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THE COUNTDOWN

Your Guide to the NYC Mayor's Race

The Jewish issues and angles. Every day.

 **71 Days to Election** 

Monday, August 25, 2025

Welcome back to The Countdown. Today, our [exclusive report](#) on a Jewish school that's requiring parents prove they are registered to vote ahead of the mayoral election.



Yeshivah Magen David in Gravesend, Brooklyn, is requiring all parents to be registered to vote as of August 2025. (Screenshot from Google Maps)

- As families prepare for back-to-school day at Magen David Yeshivah, they are facing a new rule. Parents have to show they are registered to vote before the school year begins.
- The large Orthodox school in Brooklyn is central to the city's Syrian Jewish community. In a letter to families, school officials said the new requirement reflected the school's "commitment to ensuring that our community plays an active role in shaping the policies that affect us all every day."
- The unprecedented — but, sources say, legal — move comes as Zohran Mamdani [appears likely to be elected mayor](#) in November. His pro-Palestinian views are opposed by many right-wing and Orthodox Jews in New York.
- One figure behind the policy is Joey Cohen-Saban, a Democratic party official in Brooklyn who has exhorted New Yorkers to oppose Mamdani, we found.
- The principal at Magen David Yeshivah's elementary school, Ezra Cohen-Saban, was among 50 Sephardic-Syrian rabbis who recently urged Jews to vote in the upcoming election — though they didn't mention any candidate by name. They called the race a "turning point" that would shape Jewish identity, safety and institutions for years to come.

Mamdani's favorite teacher is Elena Kagan's big brother

- If you want to understand Mamdani, you should know about one of his biggest influences: Marc Kagan. Mamdani often [says](#) that Kagan, who taught him social studies at Bronx Science, was "one of the best teachers" he ever had.

- Kagan, whose parents were both children of Russian-Jewish immigrants, worked as a mechanic and a union activist for the city's transit system before he became a teacher. He is the older brother of Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who pushed Lincoln Square Synagogue to [allow her a bat mitzvah ceremony](#) in 1973.
- Kagan is mutually impressed by his former student, he said in an interview with [Chalkbeat](#) last week. He praised Mamdani's campaign focus on slogans around affordability, saying he articulated issues "in a way that people grasp and could understand and identify with."
- He also defended Mamdani from other educators who have linked his critical views of Israel to antisemitism. After the United Federation of Teachers endorsed Mamdani, we spoke with Jewish teachers who decided to [withhold their dues](#) in protest.
- Kagan is not in their camp. "There are people in New York City, in the UFT, that believe criticism of Israel is antisemitic," he said. "They're wrong."

A Jew's clues in Mamdani's scavenger hunt

- A scavenger hunt hosted by Mamdani's campaign drew thousands of New Yorkers to the streets on Sunday. Natan Last, a writer whose mother is Israeli, [took credit](#) for helping to write the hunt's clues.
- Last is a longtime pro-Palestinian activist. He is part of Mamdani's circle of pro-Palestinian Jewish allies, including the anti-Zionist group Jewish Voice for Peace.

Following the money

- Mamdani [raised twice as much as Andrew Cuomo](#) over the past month. The frontrunner hauled in more than \$1 million in private, mostly small

donations since mid-July, according to updated Campaign Finance Board filings on Friday.

- Cuomo lagged behind with \$508,000, Mayor Eric Adams raised \$421,000 and Republican nominee Curtis Sliwa amassed \$407,000 during the same period.
- Both Cuomo and Mamdani saw more than half their contributions come from outside New York City, pointing to intense interest in this race far beyond the five boroughs.

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