



Building Collective Identity: A Study of the Narrative of Housing Justice in Zohran Mamdani's Digital Campaign

Sheila Merista

Universitas Paramadina

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.53697/iso.v6i1.3472>

*Correspondence: Sheila Merista

Email:

sheila.merista1@students.paramadina.ac.id

Received: 22-04-2026

Accepted: 22-05-2026

Published: 22-06-2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract: This article analyzes how Zohran Mamdani's digital campaign on @ZohranforNYC YouTube channel builds a politicized collective identity among the working class and renters in New York City through narratives of housing crisis and economic justice. This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis of several campaign videos that were purposively selected because they are considered the most powerful and representative in displaying the issues of high rents, structural inequality, and working-class solidarity. The theoretical framework of Politicized Collective Identity (PCI) from Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans is used to read how these contents construct three main processes of identity politicization, namely: (1) collective awareness of injustice through the exploration of the experience of the housing crisis as a collective grievance; (2) attribution to the opposite party by positioning the political elite, corporate landlords, and housing policy structures as a source of suffering; and (3) community involvement (triangulation) through visual volunteer mobilization, door-to-door action, and cross-community support that makes housing issues a public interest throughout the city. The study aims to explain how digital political communication can transform scattered everyday complaints into a coherent collective narrative that encourages solidarity and political action. The findings show that the combination of personal narratives, visual symbols of the working class, and inclusive emotional language makes Zohran's YouTube channel not only an electoral campaign space, but also an arena for the formation of collective identities that drive political participation and structural change. The article concludes that politicized collective identity, when articulated through digital media, can become an effective strategy to strengthen the voice of marginalized groups and to reframe local housing crises as moral and political issues that must be addressed collectively.

Keywords: Digital Campaign, Housing Justice, Politicized Collective Identity

Introduction

The cost-of-living crisis, particularly the housing crisis in New York City (NYC) over the past few years, has given rise to various political movements highlighting the growing inequality between the working class and the capitalist elite (CNNIndonesia.com, 2025). Reports from the Housing and Vacancy Survey (HVS) indicate that in 2023, 43.1% of renters particularly those who do not receive rental assistance or live in public housing were classified as rent-burdened, meaning they spent more than 30% of their income on contract rent. This figure includes 18.1% who were moderately rent-burdened, paying more than 30% but no more than 50% of their income, and 25.0% who were severely rent-burdened, paying more than 50% of their income (Board, 2024).

These figures exceed the affordability benchmark set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which defines housing as affordable when households spend no more than 30% of their income on gross rent (rent including utilities) (IDN Times, 2025). Moreover, previous research suggests that for the lowest-income households, the affordability threshold should be set below 30% to avoid financial hardship, given the substantial share of income required to meet other basic needs (Herbert et al., 2018). In line with these trends, housing costs have continued to rise over the past decade, leading 25% of respondents in a recent Quinnipiac University survey to identify affordable housing as the most urgent issue facing the city, on par with crime (Comptroller, 2024).

Within this context, Zohran Mamdani, one of the candidates for Mayor of NYC, foregrounds the housing crisis as a way to frame housing not merely as a technical economic issue but as a matter of social justice (Indoprogress, 2025). Through his policy document *Housing by and For New York*, Mamdani asserts that housing should be treated as a fundamental right and that the city's housing system must prioritize tenants rather than speculators (NYC, 2025). Similarly, *The Cost of Living in New York City: Housing* (2024), in its article *How Mamdani Plans to Fix New York City's Housing Crisis*, emphasizes that Mamdani positions the city as a space that must remain affordable for "the people who build it every day," with a strong focus on justice for the working class. Newspaper (2025), in *Five Ways to Make Zohran Mamdani's Housing Plan Even Better*, further portrays Mamdani's housing justice agenda as explicitly working-class oriented, including proposals to build 200,000 units of affordable housing and implement a rent freeze policy.

Zohran Mamdani strategically utilizes digital platforms, particularly YouTube through the @ZohranforNYC channel, to construct his image as a representative of the working class while simultaneously voicing demands for housing justice on behalf of the majority of city residents who are renters. Times (2025) describes the "Freeze the Rent" campaign as a systematic effort to transform long-suffering tenants into an organized voting bloc capable of shifting the balance of power toward candidates who explicitly support housing justice agendas, such as Mamdani. This digital campaign not only presents policy proposals but also articulates the everyday experiences of tenants, migrant workers, and vulnerable groups as a unified collective narrative of structural injustice embedded in the city's housing policies and political economy (Setiawan et al., 2022; Trepte, 2006). Mamdani's early electoral success has relied heavily on the strength of tenant movements, including door-to-door organizing and the consolidation of renter voting blocs, positioning him as a political representative of the tenant movement in New York City (Shelterforce, 2025).

In the context of modern political communication, social media functions as a crucial space for public opinion formation, support mobilization, and the construction of political identity. Hermawan (2025) argues that digital platforms enable two-way communication between candidates and voters by providing spaces for feedback and active participation in political discourse. The video content consistently uploaded by Zohran demonstrates how political messages can be packaged through visuals, personal storytelling, and emotional appeal closely aligned with voters' everyday experiences, thereby fostering psychological proximity while expanding the campaign's reach. This strategy is particularly significant because it not only addresses substantive issues such as high rental costs and the threat of

homelessness, but also transforms individual grievances into a shared problem that demands collective responses and policy change.

Based on this background, this article aims to analyze how YouTube content on the @ZohranforNYC channel constructs and mobilizes a politicized collective identity among the working class and renters in NYC through narratives of housing justice. The theoretical framework employed is Politicized Collective Identity (PCI), developed by Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans, which explains how social group identities can be transformed into political forces through awareness of shared injustice, attribution of responsibility to opponents, and engagement with broader communities. With this focus, the article seeks to contribute to studies in psychology and political persuasion, particularly regarding the use of digital campaigns to build identity-based collective movements.

Methodology

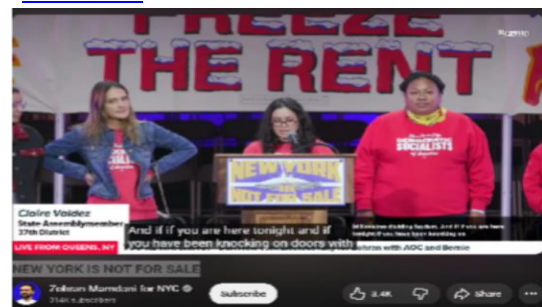
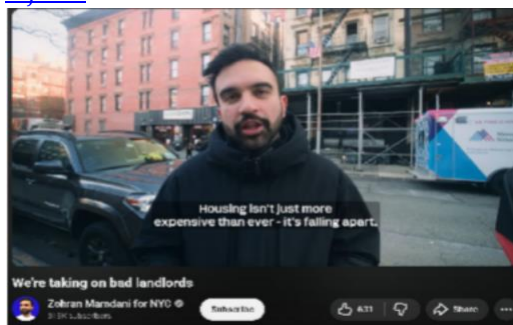
This study uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis method on Zohran Mamdani's political campaign videos on the @ZohranforNYC YouTube channel. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine in depth the narratives, visuals, and emotions constructed in video content, as well as how these elements contribute to the formation of a politicized collective identity among the working class and renters in New York City.

The main data in this study are eight campaign videos uploaded on @ZohranforNYC channels during the campaign period, namely:

1. Zohran for NYC (Oct 23, 2024) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzNEFwLz6C4>
2. Zohran Mamdani is Running to Freeze the Rent (5 Nov 2024) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09rK>



3. We're Taking on Bad Landlords (22 Feb 2025) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIrI9ZGjoKc>
4. NEW YORK is not for SALE (27 Oct 2025) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8mTD45BhL4>



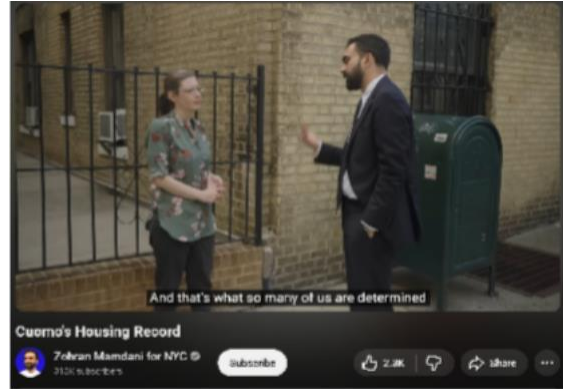
5. The Home Strech Starts Now (19 Sep 2025)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_Qm A34GFMU



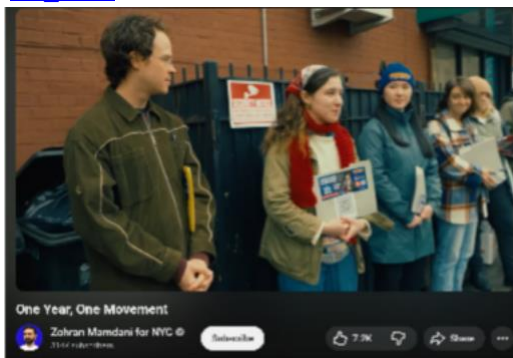
6. Cuomo’s Housing Record (9 Okt 2025)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYMc XAC kFU>



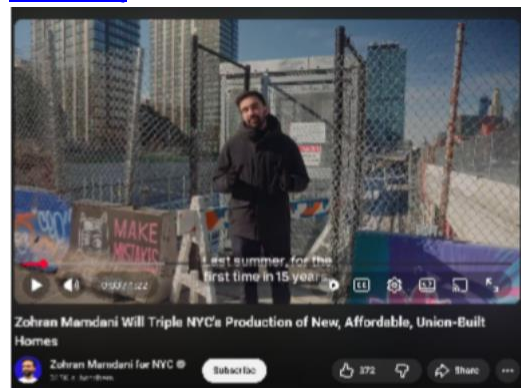
7. One year, One Movement (14 Okt 2025)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWubI Xe_1Fw



8. Zohran Mandani Will Triple NYC’S Production of New, Affordable, Union- Built Homes (4 Feb 2025)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=net2D 0G7M1Q>



The selection of the video was purposive with criteria, namely explicitly raising issues of housing justice, housing crisis, or economic inequality; showcasing the involvement of the community, working class, or tenants; and strongly representing Zohran's political communication strategy in building a collective movement.

The data collection process is carried out by watching each video repeatedly, transcribing relevant important parts, and noting visual, narrative, and symbolic elements related to the themes of housing justice and collective identity. Furthermore, the researcher conducted thematic coding using the main categories of the Politicized Collective Identity theory, namely (1) collective awareness of shared grievances, (2) adversarial attribution, and (3) community involvement or triangulation. Each scene, quotation, or visual element is classified into these categories to see the recurring patterns and ways in which Zohran constructs the relationship between "us" (the working class/tenants) versus "them" (political elites, corporate landlords, and unfair policy structures).

Data analysis was carried out interpretively by relating the findings of the coding process with the key concepts of PCI theory and the digital political communication literature. This step includes a description of the form of narrative and representation in the video, an interpretation of how the narrative shapes a politicized collective identity, and an explanation of its implications for the understanding of collective identity-based digital campaigns in the context of the politics of a big city like New York.

Result and Discussion

The housing crisis in New York City emerged as a structural problem that stemmed from low affordability and high rent burdens, measured by HUD's 30 percent revenue standard that housing is considered affordable if household spending does not exceed that figure (Herbert et al., 2018). Households that pay more than 30 percent of income are classified as rent burdened and those who exceed 50 percent are categorized as severe rent burdened. HVS 2023 data in the 2024 Income and Affordability Study shows that 43.1 percent of tenants who do not receive rental assistance are rent-burdened, consisting of

18.1 percent moderate and 25 percent severe, with a higher figure for tenants with incomes below 50 percent of the Median Income Area. The situation has gotten worse since the Covid-19 pandemic as housing costs in the NYC metropolitan area continue to rise and rents rose by 5.8 percent as of November 2023, double the number before the pandemic (Comptroller, 2024). The NYU Furman Center report confirms that tenant incomes are not in line with the increase in median gross rent since 2007, accompanied by deteriorating physical quality of buildings in 2023–2024. These indicators show the accumulation of forms of housing crisis in NYC.

The development of digital media encourages the presence of mediatized politics, which is a condition when politics increasingly follows the logic of media that works based on professional, commercial, and technological principles, so that political actors need to adjust their communication style to the visual format, rhythm, and interaction that the public likes (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Campaigns on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are a consequence of this change. A study of the 2024 election in Indonesia shows that social media and campaign technology are shaping a more adaptive and interactive political branding (Kamil & Sundari, 2024). Other findings explain that social media helps candidates build self-image, create spaces for younger generations to interact, and strengthen personal branding that effectively attracts Gen Z support (Mani et al., 2025). Zohran's strategy through the YouTube channel @ZohranforNYC with short videos, intense uploads, and canvassing invitations reflects his adaptation to the logic of digital media. Mediatized politics also encourages the use of personalization and emotionalization in campaign content. Research shows that personalization and emotionalization strengthen a candidate's closeness to the public and increase political mobilization (Geise et al., 2024). Zohran uses working-class visuals, emotional language about dignity and "the right to home," and the representation of volunteers as "us" to frame the housing crisis as a moral issue and collective identity. Through an easy-to-share video format, his campaign leverages the logic of digital media to increase political participation and build a collective movement around housing justice.

Social Identity Theory explains that social identity is formed when individuals realize themselves as part of a certain group, which is formed through the process of social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Individuals internalize group membership, compare their own groups to other groups, and maintain positive distinctiveness. Group identity can be a source of self-esteem and action orientation, including in political communication. Politicians often position themselves as part of an in-group audience to build symbolic and emotional closeness. Identity as a tenant, working class, or certain community becomes the meeting point between the candidate and the public. In Zohran's campaign, the emphasis on working-class backgrounds and immigrant communities served to activate a social identity that was relevant to voters.

Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans' concept of Politicized Collective Identity provides a framework for how group identity transforms into a political force that drives collective action. Collective identity arises from the awareness of group membership, then confronts power inequality in the broader social arena, and always takes place in a social context involving third parties. Such identities become politicized when groups realize that the injustices they experience are collective and linked to a larger power structure. The process develops through shared awareness of injustice, attribution to perceived sources of problems, and efforts to attract public support through triangulation. When groups see that their suffering is not a personal problem, but part of systemic injustice, solidarity strengthens and collective action emerges. Shared anger, attribution to external parties, and efforts to seek legitimacy from the public accelerate the politicization of identity. Politicized collective identities can be an emancipatory force, but they also have the potential to cause polarization if not managed wisely.

In the context of Zohran's campaign, this theory is seen when the experiences of tenants and the working class are framed as shared suffering that has structural roots. His YouTube content weaves a collective narrative that "we" face the same injustices and that "they" are the actors who cause the predicament. Through visuals, stories, and emotions, Zohran forms a collective consciousness, clears the boundaries between the disadvantaged and the powerful, and invites the public to join the struggle. Her campaign transforms individual experiences into collective identities that encourage solidarity and position the housing crisis as a public issue that requires shared engagement

Discussion

This section discusses how Zohran Mamdani's YouTube content on selected @ZohranforNYC accounts can shape and drive the politicized collective identity among the working class and renters in NYC. Using the concepts that exist in the Politicized Collective Identity, the analysis was conducted to see how the visuals, stories, and emotions in the campaign build a shared awareness of injustice, show who is considered to be the cause of society's difficulties, and invite the public to determine their position. This approach helps to show how Zohran's political communication not only conveys the issue of the housing crisis, but also builds solidarity and collective energy that strengthens groups that have been neglected.

Collective Awareness of Shared Grievances

The first stage in the process of forming a politicized collective identity is the emergence of a shared awareness of an important issue in society. In his campaign, Zohran Mamdani highlighted the basic needs of citizens, ranging from housing, the cost of living, to access to transportation, and invited everyone to realize that these issues belong to the community. His YouTube contents play a pivotal role in bringing together the scattered experiences of NYC's tenants, migrant workers, and working class into a collective story of housing injustice.

In Zohran's first content titled "Zohran for NYC", Zohran opens his video with an irony of people's assumption that NYC is known as the best city in the world, but at the same time NYC is too expensive to be a residential city. The contrast between the glamorous image of the city and the harsh reality experienced by its citizens is an entry point to build awareness that the housing crisis and the cost of living are not individual problems, but a shared experience experienced by millions of people. In the content, Zohran also emphasized that the housing issue violates the values of justice and dignity. He used words such as "dignity" and "home as a right," signifying that for Zohran, having a decent place to live is everyone's right and part of maintaining common dignity in society through another campaign video titled "Zohran Mamdani is Running to Freeze the Rent," he raised the issue of housing by affirming the promise of a rent freeze for millions of tenants. This message frames together that many people are squeezed by one common problem, so that individual experiences have become collective experiences.

On several occasions, Zohran compared the misery of workers/tenants to the extraordinary profits enjoyed by property owners/real estate corporations in fact making inequality look unnatural and unfounded (Illegitimate Inequality), as in the content "Zohran Mamdani Will Triple NYC'S Production of New, Affordable, Union- Built Homes." In the content he stated "NYC is a majority tenant city, but the government works too often for developers and landlords" suggesting that the current system is programmed to benefit those who own.

Zohran's arguments are reinforced in a video titled "We're taking on bad landlords". He was standing in front of one of the housing he considered the worst in NYC, West 83rd Street. According to him, this housing case is not an anomaly, but a real example of the problematic pattern experienced by many tenants in the city. He described the condition of the dwelling with descriptions of "hundreds of violations", "no heating and hot water", "leaks, rats, beehives on the walls", as well as the statement that the housing "is not only getting more expensive, but also more damaged" turning technical complaints into a picture of the collective suffering of the city's tenants.

Other videos highlight narratives about sudden rent increases, evictions, or policy decisions that immediately worsen people's living conditions, making the suffering feel urgent and demanding a quick response. The concept of suddenly imposed grievances can be seen in the content of "Cuomo's Housing Record" where this video shows the true story of Kasha Phillips-Lewis, a Washington Heights resident, who was forced into a shelter after Andrew Cuomo cut aid program funds through a touching personal narrative, Kasha recounts her struggle to get out of the shelter, efforts to improve the fate of her family, to the bitter reality when government aid was suddenly stopped. This testimony directly

shows how a single policy decision can instantly shake the lives of citizens, creating unrest, thus encouraging solidarity and demands for the system to be repaired immediately. The content strongly illustrates the loss of social justice and the right to a citizen's decent housing. Policies that allow people to fall into homelessness in the name of budget efficiency violate the principles of solidarity, empathy, and the government's social responsibility towards vulnerable groups can be said to meet the elements of Violated Principles and Threatened Privileges. The strong message that Zohran emphasized in the video is "We too often look at homelessness as if it's normal, as if it's destiny. In fact, this is a political choice." This emphasis affirms that the state and policymakers have a moral responsibility for these conditions. Zohran turns personal experiences like Kasha's into collective grievances that change the awareness that real change is something worth fighting for.

Adversarial Attribution

The PCI theory asserts that the politicization of collective identity can only occur when the aggrieved group succeeds in identifying outsiders who are actors or power structures as the source of their suffering. This attribution process is what drives the birth of collective energy to resist. Zohran Mamdani's YouTube content consistently makes it clear who is considered "them", the parties who cause the suffering of NYC's tenants and working class. Here's an analysis based on some specific videos.

The content of "Cuomo's Housing Record" clearly shows that the source of the injustice is government policy. Through the story of Kasha Phillips-Lewis, a mother who lost housing assistance due to budget cuts by Andrew Cuomo, this video shows how the housing crisis occurred as a result of wrong political decisions. In his narrative, Zohran emphasized that homelessness is not fate, but the result of a leader's choice that does not protect citizens. These accusations are directed directly at Cuomo as the responsible party. The shared anger over this policy, which was raised via video, further strengthened the sense of solidarity among tenants and other vulnerable groups.

In the content titled "We're Taking on Bad Landlords", Zohran explicitly refers to "worst landlords" as parties who deliberately ignore obligations, even though there has been pressure from tenants and city lawsuits, so that the suffering is attributed to the actions/negligence of certain actors. He also called "Major Adams" and "real estate donors" "doing nothing", so that the power structure (mayors and property donors) was framed as part of "them" who maintained the status quo and ignored the rights of tenants.

Attribution was later shown to other actors in the video "Zohran is Running to Freeze the Rent." This video depicts the Corporate Landlord as an Oppressor. In this campaign, Zohran highlights how millions of renters in NYC live in fear of rising rents, while corporate property owners continue to reap huge profits. The visuals in the video also support and strengthen the narrative by showing damaged buildings, peeling paint, and inappropriate facilities to confirm that landlords are not carrying out their responsibilities, but still raising prices. Zohran explained that rents are rising not because of the "natural market," but because city policies allow landlords to make as much profit as possible, so the system is considered to only protect the financier's profits.

More than just a personal actor or the Company's side, in the video titled Zohran Mamdani Will Triple NYC's Production of New, Affordable, Union-Built Homes, Zohran

considers the housing crisis to be a failure of public policy based on an economic and political structure that prioritizes the interests of real estate financiers, not the interests of the tenants. Zohran said that the government has been relying on the private sector to provide affordable housing, but it is not enough and tends to exploit tenants. In the video, Zohran took the opportunity to introduce his program, which is a structural solution offering by building 200,000 units of public housing in 10 years.

Attribution to certain parties is an important strategy in Zohran Mamdani's campaign because it helps people understand that the problems they face, such as rent increases, evictions, or homelessness, are failures of unfair political and policy decisions. By showing that there are responsible actors or structures, Zohran transforms an individual's sense of injustice into a sense of "us" as a group that is equally disadvantaged. This strengthens solidarity between tenants and the working class, as well as encourages them to support the changes offered in the campaign. This is the driving force for citizens to be involved in a larger political struggle.

Community Engagement

The politicized theory of collective identity explains that major changes in society are often born out of shared experiences of injustice and then develop thanks to the active involvement of many people. On the @ZohranforNYC YouTube channel, the spirit of community involvement is real. It can be seen that a number of contents often shows residents, volunteers, and tenants sharing stories about the heavy cost of living in New York, especially about housing prices that are increasingly unaffordable. Not only highlighting personal experiences, the content also invites all viewers to speak up, feeling that this issue does not belong to just one group, but has become an unrest for the entire city. From there, concern turned into collective action through door-to-door actions to delivering public orations.

In the video "One Year, One Movement", a moment is shown when many residents meet, build new hopes, and unite in a joint movement. Every scene, from volunteers knocking on private and community doors, feels like an invitation to take part regardless of their background and profession. Volunteers of various ages and ethnicities were seen taking on the role of work, dividing their time to listen to the stories and complaints of tenants, daily workers, and even students. Each brings enthusiasm and belief that this struggle is indeed worth fighting together. Citizen testimonies, footage of field actions, and excerpts of Zohran's speech, all point to the struggle for housing and economic justice as "our" as a city. This solidarity feels alive. Those who initially felt alone now find comrades in battle and in the end, their voices are louder and more meaningful because they are together. Support phrases such as "good luck, man", "we'll be behind you" or "You gotta win" and "He's building a movement beyond our expect" fill almost the entire video. The assertive narrative of moving common interests throughout NYC and even the world was echoed by Zohran through the oration "We stand the verge of victory that will resonate with the country and the world."

Still in the same video, it is clear that the movement of support for Zohran is increasingly massive. It is described that within a year Zohran was able to gather sympathy departing from the 1% figure ending in a victory of around 43% of the votes in the primary

election. This picture confirms the transformation of the campaign from a small initiative to a large political movement that is rooted in the community. The exponential growth in support is not just the result of advertising strategies or traditional media, but is the fruit of volunteer mobilization, community participation, and active involvement of the wider community, including young people and previously underrepresented groups in the political process. The data also shows the effectiveness of grassroots strategies and the involvement of third parties in the triangulation theory, in which the initial conflict between candidates and the political establishment is expanded so that the general public participates in the campaign.

In another video titled "NEW YORK IS NOT FOR SALE", volunteers are seen conducting a door-to-door campaign to meet residents directly and invite them to support Zohran. Relevant to the concept of triangulation, this action expands the conflict between candidates and opponents to an issue that involves the wider community as a third party. Citizens who care and take sides make campaign issues in the public interest, while strengthening community identity and building a collective movement towards victory. The "NEW YORK IS NOT FOR SALE" video then presents speeches from various public figures representing many aspects of New York life, including Julia Salazar (New York State Senator and activist), Brad Lander (New York City Comptroller and progressive figure), Imam Khalid Latif (Imam and Executive Director of the Islamic Center at New York University), to community leaders of various faiths, ethnicity, and profession. In addition to the specific theme of housing justice, they also take turns with one big narrative, which is that New York should remain a home, a place that is decent and fair for all, not just a commodity or a tool of wealth for a few elites and corporations.

Julia Salazar's oration emphasized that the movement of support for Zohran was born from ordinary people who were tired of "skyrocketing rents" and an economic system that only benefited big developers. He reminded with the experience of winning against political dynasties and big money that real change is only possible through collective movement, On the other hand, Brad Lander then emphasized the importance of solidarity and coalitions as the main capital of the struggle "The New York of our dreams won't build itself. We will build it together... this campaign showed the possibility of solidarity, politics doesn't have to be the sour selfish ego trip of Cuomo or Adams or Trump. Politics can be a team sport for building the New York of our dreams."

This call was immediately followed by an invitation across identities: Jew, Muslim, Christian, Black, Latino, Asian, LGBTQ, and all those present through: "this is the New York of our dreams, and now it's on us to make it real."

Imam Khalid Latif brought a moral message about the importance of embracing all vulnerable groups, countering hate rhetoric, and reclaiming political space to truly reflect the interests of the people, not corporations. By featuring voices and representations from so many backgrounds, the video vividly brings to life one big narrative: that NYC must be preserved, fought for together, and that its progress is not just for a handful of people, but for the entire city's people. Each oration affirms the value of public involvement, solidarity, and courage not to succumb to the pressures of capital and the "status quo". This shows the core spirit of the triangulation strategy in the politicization of collective identity.

Meanwhile, the video "The Home Stretch Starts Now", a triangulation element appears in the spotlight on the scale of public support through numbers (overtaking in the polls, winning 13 points, tens of thousands of volunteers) showing that the wider community has "taken sides" with this movement. Citing 35 canvass (door-to-door campaigns) in five boroughs or regions, targeting 50,000–90,000 volunteers, and describing "foreigners who care about those they will never meet", Zohran shows how ordinary citizens are positioned as active third parties. Further, he expanded the triangulation to the global level by saying that "people around the world who see this, they see themselves not only in me, but in you",. The international public was made a symbolic audience that would judge and perhaps emulate this movement, so the struggle in NYC was projected as an example for other cities.

In general, Zohran Mamdani has succeeded in applying the theory of politicized social identity in his campaign strategy in NYC. This theory emphasizes that a movement is strong and effective when the identity of a group that was originally social or community turns into a politicized collective identity, where citizens not only feel like a group, but are also encouraged to move together for a clear and shared political goal. Zohran's campaign narrative through video, speeches, and digital interactions frames the suffering of individuals or small groups as a common interest of the entire city. Zohran successfully used the main principle of politicized collective identity by fostering solidarity, building common enemies (elites, political opponents, and large corporations), and actively inviting the wider community to move from sending petitions, door-to-door canvassing, attending legislative meetings, to building coalitions across professions, religions, and ethnicities. The representation of cross-community figures in the campaign video, such as senators, priests, workers, cultural activists, and cross-identity politicians, shows a systematic effort to broaden the movement's base and strengthen an inclusive and politicized collective identity. Zohran Mamdani's victory proves the effectiveness of politicized social identity strategies in political movements in NYC. He succeeded in turning the residents' unrest into an organized joint force. The narrative of injustice is clearly raised, cross-community solidarity is built through real action and collaboration, and the space for participation is opened as wide as possible to invite all citizens to move together. Zohran's campaign did not stop at the level of rhetoric, but rather gave birth to a collective coalition capable of driving policy change and historic political achievements in a city as large as New York.

Conclusion

This article confirms that Zohran Mamdani's digital campaign on YouTube has successfully transformed the housing crisis and the rising cost of living in New York City into a social justice narrative that unites renters and the working class within a single politicized collective identity. Through moral language centered on dignity and the right to housing, combined with visuals depicting deteriorating homes, the threat of homelessness, and stark disparities with the capitalist elite, tenants' experiences are framed as shared suffering that demands structural change. Within the framework of Politicized Collective Identity, Zohran constructs collective awareness of injustice, identifies opposing actors—such as exploitative landlords, property elites, and political leaders aligned with them—and mobilizes broader public support through a triangulation strategy.

The discussion illustrates how Zohran connects the fragmented experiences of tenants and the working class to the broader notion of systemic injustice in the housing sector. The content highlights rent burdens that exceed affordability standards, housing disrepair, the constant threat of homelessness, and difficulties in meeting basic needs. These conditions are consistently framed as structural problems rather than individual failures, thereby fostering a sense of solidarity among tenants and the working class. Attribution strategies are directed toward actors perceived as responsible for the housing crisis, such as Cuomo, real estate donors, and corporate landlords, effectively redirecting public anger away from individuals and toward entrenched power structures. Through content such as *One Year, One Movement*, *NEW YORK IS NOT FOR SALE*, and *The Home Stretch Starts Now*, the campaign expands housing issues into broader urban concerns, supported by the participation of ordinary citizens, cross-community volunteers, and public figures.

Zohran's campaign also demonstrates how his background as the son of Muslim immigrants from a working-class family has shaped a political orientation grounded in lived experience. He foregrounds issues such as high rents, insufficient income, and transportation challenges, transforming them into a political platform that advocates for groups that are often marginalized and overlooked. By employing a collective identity approach, Zohran encourages the public to view themselves as part of a group facing common problems, confronting shared adversaries, and requiring collective action. This strategy has succeeded in uniting diverse social groups into an inclusive political movement, while also demonstrating that change in a large city like New York is possible when citizens build solidarity and actively engage in political struggle.

These findings underscore that digital platforms have evolved into vital infrastructure for the formation of resistance identities, where previously fragmented and disconnected economic grievances can be converted into a cohesive political force of the working class challenging the status quo. Through this visual narrative strategy, structural inequality is no longer perceived as individual fate but as systemic failure that demands collective moral resistance. Consequently, future research agendas should focus on empirically examining the durability of this form of digital activism in the post-election period, particularly whether such mobilization can evolve into a sustained grassroots movement or remains a temporary electoral phenomenon. Practically, political actors must move beyond shallow, transactional communication models and adopt narrative strategies that validate the lived suffering of constituents. Such an approach is essential to revitalizing public engagement in challenging dominant power structures.

References

- Board, N. Y. C. R. G. (2024). *2024 income and affordability study*. <https://rentguidelinesboard.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-IA-Study.pdf>
- CNNIndonesia.com. (2025). *Zohran Mamdani's unique campaign in NY, a polyglot and Muslim mayoral candidate*. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com>
- Comptroller, N. Y. S. O. of the S. (2024). *The cost of living in New York City: Housing*.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1998). The construction of collective identities: Some analytical and comparative indications. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 1(2), 229–254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136843198001002008>
- Esser, F., & Strömbäck, J. (2014). *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Geise, S., Maubach, K., & Boettcher, A. (2024). Picture me in person: Personalization and emotionalization as political campaign strategies on social media in the German federal election period 2021. *New Media & Society*, 27(7), 3745–3769. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231224031>
- Herbert, C., Hermann, A., & McCue, D. (2018). *Measuring housing affordability: Assessing the 30 percent of income standard*. Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University.
- Hermawan, V. (2025). Political communication in the digital era: The role of social media in shaping public opinion in the 2024 election. *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin Indonesia (JIM-ID)*, 4(5), 160–169. <https://doi.org/10.58471/esaprom.v4i05>
- Indoprogress. (2025). *From Queens to City Hall: When Zohran Mamdani changed New York's political style*. <https://indoprogress.com>
- Kamil, E., & Sundari, F. (2024). 2024 election campaign branding by utilizing digital transformation. *Opini: Journal of Communication and Social Science*. <http://aspublisher.co.id/index.php/opini>
- Mani, L., Sasmoko, S., Sungkharisma, B., Arabella, C., & Azzahra, C. G. (2025). Live streaming, personal branding, and political communication: Gen Z's active participation in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. *Multidisciplinary Science Journal*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2025186>
- Newspaper, T. A. (2025). *Five ways to make Zohran Mamdani's housing plan even better*. <https://www.archpaper.com/2025/06/zohran-mamdani-housing/>
- NYC, Z. for. (2025). *Housing by and for New York*. <https://www.zohranfornyc.com/policies/housing-by-and-for-new-york>
- Purwanto, P., Purnamayanti, A., & Maryani, E. (2024). The total archives theory for building collective memory and cultural identity in archive management at the archives unit of Lampung University. *KnE Social Sciences*, 2024, 374–391. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v9i12.15867>
- Setiawan, A. D., Priyatama, A. N., & Hakim, L. (2022). The relationship between social identity and behavior. *Scientific Journal of Psychology Candrajawa*.

-
- Shelterforce. (2025). *What Zohran Mamdani's primary win means for the tenant movement*.
<https://shelterforce.org/2025/07/09/what-zohran-mamdani-primary-win-means-for-the-tenant-movement/>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*. Brooks/Cole.
- Times, I. D. N. (2025). *Liked by Gen Z, this is a series of Zohran Mamdani's economic programs*.
<https://www.idntimes.com>
- Times, I. T. (2025). *Freeze the rent: How tenant movements are reshaping New York City politics*. *In These Times Magazine*.
- Trepte, S. (2006). *Social identity theory*.