

Minorías políticas en la agenda de Estados Unidos: representación y agenda de cambio

(Political Minorities on the U.S. Agenda: Representation and Agenda for Change)

Estefanía Cruz Lera

Center for Research on North America, UNAM
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In the best democratic systems, minorities —social, economic, gender, racial, ethnic, cultural, and even political minorities— play a fundamental role in determining the public policies that affect them, and in general their rights are respected. Today, this description might seem more like a fairy tale than an undeniable reality. In fact, very few modern states —if any— could presume to fully have a society of this type.

The case of the United States is peculiar in that, while it does have some of the most solid democratic institutions in the world, at least if we analyze them from the point of view of a certain liberal conception of democracy, at the same time, the relations of most of them with minorities, of the political system with the most marginalized social groups, has almost always been questioned. This is because a connection exists that includes, among other worrisome phenomena, discrimination, multiple kinds of stigma, and no fewer examples of violence of all kinds, sadly including structural violence. The latter can-

not be attributed solely to the conservative political culture of certain groups or their customs and traditions, or to the selfish interests of other groups who unconcernedly challenge the rule of law, but rather, these instances of violence must also be studied from the standpoint of government responsibility.

Among its many merits, this book by CISAN researcher Estefanía Cruz delves into the issue with methodological rigor using an institutionalist theoretical approach to clarify and understand how U.S. minorities interact with the political system and its institutions. Her ultimate aim is to explain what kind and how much influence minorities have and how different social and political movements are born within them. Some of the latter have been determinant factors for the history of U.S. democracy, such as the struggles for civil rights in the 1960s, or more contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, or the concern of the very young about ensuring a future for the planet, focusing on the defense of the environment through the decided fight against climate change, with movements, for example, like Sunrise, which was fundamental to Joe Biden’s victory.

In this sense, Cruz Lera clearly conceives of minorities not only as groups of the population that share a history and collective imaginaries, that is, that are joined together mainly because of identity, but also —and this is another of her contributions— by an agenda, by political and social objectives. These groups are heterogeneous internally, but are based in shared struggles and concerns, and manage their interests and demand their rights both in the streets and from civic organizations as well as through the tools that the system itself offers. These tools include representation in federal and state congresses, lobbying, and, above all, the strength of the alliances that their congressional caucuses build and their relations with and participation in the two main —or practically only— political parties competing for public office in the United States.

Cruz Lera’s focus, then, delves deeply into the very important role of the state as a political mediator among different and sometimes counterposed interests, which manages to resolve through democratic deliberation and negotiation the inevitable conflicts to be expected to arise out of the paradox of respecting the desires and aims of the majority and at the same time guaranteeing justice and opportunities for minorities. This is an original ap-

proach to the constitution and development of minorities in the United States, which, through their historic struggles have propitiated not only that the state and its institutions recognize them, but also weigh and accept the validity of their causes. This is why this book also includes a review of the main figures and mechanisms that the U.S. political system has imagined in order to construct inclusive governance, with the participation of all its actors, among them, of course, the minorities. The author reviews, for example, the contribution to this cause of the recognition of collective rights and not merely individual freedoms, the historic struggles for civil rights, the impact of affirmative action in an attempt to empower minority groups that were historically shunted to one side, and finally, the consolidation of concepts like redistributive social and political justice in the tasks of designing and implementing public policies.

Perhaps the book's greatest merit is the author's sweeping review of the many, differentiated motivations that many minorities have had for becoming political actors and social movements. She does this by recognizing that no minority is monolithic and that they all develop currents and factions, often even counterposed to each other in different spheres of society. There are minorities inside minorities, which can reproduce the very mechanisms of the exercise of power that as a whole they criticize more widely in society. This complex reality pushes her to concentrate on the main aspects of each minority analyzed, on those shared by all their members and recognized as fundamental positions. Thus, she deals with movements that have emerged in the Afro-American community in all their complexity. These cover the broad spectrum ranging from the pacifism and civil disobedience advocated by Martin Luther King and his followers, to the more radical positions to break with existing society of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, leading to what is probably one of the most emblematic phenomena of social action in recent times: Black Lives Matter. She does the same with the women's movement, whose battles are conceived of as a constant aspiration to equality, which in each era, in each generation, takes on different meanings: the right to vote, equal wages for equal work, right up to the demand for being able to live life without gender violence, without feminicides, without sexual harassment, and which finds its most contemporary expression in #MeToo. In the case of the Latinx minority, the author covers the

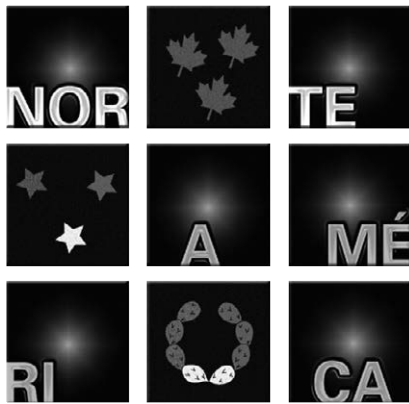
issue of migration and the existence of a growing mass of "illegals" subject to over-exploitation at work. "Here we're going to stay!" shout the members of Latinx organizations of all times, from La Raza to the Chicano movement, or, more recently, Unidos We Dream or the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (Naleo). But, again, the Latinx minority is very far from being coherent and homogeneous, and, as is demonstrated, for example, by the political action of Cubans and the "mixed status" of the population of Hispanic origin, which even includes, paradoxically, anti-immigrant groups.

Some political thinkers would undoubtedly question the decision to consider as minorities the "left" groups that make up the progressive U.S. movement, whose unity depends on Bernie Sanders' ability to keep it together; or the linked political-social movements such as those that advocate for the Green New Deal; or even the very atomized extreme right-wing groups, known as the Alt-right, which defend causes like the expulsion of all undocumented immigrants, white supremacy, and a radical constitutionalism that would always put individual freedoms above social rights. The author does interpret them this way, and with good reason: they are political positions that bring together the discontented, demands and aspirations not only from the territory of identity, but also from the fields of ideologies and religious beliefs. In any case, the book could be a lever for opening up a debate on this issue.

On the other hand, the lack of analysis of groups that have been either historic or unquestionable contemporary protagonists is noteworthy and even a bit disconcerting. This is the case of Native Americans or the LGBTQ+ community. But this comment is made in the spirit of constructive criticism and to motivate another book.

Estefanía Cruz Lera's work reviewed here contributes to filling a void in the Spanish-language literature about minorities in the United States. Her aim is to understand them comprehensively and as a complex social phenomenon whose analysis is indispensable for situating contemporary governance of the United States. It undoubtedly constitutes an original approach among the multitude of studies that have proliferated about specific minorities, especially Afro-Americans, Latinxs and women. **NM**

Diego Ignacio Bugada Bernal
Editor of *Voices of Mexico*



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Centro de Investigaciones
sobre América del Norte
(Center for Research
on North America)
Universidad Nacional
Autónoma de México

Av. Universidad 3000,
Torre II de Humanidades, piso 9
Ciudad Universitaria, Coyoacán,
04510, México, D. F.

Información general
namerica@unam.mx
www.cisan.unam.mx/Norteamerica

Ventas
voicesmx@unam.mx

Telephone
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