

Andrew Wroe, *The Republican Party and Immigration Politics. From Proposition 187 to George W. Bush*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

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As the Bush presidency nears its conclusion and the Republican Party maintains its minority status in both houses of Congress for the second consecutive term, it appears that the political dominance enjoyed by the Republicans to varying degrees since 1994 is coming to a close. Given the shifting political environment in Washington at present, now is an opportune moment to consider the extent to which Republicans utilised their political power (while they had it) to shape immigration politics and reform policy between 1994 and 2007.

Andrew Wroe's *The Republican Party and Immigration Politics* is a study of how key Republican figures used the immigration issue, particularly illegal immigration, to reach their own political ends. Wroe explores why citizens and political elites 'turned against immigration' in the mid-1990s and charts the changes in Republican political discourse on immigration (p.2). Wroe suggests that without California's Republican governor Pete Wilson politicising the immigration issue in 1993 and 1994, and without the direct democracy process in which citizens can place initiatives onto the ballot for a popular vote, the immigration issue would not have become as salient as it did. These two factors, the role of Wilson and the direct democracy process, were both the cause and effect of the 'anti-immigrant backlash' (p.3).

It is evident in this book that Wroe's strength is in American politics and direct democracy, not immigration studies. Consequently, the second and third chapters of the book on American immigration history and the early politicisation of immigration, respectively, are characterised by inadequate research and simplification. Wroe exaggerates the liberalism of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The author argues that the visa quotas implemented as a result of the 1965 INA

have been 'generous', yet ignores the fact that the 20,000 visa limit applied to each country since 1965 has created large backlogs and lengthy delays for nationals of high-demand countries, such as Mexico, the Philippines and China. Wroe also describes the 1986 IRCA as 'an inclusive, liberal law' and asserts that the extension of immigration enforcement policies in that law 'was in no way a draconian response to the perceived problem' (p.21). However, IRCA was a complex and compromised piece of legislation: although IRCA did legalise the status of three million unauthorised migrants, it also significantly increased the funding of the Border Patrol, reaffirmed the dependency of American farmers on cheap foreign labour and implemented interior immigration law enforcement policies, some of which had the unintended consequence of increasing discrimination against foreign-looking workers.

It is possible that Wroe has exaggerated the liberalism of the 1965 and 1986 reforms to emphasise the sense of change and drama that occurred in 1994. Wroe explains in his introduction that the purpose of the book is to explore the 'turn against immigration' or the 'anti-immigrant backlash' in the early 1990s. Yet consternation and anxiety about unauthorised immigration had been developing in Washington at least since the early 1970s. It is not so much that political elites and activists suddenly turned against immigration in the early 1990s; anti-immigrant sentiment had been festering for some time. The story should be more about continuity rather than change.

The contribution of Wroe's monograph to the field is his treatment of the electoral success and slow judicial death of Proposition 187 in California in the 1990s. Prop. 187 was a citizen-driven initiative designed to deny unauthorised immigrants in California access to all public benefits and services, excluding emergency health-care, and required service providers to verify and report to the immigration authorities the legal status of immigrants. Wroe notes that even though Prop. 187 was never implemented, its passage was important because it shaped subsequent debates and influenced the legislative agenda of the 104th

Congress (1995-6), and it also demonstrated the ability of citizen-driven initiatives and direct democracy procedures to change policy at the national level. In this section of the book, Wroe provides a lengthy account of how a small group of anti-immigrant activists from Orange County drafted the proposition, developed a pool of 14,000 volunteers who collected 600,000 signatures to qualify the proposition to be placed on the 1994 ballot, and campaigned for the passage of Prop. 187. Wroe interviewed key figures in the campaign and this research offers valuable insights into the use and abuse of the direct democracy process in California. Wroe also considers the role of the Republican Party in the passage of Prop. 187. He concludes that while Republican governor Pete Wilson offered indirect assistance in the form of free publicity and the Republican Party aided the collection of signatures to qualify the initiative for the ballot, this assistance 'was not crucial or even significant' (p.67). Wroe argues that Prop. 187 was, at least in the early stages, a grassroots movement, and it was the volunteers and the activists who shouldered the greatest burden during the qualification and campaigning stages.

In the 1994 election, Prop. 187 passed easily on a 59 percent to 41 percent margin. However, the successful initiative would quickly become bogged down in litigation until its judicial death in 1999. Although Prop. 187 was never put into effect, its influence on national politics was immediate. Wroe asserts that the passage of Prop. 187 created an environment for legislators in Congress that was conducive to major reform at the national level. Specifically, Wroe argues that Prop. 187 'provided the inspiration and blueprint' for the Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act of 1996 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, popularly known as the Welfare Reform Act (p.96). Both acts were major pieces of legislation that included provisions to minimise the use of welfare services by legal and unauthorised immigrants. Wroe explains that Prop. 187 was able to influence the national agenda because the initiative increased the salience of the illegal immigration issue and demonstrated to members of Congress that there were

political advantages to be gained by adopting a tough stance against immigration.

Yet the electoral success of the anti-immigration stance was short-lived. After the humiliating defeat of Bob Dole in the 1996 presidential election, Republicans such as George W. Bush began to wonder if an inclusive, pro-immigration position would offer greater political rewards than the anti-immigrant stance employed to great effect in the mid-1990s. This shift in the policy position of some Republicans was driven to a large degree by the changing electorate. Wroe demonstrates that Latinos were not only increasing their share of the US electorate, but were also registering to vote in greater numbers, motivated to vote in part by the anti-immigration proposals of the mid-1990s. Karl Rove believed that the Republican Party could effectively court Latinos, and indeed should become the 'natural home' of Latinos with the party's emphasis on religion, family values and economic individualism (p.151).

Once in office, Bush set comprehensive immigration reform, including a legalization program for unauthorised immigrants and the establishment of another guestworker program, as one of his top domestic policy goals. In the final chapter of the book, Wroe presents a descriptive, blow-by-blow account of the legislative debates on immigration reform between 2001 and 2007. Although the final chapter is engaging and clearly written, Wroe does not present any analysis or insightful conclusions on the failure of the Bush Administration to push immigration reform through Congress. The weak analysis of the final chapter may be explained in part by the author's limited research. Throughout the book, but particularly in the final chapter, Wroe uses newspaper reports from the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as his main source of information. The author does not consider the ways in which newspaper reports are representations of events deemed significant and important by journalists. In other words, newspapers offer selectively constructed stories rather than impartial translations of reality. Wroe, however, seems to

place a great deal of trust in the abovementioned newspapers at the expense of exploring the voluminous government publications, most of which would be available on the internet. To be sure, Wroe does consult the *CQ Almanac* for voting records and quotations from members of Congress, but this source only provides an overview of legislative debates.

On balance, *The Republican Party and Immigration Politics* offers an engaging narrative and presents an introduction to the politics of immigration between 1994 and 2007. The book should appeal to those with a general interest in contemporary American politics and/or immigration studies.

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