.

This is a clear sign that Cuomo has tried so hard to appeal to conservatives that he has lost the plot entirely. Right-wing politicians across the country have been [blatantly Islamophobic](#) to Mamdani since he received the Democratic nomination.

Rep. Nancy Mace, R-South Carolina, implied that his rise meant that [people had “forgotten”](#) the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Some have even [called for Mamdani’s deportation](#). For Cuomo to stoop to their level is classless.

[A Cuomo spokesperson has said](#) that the comment on Rosenberg’s radio show was a reference to political commentator Hasan Piker, whom [Mamdani has distanced himself from](#) in recent weeks. This makes no sense to me, as Piker’s name had not been mentioned in the interview to that point. The reality seems to be that Cuomo failed to call out a racist remark, and instead of owning up to it, is trying to find a way to blame Mamdani.

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**Cuomo could make his case while calling out racism. We might even respect him for it.**

I would have more respect for Cuomo if he were willing to call out racism and Islamophobia against his opponent. At the very least, he shouldn’t be adding to bigoted depictions of Mamdani and other New Yorkers.

After all, nearly [1 million Muslims](#) live in New York City, and I doubt they are endeared by these remarks.

There were already myriad reasons not to vote for Cuomo, given the [allegations of sexual harassment](#) against him and his [blunders during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Even if he had a good appearance at the final debate, he immediately ruined what little goodwill he might have earned by coming out and condoning racist comments.

It doesn't take much to stand up to Islamophobia. Had Cuomo done this, instead of disparaging Mamdani, he would have at least come off as someone with integrity. Instead, he seems content proving he has none.

*Follow USA TODAY columnist Sara Pequeño on X, formerly Twitter: [@sara\\_\\_pequeno](#)*