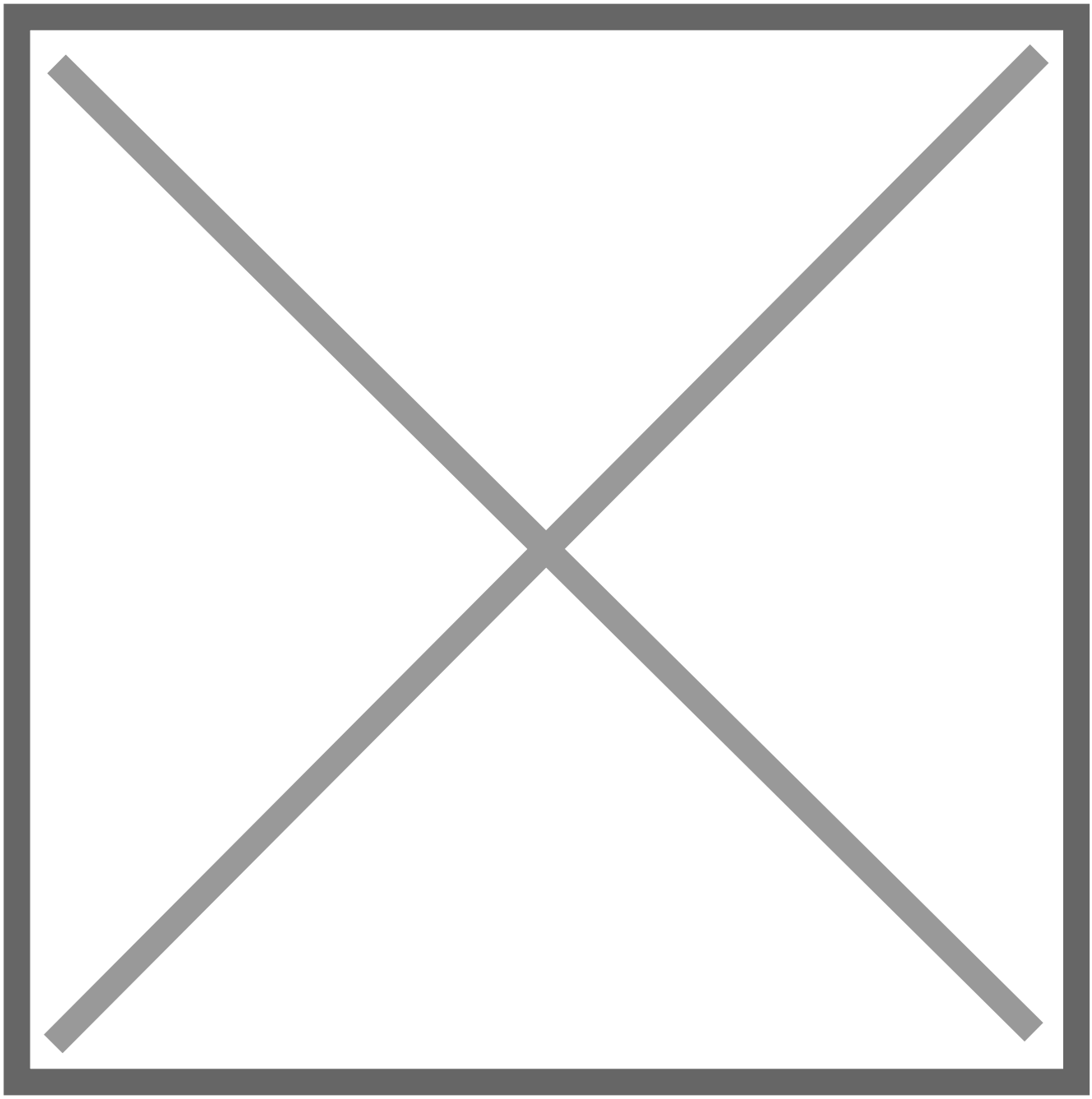
News
Analysis



New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani speaks during a news conference at the Unisphere in the Queens borough of New York City Nov. 5, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Kylie Cooper)

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Closely watched off-year elections in several states that offered the first major opportunity for voters to weigh in at the ballot box since President Donald Trump began his second term resulted in key victories for Democratic candidates and showed signs voters were motivated by cost-of-living increases, an area of Catholic social concern.

"I don't think it was good for Republicans," Trump said at a Nov. 5 meeting with Republican senators at the White House, adding, "I'm not sure it was good for anybody, but we had an interesting evening and we learned a lot."

Democrats won gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia. In New York City, Zohran Mamdani, a Democratic socialist who won his party's nomination for mayor, defeated Republican Curtis Sliwa and an independent campaign by the scandal-plagued ex-Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

According to CBS News exit polling, majorities of voters in Virginia and New Jersey said Trump was a key factor in their votes, although he was not on the ballot. Voters in those contests who said the economy was their first concern voted for the Democratic gubernatorial candidates. The exit polling also found cost of living was the most important issue to voters in New York City, with most of those voters supporting Mamdani.

John White, a professor emeritus of politics at The Catholic University of America in Washington, told OSV News, "The unifying thread to all three election outcomes is affordability," arguing Mamdani, as well as Gov.-elect Abigail Spanberger in Virginia and Gov.-elect Mikie Sherrill in New Jersey, addressed voter concerns on that subject in their campaigns.

"Donald Trump's unpopularity in all three places — plus California — also contributed to these outcomes," White said, referring to the passage of Proposition 50, an effort by California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom to counter Texas' new congressional map, which sought to add Republican-majority congressional seats in the 2026 midterm election.

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Kenneth Craycraft, a professor of moral theology at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and School of Theology in Cincinnati and author of "Citizens Yet Strangers: Living Authentically Catholic in a Divided America," said that "The common theme seems to be a backlash against Trump, whether the backlash is rooted in reality or caricature."

Craycraft said that Mamdani "ran a very good campaign," but he also benefited from being in a three-way race. He also offered a critique of Mamdani's victory speech, in which he said, "We will prove that there is no problem to large for government to solve and no concern too small for it to care about," suggesting that argument contrasts the principle of subsidiarity, or the idea, formed in Catholic teaching, that some decisions are best left to smaller, localized institutions rather than larger ones.

White and Craycraft both previously expressed criticism of Jay Jones, who was the Democratic candidate elected as Virginia attorney general, over a scandal surrounding text messages he sent in 2022 that contained violent rhetoric toward then-Virginia House Speaker Todd Gilbert, a Republican, saying Gilbert should get "two bullets to the head."

Jones was likely buoyed by the success at the top of the Democratic ticket in Virginia, early data suggests. But Craycraft called his election "shocking" after such a scandal.

White noted that data also suggests Democrats made gains among minority voters, "particularly African Americans and Latinos," White said.

"There were majorities who believed that Trump has gone too far on immigration," he said. "And Trump's economic failures, particularly on inflation, gave Democrats a unifying theme."

"Voters are focused on results and Trump has not delivered," he said. "It's up to the three Democratic winners yesterday to do that."

Other notable measures include the passage of a constitutional amendment in Texas that aims to affirm parental rights, adding language to the state constitution stating that parents are the primary decision-makers for their children and bear the responsibility to nurture and protect them.

Voters in Maine approved a measure to build on the state's existing "yellow flag law" to create a "red flag law" aimed at reducing gun violence, two years after the Oct. 25, 2023, mass shooting in Lewiston, which left 18 people dead. A red flag law would allow family members to go directly to a court to seek an order temporarily restricting a loved one’s access to firearms, an increase from a yellow flag law, which allows law enforcement officers to do so.