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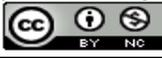
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PROCESS TRACING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE STUDY OF ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S POLITICAL DISCOURSE PATTERNS

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Leadership Development, Political Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Process Tracing, Zohran Mamdani, Longitudinal Analysis	This research analyses the discursive development of leadership identity across three speeches by Zohran Mamdani as he transitions from legislator to mayoral candidate/mayor-elect. Utilizing the qualitative explanatory case study approach that combines Critical Discourse Analysis with process tracing, the study examines pronoun usage, modality, evaluative language, metaphor, and lexical selection in speeches across legislative, campaign launch, primary campaign, and transition stages. The discussion reveals discursive shifts that correlate with changing political positions. Legislative communication generates leadership through integrating movement and institutional identities. Campaign talk invokes self-proclaimed authority without disrupting continuity of movement through metaphor. Advanced reframing in stressful circumstances, including removing personal aspects from attacks and engaging directly with affected communities, is evident in responses to such attacks. In this regard, the study contributes to the field of leadership research by demonstrating that the identity of leadership is progressively constructed through sequence of communicative experiences rather than expressed through them. The primary argument is supported: leadership development is not only established in discourse but is actually produced by it.
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INTRODUCTION

The leadership is mutually constructed, negotiated, and sustained through conversation, not just formal power, official duties, or policy moves. The discourse is the key social activity in political relationships, where political leaders acquire identities, proliferate ideologies, mobilize supporters, and confer legitimacy. Not only are public statements, political speeches, and campaign speeches

strategic performances that shape leadership personalities, but they are tools of communication (Fairclough, 2013; Dijk, 1997). Thus, Zohran Mamdani told many of his Brooklyn supporters in June 2025, I have much to learn. It was not a weakness; it was the result of an impressive discursive journey of a community-based housing counsellor to a state legislator, a presidential contender, and even the first elected Muslim American mayor of New York City. What was the language that this new political figure employed in creating some authority during his rise to power? What can we learn better than how political leaders, through speech, are enabled to form their identities on their path? These are the questions that our research will seek to answer. The political discourse studies propose that language is the space in which the social realities are established and power dynamics are sustained.

Political actors can relate to their subjects and fit into broader ideological discourse by deploying linguistic strategies, including, but not limited to, pronouns, modality, assessing rhetoric, metaphor and framing (Chilton, 2014; Charteris-Black, 2018). Discuss how leaders use such discursive tools to manifest themselves as moral authorities, change agents or representatives of group interests. According to this, leadership is a discursively constructed and socially accepted status and not a natural human quality. The gap in knowledge is largely due to the absence of process-oriented, longitudinal, qualitative research examining development of leadership identity on discursively changing stage across multiple political stages within a single actor's career. Often, leadership has been studied as an outcome or an attribute rather than as a process, a language-mediated and slow one. To address shortcomings, this paper understands leadership as an evolving discursive pathway instead of immutable quality. It studies formation, establishment and institutionalization of Zohran Mamdan's leadership persona during his career over language. This study focuses on focal speeches that symbolize the onset moments in his trajectory: his legislative address establishing foundational uniqueness, his attack response proving leadership under pressure, his victory speech marking the move to mayor-elect.

Research Questions
1. What are key elements that define the Mamdani's discourse during each threshold moment?
2. In what ways do these linguistic characteristics change throughout the developmental path & what moments indicate discursive realignment?
3. Which mechanisms account for identified discursive change, and what signs of leadership growth are apparent throughout the journey?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Over the last three decades, there has been a drastic shift in the perception of leadership towards a socially constructed & communicatively enacted phenomenon. Rather than perceiving leadership as an innate trait of individuals, emerging scholarship theorizes it as a manufactured, negotiated, and discursively legitimized construct (Fairhurst, 2007). In discourse studies, the language is not considered a neutral means of communication but rather a social practice that both creates and is created by power relations (Fairclough, 1995). The political rhetoric is vital in shaping ideological meanings and social identities. Dijk (1997) states that political discourse does not exist outside

ideological constructs that arrange representations of us and them and either confirm or disaffirm existing power systems.

According to studies in the political linguistics, a characteristic of language that can be used in the construction of a leader includes pronoun usage, modality, and evaluative language. As Chilton (2004) identifies, the relocation of the political actors into the ideological space is made possible through spatial metaphors, deixis, and modality, which indicate authority. Thus, collectivizing and solidarity-forming pronouns create a sense of the collective identity. In contrast, the question of transitioning to singular first-person pronouns can indicate responsibility and institutional power. In this drive, the topic of the language development of political actors, particularly the transition from grassroots mobilization to institutional power, receives insufficient attention. According to Charteris-Black (2011), metaphors can be persuasive in the leadership discourse because political leaders often discuss political processes in narrative forms of struggle, journey, and transformation. These metaphors are not stylistic figures of speech but cognitive devices used to define what people know and feel.

Recent Studies & Research Gaps

The recent scholarship has developed these bases in the significant ways. The discourse-historical approach developed by Wodak (2015), used to discuss how identities and ideologies are produced through a series of communicative occurrences rather than a single event. According to Fairhurst and Connaughton, leadership is constituted in the communicative sense that it is not present before or outside the communicative practices in which it is used. Research specifically on the discourse of political leadership has examined how political leaders construct authority in times of crisis (Bates, 2020), the role of anti-elite rhetoric by populist leaders (Krämer, 2017), and the use of inclusive pronouns to create coalitional identities (Bull & Fetzer, 2019). Although scarce, studies of rising the political leaders indicate that their speech is developing considerably as they gain the experience (Obeng, 2017). In addition to discursive approaches, leadership development scholarship provides valuable information.

The underlying distinction between the development of the leader (individual capacities) and the development of leadership (collective capacity). Day et al. (2014) conducted a synthesis of research on the leadership development process, highlighting mechanisms such as experiential learning and adaptive challenges. The works of Lord and Hall (2005) provided evidence that identity as a leader is formed through social interaction over time. Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain. Much of the research focuses on discrete texts rather than on discursive trajectories. Orations are considered isolated rhetorical phenomena, limits recognition of how linguistic mechanisms change over time as leadership identity is refined and communicated in contemporary politics. In addition, research focuses on well-known personalities, leaving evolving leaders under-researched. The research fills these gaps by conducting a longitudinal analysis of discourse of an up-and-coming political leader.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) formulated by Fairclough (1995). CDA offers a methodical approach to analyzing the role of discourse in the reproduction/transformation

of the power relations. This work is intended to be analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model: textual analysis (linguistic features), discursive practice (text production and consumption), and social practice (power relations in a broader sense). Leadership is theorized as a discursively constructed process of development. Unlike constant attribute, leadership is perceived as textually produced phenomenon across multiple communicative episodes. This is based on discursive theory of leadership described by Fairhurst (2007), which situates communication as a part of leadership. It examines five linguistic characteristics that reflect the construction of leadership: pronoun usage (inclusive/exclusive we, I, you), modality (epistemic and deontic makers), evaluative language (positive/negative attributions), metaphor (conceptual mappings), and lexical choice (policy and people nomenclature).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts qualitative explanatory case study design to investigate how leadership identity is discursively constructed over time in political trajectory of Zohran Mamdani. The explanatory case study approach is appropriate for examining contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. To capture developmental nature of leadership, study combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with process tracing. While CDA enables close analysis of linguistic features and their relationship to power and ideology, process tracing provides a temporal and causal framework for sympathetic how discursive shifts emerge across sequential communicative events. This integrated design allows study to move beyond static textual analysis and instead trace leadership as an evolving, discourse-mediated process.

Analytical Framework

The study is grounded in critical discourse analysis, specifically drawing on the Fairclough's three-dimensional model:

- ✓ Textual Analysis – The examination of the linguistic features within each speech
- ✓ Discursive Practice – The analysis of production as well as audience orientation
- ✓ Social Practice – interpretation within broader political and institutional contexts
- ✓ To operationalize leadership construction, five linguistic dimensions are analyzed:
- ✓ Pronoun Usage (e.g., I, we, you) → The identity positioning and coalition-building
- ✓ Modality (epistemic and deontic) → expressions of certainty, obligation, and authority
- ✓ Evaluative Language → The moral positioning as well as value construction
- ✓ Metaphor → The cognitive framing of political realities in particular context
- ✓ Lexical Choice → alignment with policy, movement, or institutional discourse
- ✓ These dimensions function as observable indicators of leadership identity construction.

Case Selection

The case of Zohran Mamdani was selected through the purposive sampling based on the following selection criteria:

✓ Emerging leadership status– enabling analysis of identity formation instead of consolidation
✓ Rapid political progression – allowing observation of discursive change across stages
✓ Publicly accessible speeches – ensuring transparency and replicability
✓ Exposure to the political contestation – providing instances of discourse under pressure
✓ This case is particularly well-suited to examining how leadership identity develops through communication rather than being assumed to be a fixed attribute.

Data Selection

The study analyzes three purposively selected speeches, representing a critical threshold moment in Mamdani's political trajectory. These moments are defined as points at which multiple linguistic features shift simultaneously, indicating a qualitative transformation in leadership positioning. The selected speeches are:

1. Legislative Speech (April 2023)
   A floor speech on housing policy represents the foundational stage in which movement and institutional identities are integrated.
2. Debate Response to Identity-Based Attack (April 2025)
   A campaign debate response that represents leadership under pressure, using discursive strategies to manage attacks and maintain the coalition.
3. Victory Speech (June 2025)
   A post-election speech representing the transition to institutional leadership, marked by unification and responsibility.

These speeches were selected for analytical richness, contextual significance and comparability across stages.

Process-Tracing Approach

This study employs theory-building process-tracing approach to identify mechanisms over which leadership identity develops across time. Each speech is treated as a causal node within a temporal sequence. Discursive features are analyzed underlying developmental mechanisms. The analysis seeks to answer:

1. How do linguistic features change across stages?
2. Why do these changes occur in relation to shifting political roles and contexts?

The study identifies four key causal mechanisms:
1. Experiential Learning – accumulation of communicative competence over time
2. Strategic Adaptation – adjustment of discourse in response to opposition and context
3. Coalition Maintenance – use of inclusive language to sustain diverse support bases
4. Role Adaptation – alignment of discourse with evolving institutional responsibilities

The evidence for these mechanisms is established through within-case comparison and pattern matching across the three speeches. The particular attention is given to "threshold moments," where simultaneous shifts across multiple linguistic dimensions provide strong evidence of transformation in the study.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in four stages:

1. Close Reading and Coding
   Each speech was systematically coded according to the five linguistic dimensions (pronouns, modality, evaluation, metaphor, and lexical choice).
2. Within-Speech Analysis
   Linguistic patterns were analyzed in relation to the speech's immediate political and communicative context.
3. Cross-Speech Comparison
   Patterns were compared across the three speeches to identify continuities, shifts, and turning points.
4. Mechanism Identification
   Observed changes were interpreted through lens of process tracing to identify underlying causal mechanisms of leadership development.

Validity & Limitations

To enhance analytical validity, the study employs:

1. Triangulation of linguistic features (multiple indicators of leadership construction)
2. Contextual interpretation (linking discourse to political conditions)
3. Transparent case selection criteria

However, several limitations remain:

1. The study focuses on a single case, limiting generalizability
2. Interpretation is qualitative and researcher-dependent
3. The analysis is restricted to selected speeches, rather than the full discourse corpus

Despite these limitations, study prioritizes analytical depth and theoretical insight over statistical generalization.

DATA ANALYSIS

Overview: Three Speeches in Zohran Mamdani's Political Trajectory

In this section, we analyze in detail 3 speeches by Zohran Mamdani during legislative foundation, primary campaign, campaign launch, and transition stages of political cycle. We break down five linguistic aspects of each speech: lexical choice, evaluative language, pronoun use, modality, and metaphor. We then make sense of knowledge generated by these elements in construction of the leadership. Then we trace trends across trajectory, building on the analysis of individual utterances, to identify the threshold points at which significant discursive transformations occur. The study is based on a previously prepared theoretical framework: leadership is discursively constructed through specific linguistic options that situate the speaker in relations to audiences, opponents, and institutional contexts. Each speech is analyzed as a single communication instance and as part of an ever-increasing discursive portfolio that demonstratively defines Mamdani as leader. Six speeches analyzed included:

Speech 1: Legislative Phase – Assembly Floor Speech on Good Cause Eviction (April 2023)

Context: As of April 2023, Mamdani had been in the New York State Assembly for two years, representing Astoria, Queens. The Good Cause Eviction law was of greater interest to tenant groups since it sought to control rent increases and provided tenants with rights against eviction. Besides being bill's main sponsor, Mamdani was a former housing counsellor who had helped save renters at risk of eviction. This duality of being a movement champion and an institutional insider affected use of language means in speech. The audience consisted of members of the Assembly, some of them being in favour, some of them doubtful, and some of them were against. Thus, speech was intended to persuade both colleagues and tenant activists who were monitoring proceedings and individuals in his district.

Pronoun Usage: A breakdown of pronouns in Speech 1 demonstrates four roles that Mamdani interrelates well. Last is what I call the legislative we as we can actually find his saying: We have two years working on this bill. We have received testimonies from tenants across the state. Through this, he becomes a legislative insider and claims that he and his cosponsors share the control of the measure. The second is the movement evidenced by statements like, "We in tenant movement know what's at stake." For decades, we struggled to fight over this. Through this, he maintains his activist history and demonstrates to movement people that he is real. Experiential pronouns, i.e., the third type, are represented by statement "he made," which he remembers from first eviction case he ever worked on. I remember face of my mother. I see repercussions when families become homeless. This individualizes subject, a quality that cannot be created over institutional arguments & relies on pre-legislative legitimacy.

Fourth, the singular first person plural, a few times but efficiently used, is the word we: "In Astoria, we have seen rents go up more than 30 per cent, and wages remain the same. This keeps the district in touch and builds broader arguments based on local knowledge. What is impressive is the flawless consistency in Mamdani's various uses of "we". We can take the form of movement without stating the transition, where, in one paragraph, he/she switches between legislative "we" and movement "we". Such mobility demonstrates that identities by Mamdani were not mutually exclusive, but can be combined– he could be both lawmaker and activist. At this time, we do not have an institutional mechanism to designate the Assembly or the government as a collective actor. When Mamdani speaks of "we," he does not mean the institution itself but rather the bill's sponsors and proponents. This small move puts him among those who want change rather than those who ask the power structure to change.

Modality: In Speech 1, a different modal pattern distinguishes legislative language from that used later in campaigns. Epistemic certainty is applied liberally in a very positive way: "We have heard rent control works, as we have observed it work in other cities. We are assured that this bill will protect tenants, as similar laws are in place in other countries. This claims to be based on facts and experience, not institutional position. A more moderate voice comes out here and there: I think this is the best working form of this bill we have ever had. This conveys self-faith without overstatement. The deontic obligation is most crucial external modality. Mamdani repeatedly tells us, "The state

must act." legislators should stop protecting landlords at the expense of renters. Albany has no way to continue neglecting working families. This makes responsibility vested in state, the legislature and Albany – all of which he is technically a member of. However, he is talking to them as foreign speaker. This stance helps him maintain his support character when operating within institutional structures. He desires action but does not promise to give it, which is too early for new representative of minority oil party.

Evaluative Language: The evaluation provided in speech 1 draws specific moral lines. Tenants are described as being vulnerable, deserving, working families, struggling New Yorkers and those who need protection. Landlords, on other hand, are described as corporate landlords, powerful interests, and as the reason we require such a law. The existing policies are inhumane, unfair, and failed, and they belong to a broken system. The policies suggested are strong, proven, necessary, and the right thing to do. It positions its opponents as supporters of the status quo and as people on the landlord's side. This evaluative pattern indicates movement discourse, with unmistakable victims, villains, and cures highlighted. Moral clarity can be applied in several ways. It mobilizes supporters sharing its values. When they are put on the run, opponents are forced onto the defensive, compelling them to justify the unfair status quo. It further supports Mamdani as righteous, one of the main principles of leadership claims.

Metaphor: Recurrent metaphors have been used in Speech 1. The law is put forth as safeguarding protection: "This bill is protection against unfair eviction of tenants. It provides them with the assurance that they lack at time. This presents law as protection and defence, placing the tenants in a state of need. Housing is defined as a foundation: without stable housing, there can be no schools, no occupation, no health. Housing is the platform on which things are built. This qualifies housing as a basic commodity and creates urgency on the issue. The metaphors of natural disasters are used to describe emergency: The flood of evictions coming our way. The queue of families being thrown out of their houses. This builds sense of urgency & implies that action should be taken immediately. Advancement is considered a process: "Years we have been striving to this stage. We are making progress. They want to decrease us, but we do not stop. This makes movement legislative success a success of the movement and associates it with long struggle. The housing–as–foundation metaphor is particularly resonant because it connects a specific policy issue to broader issues of education, health, and community stability. It contextualizes housing not as a specific issue but as a shared asset can affect everyone.

Lexical Choice: There is an upward trend in the lexical choice throughout the speech. Legislative jargon is prevalent, with references to the floor debate, committee process, cosponsors, votes, the amendments and statutes. In this connection, policy lingo is evidence of knowledge: cause, loophole, statute of the limitations, burden of proof as well as rent stabilization. It is authentic in movement terminology: "tenant movement," housing justice, working families, community and organizing. Abstract arguments are based on experience: I remember, I have seen, I sat with, and I watched. The mixture of registers is significant. Mamdani demonstrates knowledge of lawmaking in specialized terms while maintaining the realism of his activism by incorporating the language of mobilization.

Consequently, the experience-based vocabulary ties the abstract policy discourses to the concrete human experiences.

Interpretation: Leadership in Speech-1

Speech-1 combines several identities and forms of the leadership. The speaker is simultaneously a representative of the district, a member of the movement, a legislative actor and an eyewitness. This fusion is crucial since, by incorporating Mamdani into the legislature, he does not lose his movement identity as his legislative powers merge with his movement powers. The "I" is a testament to human consequences, provides individual experience to policy debate. This kind of authority contrasts with institutional positions, as it grounds the voice in rightness over firsthand experience, witnessing the pain, working with affected groups. The external deontic mode casts Mamdani as an advocate rather than an institutional player. Instead of undertaking to do it himself, he invites the state to intervene. This is appropriate, considering his position as a newcomer to the minority who can never claim undue control over outcomes. However, assured epistemic style is competent and informed. At this phase, internal institutional pushing is form of leadership; it preserves movement's ideals & build legislative proficiency. Future stages, during as Mamdani will need to exercise administrative authority while sustaining legitimacy established in the speeches such as this, will rely more on groundwork laid here.

Speech 2: Primary Campaign – Debate Response to Islamophobic Attack (April 20, 2025)

Context: In April 2025, an Islamophobic stereotype was applied in the primary debate question, suggesting that Mamdani was not eligible to be mayor because of his faith. The conclusion was clear to all of them: The very state of being Muslim by Mamdani was disqualified, as even though media accounts varied on the exact wording of the qualification. This was an unharassing attack on his very being, his record and his policies. To understand the speech, its context is important. Mamdani had few seconds to respond during live talk watched by thousands. The answer would be reiterated in social media and mainstream coverage. His reaction to this moment may determine the rest of the campaign.

Pronoun Usage: Speech 2 portrays high level of pronoun adaptation under a stressful environment. Mamdani uses a calming "I" in the actual confrontation of the attack: "I am not going to be diverted by the bad-me slanders that are being thrown at us." I am aware of my identity. I know what I am fighting against. This is example of leadership under stress and of denying defensiveness. He shifts to a collective "we" and "us" by altering the story: These attacks are not directed against me; they are aimed at quarrelling with us. They are meant to make us fear them. Their preoccupation is diverting our attention from the vital issues. This shifts personal criticism into a group problem and puts the speaker on the defensive. The most evident element is the direct appeal to specific groups through the use of "you". Mamdani says, To New Yorkers of the Muslim world, as you will be listening to me tonight, I know you.

We created this initiative because of you. To the people of Jewish New York: my commitment to your safety is insatiable. To everyone who has ever been told they are not part of this: this is your

campaign too. This implements coal maintenance via diversity, creates resistance by deliberately using "they": "They are making us live in fear." They would have us rise against each other. They want us to neglect the very thing that is at stake. That gratification will we deny them. This puts the opposition in a contrasting light and unites individuals around a common threat. There is special significance in addressing Muslim and Jewish New Yorkers simultaneously. Mamdani could have only spent time targeting Muslim audiences, and this would have been understandable, but it would have been perceived as defensive. He upholds coalitions across differences; thus, by making the Jewish New Yorkers part of himself, he shows that his leadership has benefited more than his own communities.

Modality: In Speech 2, the modality has opposition and confirmation. There is resistant deontic, and this is loud and clear: They expect us to retreat. They require us to apologize for being who we are. They aim to instill fear in us. We will not do that. We will not be quieted. "We will not be frightened." This builds power, refuses to give up, and creates common will. Positive epistemic enforces identity: I know who I am. I know the fight I am engaged in. In my opinion, the people in New York are better than that. I know we will not grow apart. Common commitment drives power forward: "We shall carry on. We will continue to organize. We are going to keep shaping the alliance that will win this election. Deontic systems based on values ~ react as moral obligation: "We must overcome those who aspire to divide us unity is more important than fear. The strongest feature is the recalcitrant deontic. Mamdani does not engage in their terms, thus opting not to respond to the attack. He does not explain why assault is wrong or discuss his ideals; he merely rejects thought that this is a subject worth discussing.

Evaluative Language: In Speech 2 assessment, corrections within reactions are made accurately. The attack is the slander, diversion, divisive plan, panic-making and desperate. The attacker is desperate, is willing to separate us to gain political goodwill, and is running on fear. Muslim New Yorkers are a constituent of this city; they belong here, they are known, they are valued, they are important. Jewish New Yorkers are an essential ally, deserve unwavering commitment, and are part of our coalition. In this connection, all marginalized groups are mentioned: "those who have always been taught to sit, to be quiet, to realize your place~ this campaign is aimed at you. The New Yorkers are generally superior to this, not to be fooled, perceiving by division, and wanting unity, not fear. The term "desperate" is a strategy in labelling the attack. It means that the aggressor is vengeful because he lost an unestablished claim of development and viability. The evaluation of the New Yorkers as superior to these appeals to the audience and links them to a sense of the high moral standing.

Metaphor: Lexical Choice: The speech's 2 lexical choices characterize the nature of the identity attack. Commonly used words related to identity include the Muslim New Yorkers, Jewish New Yorkers, faith, belong, who I am, and who we are. The words, which form foundation of a coalition, are together, united, coalition, all of us, each other, and common ground. The words resilience used to demonstrate strength include not distracted, not backing down, still here, still fighting, and stronger. Minority preserves the moral base: dignity, respect, unity, justice, and belonging. The danger is recognized by hollowing out the vocabulary: smears, division, fear, desperation, attack,

distraction. Identity is a carefully chosen word. The grammatical structure of the words Muslim New Yorkers and Jewish New Yorkers "is the same, which implies equal status and care. The word "belong" is very powerful, as it presents a strongly as well as assertive presence that the onslaught clandestinely negated.

Interpretation: Leadership in Speech 2

Speech 2 is perfect example of how to deal with attacks. Mamdani chooses not to rely on a defensive explanation or a counter-offensive but instead employs a sophisticated reframing strategy that incorporates multiple aspects. Depersonalization turns the assault on the self into a collective concern: We are not talking about attacks on me, but about attacks on dividing us. This removes the speaker's defensive position. Direct outreach to affected communities fosters inclusion. It maintains coalitions: stating that you are a Muslim New Yorker (I recognize you) and a Jewish New Yorker (my dedication to your safety) at same time. Restaging an assault as confirmation transforms danger into confirmation: The more they hit; more you know we are winning. The contrast of values brings moral clarity; the division is their weapon. "Our strength lies in unity." At this phase, leadership is strong and coalition-building-oriented; that is, it establishes the capacity to resist criticism and to strengthen, rather than destroy, coalition ties. This speech describes the response to an identity-based attack: identify, do not defend, connect with common experiences, strengthen commitment to every community.

Speech 3: Transition – Victory Speech (June 25, 2025)

Context: Mamdani surprisingly carried the day in Democratic primaries. This speech, delivered to supporters on election night, is his first public address as an elected mayor and marks the transition from candidate to potential executive. The audience will be broader electorate at home, including those who voted against opponents, and campaign-happy supporters who labored on campaign. The victory speech has to balance several requests, such as celebrating the victory with the base, reaching out to those who did not support him in the campaign, demonstrating the right level of humility, and showing that government is ready to initiate a process of reconciliation between the party and the city.

Pronoun Usage: Speech 3 is adept at using pronouns. Successful action, we know the basis: we have done this. We designed something that has never been experienced. We showed that there is another New York that can be realized. Accountable transitional "I" means admission to the new status: I know my responsibility. You have placed a duty on me that I know you have assigned. I know what this moment takes. "I won't disappoint you." This united city of us is spread to all New Yorkers: All of us New Yorkers. This city is beloved by us all. Its success is hoped for by everyone. Appropriate emotion is exuded in grateful I: I am grateful- thankful to my family, thankful to my team, thankful to all the volunteers who visited homes, thankful to all the voters who believed in this campaign. Humble I: Minimal personal recognition of the problems encountered: I understand that there is still much to learn. I understand that I will err. I vow to study, to listen, and to be better every day. The balance between the movement we and the unifying we is quite complex. Mamdani celebrates with his supporters while explicitly recognizing those who voted otherwise. This is the

beginning of the transition from candidate to mayor-elect, and the latter must now represent all people in governance.

Modality: In the Speech 3, Modality is an aspect of humility appropriate to the transition. The experience inquiry is directly addressed by humble epistemic: I know that there is more I need to know. I know that I still have to learn so much. Rather than taking it defensively, Mamdani is advised to exercise the right kind of humility as he works to ensure that development is achieved. Particular moral promises vow to act later: I shall do my best to win your confidence each day. I will become a mayor to all. I will speak on behalf of every community. Shared responsibility invites participation: "Together, we should stand up to this occasion. We must show that our movement can rule. The feeling of thankful modality: I am so thankful. I feel incredibly honored. I am fully ready to begin working. The most significant attribute is the modest epistemic. In this linking, it also addresses the problem of experience, a weakness in the campaign, not by claiming knowledge but by acknowledging the need to educate oneself. Therefore, this is possible only because previous talks demonstrated the sufficient competence to make humility an appropriate attribute rather than a disqualifier.

Evaluative Language: Assessment in Speech 3 cuts across the voters. Our believers in what is possible are known as supporters, and they are the heart of this movement and the reason we are here. The opponents are treated with respect: "sought vigorous campaigns," "love this city and care deeply about it," and will become invaluable allies. It is a historic, humbling, full-of-possibility, and demanding moment. The work to be done is hard, urgent, the work of generations, the work we were made to do. The city of New York is the greatest in the world, our home and worth fighting over. This analysis of opponents as being vital partners is essential in party unity. Mamdani indicates to them that he would require their support and collaboration, rather than fighting them as adversaries to be humiliated.

Metaphor: Governing metaphors are presented in Speech 3. Triumph is the new beginning: "This is not the end--it is only the beginning. "Now the actual work begins. This creates an expectation and reinvents elections as a process and not an objective. Being a leader means trust: "I have been trusted with you, and I will honour that trust every day. This forms relationships with constituents. The city symbolizes a family: we are community, one family. Now this very evening it comes down to the sea--but water keeps on. This brings about uniformity more than winning an election does. Governance has its service part: I am not here to be served. This makes the service-status position. The comparison between victory as a starting point is very important. It prevents supporters from seeing election night as the highlands and prepares them for more challenging duties of governance. The metaphor likening movement to a river suggests that winning an election does not end movement but rather changes its shape.

Lexical Choice: Lexical choice in Speech 3 reflects transition to governance. Gratitude vocabulary appears frequently: "grateful," "thank you," "honored," and "humbled." Unity vocabulary expands to include: "all of us," "every New Yorker," "together," "one city." The responsibility vocabulary signals seriousness: "responsibility," "trust," "weight," "promise." The work vocabulary prepares for governing:

"work," "fight," "build," "serve," "deliver." Learning vocabulary addresses experience: "learn," "listen," "grow," "mistakes."

Interpretation: Leadership in Speech 3
The major transformation of the candidate into the mayor-elect occurs in Speech 3. The humble epistemic confronts the experience question, which provided a marketing weakness. Mamdani is humble enough and dedicated to making things better, rather than defensive over-claiming. In this connection, the harmonious pronoun work shifts the institutional burden onto the responsible I, the unifying we onto collectives of all New Yorkers, and movement we onto the base. Scope of victory is initiating overseas expectations and alignment with collective values. During this time, mayors-elect in formation are charged with leadership and continue to maintain their core identity with new institutional roles.

Cross-Speech Analysis: Three Threshold Moments
- ✓ Pronoun usage evolves from legislative "we" and experiential "I" in the foundational speech to the community-specific "you" and collective "we" in attack response, to balanced, unifying, and responsible pronouns in the victory speech. The "I" function shifts from witness to resilient to responsible servant.
- ✓ Modality transforms from external obligation ("the state must act") in foundational speech to resistant affirmation ("we will not") in attack response to humble commitment ("I have much to learn"/"I will work") in the victory speech.
- ✓ Epistemic modality shifts from experiential certainty in foundational speech to affirmative identity claims under pressure in the attack response to humble learning in transition in the victory speech.
- ✓ Evaluative language expands from landlords and the status quo in the foundational speech to attackers and affected communities in attack response to all New Yorkers and complexity in the victory speech.
- ✓ Metaphor evolves from shield and foundation in foundational speech to attack as test and evidence in the attack response to victory as beginning in the victory speech.
- ✓ The three threshold moments—foundational identity, resilience under pressure, as well as institutional integration—mark qualitative transformation in leadership positioning rather than gradual evolution.

FINDINGS OF STUDY
The discussion of three speeches during Zohran Mamdani's political career revealed that language characteristics associated with shifts in political positions were intertwined with contextual factors. In the speech 1, when addressing the legislative stage of the Good Cause Eviction bill, Mamdani developed leadership by combining movement and legislative individuality. The use of pronouns balanced legislative we (joint-venturing legislative endeavor), movement we (activist unity), and experience I (individual experience). Modality placed pressure on the state and Albany from outside, and it laid an epistemic claim to experience rather than to institutional power. Evaluative language established noteworthy moral distinctions that cast the tenants as deserving victims, the landlords as greedy villains, and proposed policies as the solution. The legislation was portrayed

metaphorically as a defence, the house as the foundation, and progress as a forward step. Lexical choice increased policy fluency while maintaining movement terms. The theme of leadership in this address was the in-organizational support that embraced the movement principles and nurtured legislative understanding.

The second important moment was the speech 2 that discussed an Islamophobic attack and showed a high level of reframing in a tense situation. The use of pronouns attuned to accuracy: unyielding PR will be avoided, weapons turned into bullets, community PR will solidify personal attack into a collective concern, and, above all, face-to-face involvement with given groups using the word you helped maintain coalition during diversity. Modality presented defiant, we shall not, and positive, I know who I am. Evaluation language redefined the attack as a "desperate" and divisive one and supported affected communities as members of group for analyzing leadership development over lens of political discourse. Transformative metaphors portrayed the attack as scrutiny, an indication of efficacy, and means of division against cohesion. This speech portrayed leadership as strong and alliance-oriented, expressed over capacity to withstand hardships whilst strengthening coalition bonds. Third critical moment was speech 3, victory speech, which marked transition from candidate to mayor-elect.

Mastery of the use of pronouns contributed effectively to the achievement of a winning motion: "we," acknowledging the foundation; a transitional, responsible "I," accepting the institutional burden; a unifying "we," extending to all New Yorkers; and a humble "I," addressing problems of experience. Modality posed small epistemic ("I have a lot to learn") and committed deontic (I will strive daily). Evaluative language was related to electorate, respect for opponents & presentation of future tasks as urgent & defining. New metaphors described triumph as beginning, leadership as trustworthiness, the city as a place and sovereignty as responsibility. This speech demonstrated leadership qualities as mayor-elect in development, maintaining the necessary identity whilst adapting to changes in institutional errands. Three significant moments emerged out of path: Speech 1 (campaign launch), Speech 2 (response to attack), and Speech 3 (winning address). In both examples, different linguistic features shifted simultaneously, indicating a qualitative shift in leadership positioning rather than a gradual evolution.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the leadership identity is not a pre-existing attribute revealed through political speech but a dynamic construct progressively produced over discourse across shifting institutional and political contexts. Through a progressive analysis of three pivotal speeches, it becomes evident that Zohran Mamdani's leadership emerges through patterned yet adaptive linguistic strategies that align with evolving role expectations, audience demands, and moments of contestation. The integration of movement and institutional identities in the legislative phase establishes an initial foundation of legitimacy, which is subsequently expanded through assertive yet continuity-preserving discourse in the campaign stage. In this connection, under the political attack, leadership is further consolidated through strategic reframing, in which personal threats are transformed into collective concerns, thereby reinforcing coalition integrity as well as moral authority.

The transition to mayor-elect marks critical reorientation toward broad governance, characterized by humility, shared responsibility, and institutional accountability. The identification of threshold moments, viz., campaign articulation, crisis response, and victory transition, confirms that discursive transformation occurs in multiple linguistic dimensions. Moreover, the process-tracing approach reveals that underlying the mechanisms, including the experiential learning, strategic adaptation, coalition maintenance, and role alignment, drive these shifts. By foregrounding the temporal and processual nature of discourse, this study advances leadership scholarship beyond static and trait-based models, offering an understanding that how leaders are communicatively constituted over time in diverse context. Ultimately, the findings substantiate the central claim that discourse does not merely reflect leadership development but actively enacts and produces it, positioning language as the primary site through which political authority, legitimacy, as well as identity are constructed and sustained.

Implications

This study has significant implications for theory, methodology and practice. The current study provides empirical support for the assumption that leadership is a discourse-shaped process rather than a trait. Mamdani's ride serves as an example of how leadership identity is built step by step through the communicative events, and every word spoken contributes to the growing discursive portfolio. In this linking, the concept of discursive trajectory shows how leaders preserve important elements of identity while adapting to new requirements of institutional life, meaning that identity integration, rather than substitution, characterizes the development of a leadership career in the diverse contexts. This paper demonstrates the significance of longitudinal techniques in study of political discourse.

The time-series analysis of the sequence of speeches reveals developmental patterns that are not apparent in the study of text alone. The identification of specific linguistic features as indicators of growth, the adaptation of pronouns, modality shifts, reshaping capacity, and identity integration can provide methodological tools for future studies to track changes in political discourse across careers. Ideally, the findings offer guidance to new political leaders. The foundation of identity, based on direct experience and policy work, creates the credibility on which subsequent campaign claims rely. Switching roles requires mastering art of communicating that the transition to change is continuity. Thus, the strategies for responding to attacks should eliminate their personal aspects, work directly with affected populations, and shift the focus from the vulnerable status to evidence of effectiveness.

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