

**Marisa Abrajano & Zoltan L. Hajnal**

**White Backlash. Immigration, Race, and American Politics**

*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, 216p.*

Nowadays, the US immigration policies occupy the center stage of contemporary political and public discourse inside and outside the country. In a frame of contemporary 2016 US. presidential campaign, immigration and its growing potency for conflicts, relationship between citizens and the newcomers won a special attention at the Republican and Democrat debates. Donald Trump announces a new call for mass migrants' deportations and building a new wall across the US - Mexico border. He also proclaimed the Obama administration's plan to settle Syrian refugees in the country after the terror in Paris "insane". In contrary to Republican statements, Democrat candidates announce the shutdown of detention centers for migrants and introduction of the Obamacare-program to all newcomers, inclusive those who are illegally on the territory of the USA.

The reviewed book consists of a foreword, six chapters united in four parts, a reference section, and an index. Also illustrations and tables are a useful resource describing authors findings in details. Chapter 1 is devoted to a theory of immigration backlash politics that explains how immigration transforms the basic political leaning of white Americans. Chapters 2-3 deal with views on immigration and defection to the Republican Party, explaining correlation between negative views on immigration and a tendency to support Republican candidates at the presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial levels. Part Three of the book united chapters 4-5 searches for the roots of the backlash and growing polarization in American politics. Chapter 6 examines the effects of this backlash on the decision-making policy from state bureaucrats. The conclusions offer a discussion on the impact of the growing implications for political divided USA through shifting role of race in the nation. The authors provide a nuanced reading of electoral relevant data based on personal attitudes toward newcomers among white Americans, pointing out that the consequences of immigration are far from uniform.

Urgency of current book consists in analysis how far immigration issue changes the dynamics of US election and voters' preferences. Because of America's long history telling the story of immigration, the correlation between "being an American" and "being an immigrant" pretty the same and absolutely unlike Europe. "The US is a nation of immigrants..." as once told John F. Kennedy and US presidents after him frequently remind Americans that they share the experience of their forebears leaving another country to begin anew in United States"<sup>1</sup>. Today immigrants and their children represent fully one in four Americans (P.1), however "less than 10 percent of Americans usually rate immigration as the most significant problem facing the country" (P. 32).

The key points of this book are grouped around three conceptual statements. Firstly, changing racial demographics in the United States have made Latinos the largest racial minority in the USA. There are two impact factors that are result of such demographic



challenge. On the one hand, many Latinos in the USA still feel that discussions about immigration are about them (P. 115-116). But their views about the topic are not effectively or proportionally represented in American public or policy debates about immigration. On another hand, immigration and the ration of the newcomers, indeed Latino, do impact whites' core political calculus (P. 108-110). Small wonder that in states where immigrants could benefit from government spending, white Americans have voted to reduce educational, welfare and healthcare funding (P. 131-138). Also, states and neighborhoods that have been "overloaded" by immigrants become less likely to endorse public spending to disadvantaged sectors of the population (P. 31-34).

Secondly, author's findings explore and describe how white Americans respond to immigration reform. The fact is that mass media "threat narrative" towards newcomers is less to identify with Democratic party. However, through 1970s to 1980s white Americans were largely Democratic supporters (P.91), but in last decades shifted from the Democratic to Republican candidates (P. 92). The same pattern is evident at senatorial, gubernatorial (P. 91) and less or more at presidential levels (P. 93-101). Also, formidable shaper of political behavior among white Americans appear to be linked to how mass media covers immigration (P. 169-174). In a fact that media coverage of immigration is significantly negative, i.e. three by one in New York Times (P. 176-178), the public is exposed to dominant negative frame of immigration.

However, authors consistently repeat that immigration is a unique phenomenon, because "it has changed the social group imagery of the parties" (P. 6). They also predict that American electoral arena is changing by two different responses – one largely on the side of immigrants and one largely in opposition to immigration.

Thirdly, racial and ethnic minorities are not blindly loyal to Democrats and/or Republicans (P. 209-216). The racial and ethnic minorities play significant role in the polarization of the American electoral landscape, because Latinos now significantly outnumber African Americans; Asian Americans are the faster growing pan-ethnic group, and white Americans are not far from losing their majority status (P. 29). In addition, authors finding suggest that all minorities are not equal in the minds of white Americans, i.e. Latinos seem to be a "real threat" in contrary to Asian Americans (P. 151-153) or African Americans (P. 214). Quite interesting and perhaps most importantly that white Americans living in the states with high concentration of Asian Americans are more likely to identify themselves as liberals and Democratic Party supporters (P. 143, table 4.3).

Summing up, the book edited by Marisa Abrajano & Zoltan L. Hajnal, is a remarkable contribution to the interdisciplinary field of critical migration studies. It's a book of interest to researchers and practitioners working in the field of political science, demography and migration as it provides insight into the political, demographical, and cultural dimensions of the USA today.

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**Note:**

Martin,F., Midglez, E. Immigration to US., in: Population Bulletin, 54, No.2 (1999)