

“The Hamptons is basically in group therapy about the mayoral race.”

**By Jacob Bernstein**

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August in the Hamptons: Ocean breezes. Oversubscribed Tracy Anderson classes. Parking woes.

And this year, with a New York City mayoral election looming in the fall, a freakout that the most sumptuous of summer staples hasn't soothed.

“Even overpriced lobster salad can't seem to make people out here feel better,” said Robert Zimmerman, a veteran political fund-raiser who has yet to back anyone in the race.

“Everyone's talking about it all the time,” said the writer and pundit Molly Jong-Fast, a New York City voter who has a home in Sag Harbor.

What they are talking about, for the most part, is whether anyone — specifically former Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo or Mayor Eric Adams — can beat the democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani.

Mr. Mamdani is the 33-year-old Democratic nominee who prevailed over Mr. Cuomo in the primary and is comfortably ahead in the polls. In June, he dared to say on “Meet the Press”: “I don't think we should have billionaires.”

Which, in running to lead a city that has more Forbes billionaires than any place on earth, has led to a certain amount of grouching.

Greg Kraut, the chief executive of KPG Funds, a real estate investment firm, has called Mr. Mamdani's supporters “moron millennials.” Bill Ackman, the hedge fund titan, has said a Mamdani era would be “disastrous” for the city, and would cause billionaires “to leave.”

The agita is on full blast out east, where the price for one home last year ran as high as \$88.5 million and so many 0.1 percenters congregate in August. (Presuming they don't have a yacht.)



“The Hamptons is basically in group therapy about the mayoral race,” Mr. Zimmerman said. “What they’re discussing is not just Mamdani and his policies, but Cuomo and Adams and whether anyone can beat him.”

Holly Peterson, a Park Avenue and Southampton based novelist who, as she put it, owes her career to being able to skewer the “selfishness” of high society types, said she can barely find anyone on the East End who is over 40, works in finance and is “pro-Mamdani.”

In other words, the plutocrats are panicking.

Mr. Cuomo and Mr. Adams, who are running as independents, have been taking advantage of that as they put on polo shirts and visit shingled Hamptons estates to partake in a campaign tradition: Meeting, greeting and asking for money.



Mayor Eric Adams, running for re-election as an independent, has held fund-raising events in the Hamptons. Kent J. Edwards for The New York Times

Attendees have included real estate behemoths, crypto kings, corporate lawyers, fancy gym owners and a reality television star.

Mr. Cuomo and Mr. Adams had a near miss on Saturday night, Aug. 16, when they hit the same see-and-be-seen Southampton restaurant Pop Up By Rocco.

Mr. Cuomo got there first.

He had just finished up his linguine alle vongole when the restaurant's owner, Zach Erdem, said he ambled up to the table to tell him something: Mayor Adams was on his way.

Mr. Cuomo, Mr. Erdem said, quickly paid the bill and left with his group in tow.

Fifteen minutes later, Mr. Adams arrived, sat down at the table ("in the same chair" as Mr. Cuomo, Mr. Erdem noted) with the Bitcoin billionaire Brock Pierce, and was treated to vegan chicken nuggets made specially for him by the chef, Rocco DiSpirito.

Two events for Mr. Adams that weekend raised around \$100,000, according to Todd Shapiro, a spokesman for the mayor's campaign. Mr. Cuomo's campaign declined to note a specific Hamptons weekend haul but said that between July 8 and Aug. 18 the campaign had raised \$530,000. Mr. Cuomo was back on Thursday for a fundraiser in Sag Harbor.

"While they're wining and dining billionaire types, Zohran is bringing thousands of New Yorkers together," said Rebecca Katz, a political consultant whose firm, Fight, produces ads for Mr. Mamdani.

Mr. Mamdani, who has a fund-raising lead over his opponents, has not held any benefits in the Hamptons, according to a campaign spokesman, Jeffrey Lerner.

Some politically engaged Hamptonites are still on the sidelines. Among them is John Catsimatidis, the billionaire grocery store magnate who has previously run for mayor as a Republican and is now a member of the "Anyone But Mamdani" crowd.

Mr. Catsimatidis hosts a power breakfast in Southampton each weekend — recent guests include Gov. Kathy Hochul and the New York City police commissioner Jessica Tisch — but said he had declined invitations to other such gatherings.

He expressed the hope that Mr. Adams and Mr. Cuomo will take a hard look at the polls in the coming weeks and the weaker of the two will bow out gracefully. Recent polls have shown Mr. Adams running a distant third to Mr. Cuomo.

Patricia Duff, a Democratic donor, had thrown her lot behind Mr. Cuomo.

“Mamdani has a great smile and is wonderfully articulate,” she said. “His social media is entertaining, and his promises sound fine until you look at the fine print and they’re not realistic. It’s fantasy land.”

Ms. Duff attended a recent event for Mr. Cuomo co-hosted by the corporate lawyer Lucy Fato and the cosmetic dermatologist Macrene Alexiades. Also there was the real estate lawyer Risa Levine, who said she rolled her eyes a little at some of the comments from business leaders about what could happen if Mr. Mamdani wins in November.

“I don’t think New York will become inhospitable overnight,” she said. “For better or worse, things don’t happen that quickly.”

Still, she said she isn’t a Mamdani supporter, citing his plans for making city services “free” and, especially, his criticism of Israel.

Ms. Jong-Fast said she had heard many a variation of this argument.

“The fact that everything is supposed to be about Israel doesn’t make any sense to me,” she said. “He’s running for Mayor of New York. There’s no chance he’s going to have anything to do with Middle East policy.”

Mr. Adams’s Hamptons itinerary in the dog days of August included a fund-raiser hosted by the hedge fund manager Jason Mudrick and a pit stop at the 50th birthday bash for the nightlife impresario Noah Tepperberg.

Mr. Cuomo, running for mayor as an independent candidate, has been holding campaign fund-raisers in the Hamptons this summer. James Estrin/The New York Times

Mr. Cuomo spent Aug. 15 at a fund-raiser co-hosted by a hedge fund billionaire, Gregg Hymowitz, and his wife, Marcella. Mr. Hymowitz, who had donated \$100,000 to Mr. Adams in 2021, is now in the Cuomo camp.

Another recent benefit for Mr. Cuomo took place at the Southampton estate of the conservative media executive Jimmy Finkelstein and his wife, Pamela Gross, a former adviser to first lady Melania Trump.

The event was co-hosted by Mr. Finkelstein's brother, Andrew J. Stein, a former president of the City Council who in 2011 was placed on probation for three years for failure to pay his 2008 taxes. "It was a misdemeanor," said Mr. Stein, who argued that the Democratic nominee's supporters are mostly overprivileged.

"If you look at the people who supported Mamdani the commie, they're affluent!" he said. "The signs for him are up everywhere in Brooklyn Heights and Dumbo." (Mr. Mamdani has also been called a "communist" by President Trump. He addressed the attack on "Meet the Press: "No, I am not.")

As Mr. Stein sees it, the only person likely to fend off Mr. Mamdani is Mr. Cuomo. He cited an August poll by Siena College, showing that Mr. Cuomo had support from 25 percent of the electorate, while Mr. Adams was stuck at 7 percent.

Guests at Mr. Finkelstein's home included Joe Farrell, a prominent builder of luxury Hamptons homes, and the "Real Housewives of New York" cast member Kelly Killoren Bensimon.

Reporters were kept out of the event. In an audio recording leaked to Politico, Mr. Cuomo appeared to promise that, if elected, he could muster a kind of détente with President Trump. ("Let's put it this way: I knew the president very well," he appeared to say.)

In a phone interview after the fund-raiser, Ms. Bensimon said she remained "undecided" in the race.

"I'm not really a political person," she explained. "I'm a 'who are the people in your neighborhood' person, and I love the Finkelsteins."

**Jacob Bernstein** reports on power and privilege for the Style section.