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***Racial Coalition Building in Local Elections: Elite Cues and Cross-Ethnic Voting.* By Andrea Benjamin. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 202 pp., \$99.99 (Cloth)**

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Partisanship is a powerful drug, and remains one of the most powerful predictors of vote choice in U.S. elections. We view candidates and policies through partisan-tinted lenses, and feel strong emotional attachments to our party. In most local elections, however, the partisan factor is removed. While politically sophisticated voters might be able to surmise a candidate's underlying partisanship, most voters instead are marking their ballots without the use of party cues, falling back on other cues such as race and ethnicity or elite endorsements. White, Black, and Latino voters all prefer to vote for members of their own ethnicity or race, but what if no such option is available? Into this void of political science, Benjamin posits that three factors determine vote choice: in-group elite endorsements, the racial and ethnic salience of the campaign, and the race and ethnicity of the viable candidates. Focusing on elite cues, Benjamin opens with an examination of 20 years of mayoral election history in four cities (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston), then turns to multiple unique datasets and survey experiments to explore her Co-ethnic Elite Cues Theory.

White voters and candidates are included in her analysis, but they are not the focus. Benjamin is interested in the predictors of support for Black–Latino coalitions, and how they might lead to better representation of these communities. U.S. cities are increasingly diverse, but, as she notes, in 2016 there were White<sup>1</sup> mayors in 72 of the 100 largest cities in the country (p. 147). In many of those cities, Black and Latino populations form a plurality or even a majority of the population. "It is often assumed that Blacks and Latinos should work together—that is, that

they are natural allies—because of their shared experience as disadvantaged minorities relative to Whites” (p. 9). Yet, they have a slim record of electoral alliances. Here, Benjamin is echoing not only Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984), but, more recently, Sawyer (2005), who argued that Blacks and Latinos share similar concerns over core issues and are struggling against the same institutional racism. The book also complements Wilkinson’s (2015) recent argument that Black–Latino coalitions are affected by how members of those groups view each other. As Benjamin illustrates, co-ethnic elite endorsements not only affect vote choice, but also how individuals see members of other groups. Unfortunately, Benjamin does not engage with all of this work; it is up to the reader to bring her findings into conversation with other recent scholarship.

Benjamin made a few missteps. She repeated twice that non-citizens can contribute in ways other than voting, including making campaign donations, but of course for many non-citizens—those who are not legal permanent residents—that would be a violation of federal law. She never explained why her focus in chapter 1 on four of the five top cities where Blacks and Latinos live did not include Miami (the one with the largest percentage of Black and Latino residents). Overall, however, these quibbles do not detract from the exceptional quality of the work. Benjamin used a variety of types of data to make well-supported and important points about how in-group elite cues can help Blacks and Latinos work together to increase their political representation and power. The book includes a robust mix of real-world examples and sophisticated survey experiment data. It is an engaging read, with chapters that work well in isolation (i.e., for course assignments).

Of course, not all elite endorsements are created equal. For example, Benjamin found that an endorsement from President Barack Obama or Representative Maxine Waters matters more to Black voters than endorsements from Black religious leaders. Benjamin also found consistent evidence that endorsements are not enough: cross-ethnic voting also requires that there be some racial content to the election, for example media attention to the race or ethnicity of the candidates, or a focus in the election on a racialized issue. Black voters, she found, are a more cohesive bloc, and are more easily convinced to vote for a Latino candidate, compared to the ability of elite and contextual cues to encourage Latinos to vote for a Black candidate.

This is mostly a book about Black and Latino voters and candidates, but a crucial aspect that Benjamin addressed is how White voters respond to

explicit Black–Latino coalitions. White voters are still the majority in most cities; will White voters react to calls for coalition by increasing their support for the non-minority (White) candidate in a race? No. White voters are not so easily scared off, although reading about a Black–Latino coalition does lead Whites to express more negative feelings about Blacks. Overall, Benjamin found “White attitudes toward Blacks and Latinos are largely negative, and stable. These do not change even when Blacks and Latinos are working together” (pp. 140–141).

In general, both Black and Latino voters prefer to vote for a candidate from their own group. But often that choice is not available, and they must choose between supporting a White candidate or a candidate from the other group. Latino candidates can reach out for Black elite endorsements and garner increased support from Black voters without fear of alienating White voters. Black candidates may have a harder time turning Latino elite endorsements into Latino votes, but again White support will not be negatively affected. Achieving diversity in more mayoral offices, Benjamin concluded, requires biracial coalitions and endorsements. Given slight differences in how Blacks, Latinos, and Whites respond to her experimental manipulations, and in particular the relative lack of cohesion in the Latino community, she concluded: “The face of the new biracial coalition is likely a Latino face” (p. 151).

#### NOTE

1. In most cases, this *Journal* capitalizes Black, but not white, or capitalizes neither, in our research articles and book reviews. This review’s capitalization of both Black *and* White, reflects the usage adopted by the author and publisher of the book under review.

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