

CASE STUDIES

PART 2

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CLOTHING

4. Sadiq Khan: The real reason I don't wear ties

Scarlett Russell, *The Times*, 20 April 2025

You never wear ties. Why not?

I actually love ties. I wore them for 11 years as a lawyer and 11 years as a member of parliament, but when I was running to be mayor [in 2016] I wanted to be authentic and comfortable. I met Giorgio Armani in 2016. I told him this story of when I used to have a Saturday job on Oxford Street and save up my money to buy Armani ties in the Christmas sales. The next day I turned up at work and there was a bag full of Armani ties he'd sent me. I sent him a thank-you note, but didn't have the heart to tell him that I don't really wear them much any more.

Do your twentysomething daughters borrow your clothes?

They tease me a lot. What I think is fashionable they call "retro", but they do love my sweatshirts.

What's the most treasured item in your wardrobe?

I got married to my wife, Saadiya, in 1994. Her mother is a seamstress and measured me up before going to Pakistan, where she made me a bespoke pearl-coloured sherwani. I've still got it and, even better, 30 years on I still fit into it.

What do you wear to take out the bins?

Nike, Adidas or Champion grey jogging bottoms, sweatshirts and a pair of trainers. In my mind I look cool in leisurewear, like David Beckham. My neighbours probably think I look like David Brent.

Whose wardrobe would you love for the day?

Riz Ahmed, Idris Elba, Bill Nighy — and Daniel Craig's Tom Ford suits in James Bond.

Do you have any fashion regrets?

I bought some suits in the 1980s that had padded shoulders. They looked so much better in LA Law when Jimmy Smits wore them, but I'm afraid that, on me, they do not look cool.

How many suits do you own?

I'm a hoarder. I've kept suits for a long time and not counted them. A piece of advice I took from Bill Nighy years ago was to wear only blue suits. They're quintessentially smart, fit any kind of event and you can wear a white shirt without a tie and still look smart.

What is your favourite thing about London Fashion Week?

Recently I was at the Harris Reed show at Tate Britain. From out of nowhere Florence Pugh turned up. A few years ago I went to Molly Goddard and Adwoa Aboah just turned up, so that's what I love about Fashion Week, the people who just appear. Also, how [labels] reimagine venues and completely change how you experience them. And, of course, the designers and clothes.

Who is your favourite London designer?

For men's, Paul Smith. When I buy gifts for my daughters I go to Vivienne Westwood — the jewellery is fantastic. Oliver Spencer is special; I'm wearing a pair of his shoes now. And I wear Fred Perry all the time.

You have to travel a lot for your job. Any packing hacks?

During one of the Black Friday sales I invested in a really good Briggs & Riley suit bag. A decent suit bag means you can pack quite a bit in if you're only carrying hand luggage. I pack a lot of white shirts, a spare T-shirt for the flight and, if it's hot, linen, because it looks cool even when it's crumpled.



Khan at his swearing-in ceremony last year - LUCY YOUNG / EVENING STANDARD / EYEVINE

Speaking of linen, the green suit you wore for your swearing-in ceremony last year caused quite a stir ...

I was in the clothes shop Percival in Soho with my daughters and rang my team at City Hall, saying: "I've got this suit I want to wear. Two things — it's linen and my daughters are advising I buy it in green." Everyone in the office shouted: "No. Stick with black or blue." I went with green — my daughters had seen the campaign close up and knew that I wanted to be the "first green mayor". They thought it was cool, and they were right.

5. What Zohran Mamdani's suit tells us about the man and the way society is changing

Jad Salfiti, *The Guardian*, 2 Jan 2026



The New York Times

Buoyed up by an ingenious campaign, Mamdani caught the imagination of the world like no other New York mayoral candidate of recent times. But whether he was throwing his hands in the air at a hip-hop club or at a premiere party for the film *Marty Supreme*, one thing on his campaign trail rarely changed: he was almost always in a suit. Loosely tailored, modern with soft shoulders, yet conventional and ordinary, his is a typically middle-class millennial suit – well, as typical as it can be for a generation that rarely bothers to wear one.

“The suit is in this weird position,” says men’s fashion writer Derek Guy (AKA Twitter’s “the menswear guy”) over the phone from California. “It’s been dying a slow death since the end of the second world war,” with the real dip arriving in the 1990s with “the rise of business casual”.

“It’s basically only worn in the most formal locations: weddings, funerals, to some extent, court appearances,” Guy says. “It’s sort of like the kimono in Japan,” in that it “essentially represents a tradition that has long ceded from daily life.” Many politicians “wear a suit to say: ‘I am a politician, you can trust me. You should vote for me. I have authority.’” But while the suit has historically signalled this, today it performs authority in the hope of winning public confidence. As Guy explains: “Since we’re also living in a liberal democracy, politicians want to seem relatable, because they’re trying to get your votes.” In many

ways, a suit is just a subtle form of drag, in that it performs masculinity, authority and even proximity to power. Or at least how politicians are expected to look.

Mamdani's preferred suit is from Suitsupply, a Dutch label that retails in the £400-£1,200 range, placing it firmly in the mid-market bracket. "Mamdani is very much a product of his background," says Guy. "A relatively young person in his 30s, he's neither poor nor exceptionally wealthy." To that end, his mid-level suit will resonate with the demographic most likely to support him: people in their 30s and 40s, college graduates making middle-class incomes, often frustrated by the cost of housing. It's exactly the kind of suit they might wear themselves. Not cheap but not extravagant, Mamdani's suits arguably don't contradict his proposed policies – a rent freeze; building 200,000 permanently affordable, union-built, rent-stabilised homes; fare-free public buses; and universal early-childhood care.

"You could never imagine Donald Trump wearing Suitsupply; he's a Brioni person," says Guy, referring to the luxurious Italian suits that Trump wears, which cost from £3,480-£10,600 off the rack: "He's extremely wealthy and grew up in that New York real-estate world. A power suit fits naturally with that tycoon class, just as more accessible brands fit naturally with Mamdani's cohort."

Perhaps the point is what Dr Matthew Sterling Benson-Strohmayr, an economic historian at the London School of Economics, refers to as the "performance of banality", summoning the suit's long career as a uniform of political power, with Mamdani's particular choice tapping into a studied modesty, neither shabby nor showy – "respectability politics" in an inconspicuous suit – to help him appeal to as many voters as possible. But Benson-Strohmayr thinks Mamdani would be aware of the suit's military and colonial legacy: "The suit isn't neutral; historians of the empire have long noted that its contemporary origins lie in military or colonial administration." He also sees the suit as a form of protective armour: "I think if you're Brown, you aren't going to get taken as seriously in these white spaces." The suit becomes a way of signalling legitimacy, perhaps especially to those who might question said legitimacy.

This kind of sartorial "code-switching" is hardly a new phenomenon. Even Mohandas Gandhi, whose most iconic image was him cross-legged in a hand-spun dhoti with a shawl draped over his shoulder, once donned a three-piece suit as he trained as a young barrister in London. These days, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has started swapping his usual fatigues for a black suit, albeit one without the tie.

The suit Mamdani chooses, according to David Kuchta, the author of *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity*, is symbolic/significant. "As a Muslim child of immigrants of Indian descent and a democratic socialist, he is under pressure to conform to what many American voters look for as a sign of leadership," he says, while simultaneously needing to walk a tightrope by "not looking like an elitist selling out his non-mainstream roots and values".

But Kuchta is acutely aware of the double standards applied to who wears suits and what is read into it when they do. "That may come in part from Mamdani being a millennial, able to adopt different identities to fit the occasion, but it may also be part of his multicultural background, where code-switching between languages, customs and clothing styles is common," he says. "White males can remain unnoticed," but when women and ethnic minorities "attempt to gain the power that suits represent," they must carefully navigate the codes associated with them.

PRIVATE LIFE

6. Sadiq Khan on meeting his wife, embarrassing his daughters and the dating advice he gives to single friends

The Evening Standard, 14 February 2024



Sadiq Khan — Mayor of London, the first ever Muslim mayor of a Western capital and the man who set a new record as our city’s first mayor to secure a historic third term — is telling me about his mission to give more hugs.

“I went from having six brothers and a sister, to having two children who are women... I think that more female environment has changed my behaviour for the better,” the former human rights lawyer and Labour MP for Tooting tells me, shortly after pulling our former editor Dylan Jones into a warm embrace as he arrives at The Standard offices on Finsbury Square. “Now I make a point of giving hugs to my male friends, to my colleagues, to people I haven’t seen in a while. It’s a way of showing love without needing to say ‘I love you’.”

Love, fatherhood and public displays of affection might not be your regular subject for the man in charge of our capital’s transport, housing and climate policies for the majority of the last decade and more commonly pressed on subjects from London’s ultra-low emission zone (Ulez) to soaring crime rates.

But this is exactly the point. Khan, 54, is here to take part in a special Valentine’s episode of our her dating podcast, *London Love Stories* with Katie Strick, and appears to be enjoying a rare chance to talk about these softer, fuzzier elements of his day-to-day, whether it’s date nights with his wife Saadiya, visiting his elderly mother every morning before work, or the weekly games of football and tennis he plays with his friends in Tooting — an example of the non-romantic forms of love that the pandemic taught him were just as important for mental wellbeing as the romantic stuff, and a key element of what he believes to be the real joy of London: the interactions between Londoners

themselves. He leans into the brief, posing jovially with a bouquet of roses and cosying in among the pink cushions of our television studio for a more informal chat about matters of the heart.

His own Valentine, Saadiya — his wife of the last three decades, a fellow solicitor and Tooting-raised Muslim who just so happens to be the child of a bus driver like her husband — is at home with the family dog, Luna, and readying herself for date night. The couple have tickets to see Sarah Jessica Parker's in Plaza Suite at the Savoy Theatre, and are looking forward to a night out as a two — though they'll be being careful not to make any public displays of affection for fear of embarrassing their daughters Anisha and Ammarah, as they did several years ago, when Khan was pictured serenading his wife at a 2019 Lionel Richie concert in Hyde Park (Richie's hit, *Endless Love*, has long been their go-to couple song).

The pair met when they were teenagers and their love story reads like your classic high-school-sweetheart-happily-ever-after: he was at the local boys school, Ernest Bevin Academy, seen externally as the “tough, hard school” in the area, while Saadiya attended the local mixed school, Graveney, where the headteacher, Mr Stapleton, went to great lengths to keep the girls from being “courted” by other local boys.

A determined young Khan managed to get around that headteacher, somehow, and started dating with his now-wife while they were in sixth form. “We fell in love quite young,” he tells me, looking relaxed under the interview spotlight despite rarely speaking about his romantic life in public. “When I meet people who haven't spent time with someone from my background, I tease them and say we had an arranged marriage when we were very young... Then we carry on the story and say we arranged ourselves.”

Khan talks me through a few of the highlights of his and Saadiya's love story since then — day dates watching the pelicans in St James' Park; a recent evening he surprised her with tickets to see her favourite artist John Legend at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club; becoming parents (“I love being an uncle, a husband and a son, but of all the things I am I think my favourite is being a dad”) — and swerves my question about the rumours that he once wooed his wife over a filet-o-fish in a Croydon McDonalds. “There'll be people listening to this who may not be able to afford fine dining so my advice is: even franchises on the high street can be romantic with the right person,” he says with a knowing grin.

7. Gen Z's 'first lady': how Rama Duwaji, Mamdani's wife, is reshaping political fashion

Jess Cartner-Morley, *The Guardian*, November 12, 2025



📷 Zohran Mamdani speaks to reporters as Rama Duwaji, his wife, looks on before casting his ballot in early primary voting in the Astoria neighborhood of Queens, New York, on 19 June 2025. Photograph: Shuran Huang/New York Times/Redux/eyevine

It is the most traditional of assets for any ambitious young male politician: a fashionably dressed, beautiful young wife. But as with everything else about the rise of Zohran Mamdani, his wife, Rama Duwaji, represents a new era of politics which speaks to a new generation of voters.

Married to the soon-to-be leader of the biggest city in the US, Duwaji, 28, is arguably the US's first generation Z "first lady". Duwaji is an artist and illustrator of Syrian heritage, whose work explores themes of Arab identity, female experience and social justice. Working in paint, line-drawing, ceramics and animation, she graduated with a master's degree in fine arts from New York's School of Visual Arts in 2024.

It is fair to assume that one does not pursue a career as a socially conscious artist contributing line drawings to niche left-leaning publications with the aim of becoming a global celebrity. But Duwaji's life took an unexpected turn when, in 2021, she met Mamdani. The couple married in February this year, about eight months before Mamdani was elected mayor of New York City, and Duwaji was thrust into the spotlight as New York City's 28-year-old first lady. In the week since Mamdani's triumph, *Vogue* headlines have included "Zohran Mamdani and Rama Duwaji Are Making Finding Love on Hinge Seem Possible Again" and "Fall's Next Cool-Girl Haircut Is Officially the Rama".

First lady is one of the most high-profile spots in US politics and culture. From Eleanor Roosevelt's civil rights advocacy to Hillary Clinton's healthcare reforms, the political wives of the White House have long been impactful players on the political scene. As the first lady of a city, rather than the nation, the stakes are more muted for Duwaji - but the buzz around her husband is shining a spotlight on both of the new inhabitants of Gracie Mansion.

Duwaji's victory-speech look was sober: all-black, with a high neck and calf-length skirt, and silver jewellery. But her low-key style did not deflect a feverish online reaction, with her chic dark bob and vintage-style boatneck top bringing instant comparisons to Audrey Hepburn. The outfit was notable for being consistent with Duwaji's personal style, rather than a cut-and-paste political wife style. ("Rama Duwaji Is New York City's First Lady, and She's Not Wearing a Sheath Dress," noted Harper's Bazaar magazine approvingly.) Fashion industry paper Women's Wear Daily reported her style choices under the headline "Rama Duwaji's Election Night Look Bridges Brooklyn and the Middle East", noting that Duwaji's denim top, embellished with laser-etched embroidery, was by the Palestinian-Jordanian designer Zeid Hijazi. The choice of a Palestinian designer was widely interpreted as a deliberate and political choice by Duwaji, who has expressed clear and vocal support for the plight of Gaza. Duwaji's velvet and lace Ulla Johnson skirt and silver Eddie Borgo earrings showed support for two independent New York designers drawn from outside the traditional high-status Manhattan names - Oscar de la Renta, Carolina Herrera and Michael Kors - with whom modern first ladies have been most associated.

In their style and in the story of their relationship, Mamdani and Duwaji blend youthful energy with traditional elements. Mamdani maximises his youthful advantage as a digital native and uses social media as a political broadcast channel, but does so while wearing the most traditional of outfits: a dark suit and tie. Duwaji, likewise, steers clear of the first lady cosplay of a pastel skirt suit, but her quirky retro-tinged elegance has a ladylike tone, albeit one forged in the vintage boutiques of Brooklyn rather than the department stores of Fifth Avenue. She has a taste for chunky flat boots and oversized white shirts, layered necklaces and winged black eyeliner. These are recognisable as the authentic style choices of a 28-year-old woman, but they do not present as challenging or radical. Likewise, their love story is both strikingly modern - the two met on Hinge - and solidly traditional in being formalised by marriage. Wedding photos shared on Mamdani's Instagram show the couple holding hands on the subway as they travel to city hall, Duwaji wearing a vintage coat and her trademark flat boots with a short white dress, Mamdani carrying an umbrella. Their combination of romcom-worthy New York spirit and down-to-earth, affordability-conscious relatability has charmed the public.

In the ultimate cultural flex, Duwaji has already had a vibe shift named after her. "Aloof wife autumn" is trending on social media after a New York Post headline reported that the new mayor-elect's "aloof wife ... quietly steered his campaign from behind the scenes". Duwaji's husband is conspicuously absent from her Instagram page, where she posts street selfies in chic monochrome outfits and "things I saw that made me want to make art". Her creative purpose and cool-toned self-possession are in striking contrast to the docile, gingham-aproned "tradwife" aesthetic that has stormed the TikTok algorithms in recent years.

As a visual artist, Duwaji is aware of the power of image-making. She is also comfortable moving in the circles of the more avant garde end of the fashion industry, recently attending a catwalk show for Diotima, which is helmed by Rachel Scott, an American designer of Jamaican heritage who is a rising industry star. Scott, who dedicated the collection to "the honour of all displaced persons", said that she invited Duwaji because she was "intrigued by her work and her personal style".