

Mikhail A. Alexseev. *Immigration Phobia and the Security Dilemma: Russia, Europe, and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. viii, 286 pp. \$70.00.

Immigration phobia is an ancient phenomenon that has attracted much attention from statesmen, politicians, philosophers, and social scientists who have offered various explanations for its origins, none of them entirely convincing, according to Mikhail Alexseev, professor of political science at San Diego State University. Drawing on surveys and case studies from Europe, the United States, and the Russian Far East, the author documents the global reach of anti-migrant sentiments in the post-September 11 world.

The introductory chapter is a *tour de force* designed to show how existing theories miss the mark and to lay the groundwork for an alternative explanation. The “security-dilemma perspective,” as the author calls his approach, is fleshed out in a series of chapters demonstrating how the proposed thesis can fill the gaps in the established lines of inquiry. The last chapter reviews the policy options that can tackle the rapid spread of the migration-driven alarmism and stem the noxious tide of the anti-immigrant proposals flooding the legislative halls in many countries. Several appendices provide generous details about the datasets on which this study is based, including the Primorski 2000 survey of antimigrant attitudes the author conducted in the Russian Far East. The last section features The Immigration Phobia Self-Test for readers wishing to gauge their immigration tolerance quotient.

As fodder for his paradigm, the author uses several theories whose predictions are at odds with empirical evidence. Thus, the realistic threat approach ties anti-migrant alarmism to the encroachment on a particular habitat that diminishes the host population’s economic resources, breeds unemployment, generates material hardships, and thus engenders hostility toward the incoming migrants. However, Canadian studies conducted in the last decade of the twentieth century reveal that declining employment rates and job prospects do not produce a corresponding spike in antimigrant sentiments, which can actually go up in a markedly improved economic climate. By the same token, U.S. studies indicate that the counties with the highest influx of immigrants and the toughest market conditions can show the lowest levels of anti-migrant hostility. So much for the realistic threat hypothesis.

The “symbolic threat” theory links immigration phobia to the symbolic assault on identity and privileged status that the native population associates with the ethnic other’s unwillingness or inability to blend with the dominant culture. Samuel Huntington is a well known proponent of such a theory, which, according to Alexseev, is inconsistent with the fact that identity politics and anti-immigrant fear-mongering often flourish in territories and neighborhoods well before the invading migrants have had the chance to establish a beachhead and coalesce into a viable ethnic force.

The “contact hypothesis” blames anti-migrant virulence on the increased rates of interaction between the host population and the migrant groups moving into a new area. Once again, the author marshals evidence that the hostility toward newcomers may actually decrease with the rise of the frequency and intensity of contacts between the established and migrant populations.

The author derives his perspective from a seminal paper published in 1950 by John Herz where he articulated “the security dilemma [that] emphasized this linkage between authority strength and the yearning for preemptive self-defense even in the absence of clear and present threats to security” (p. 34). At the heart of this perspective is the notion that the real or perceived anarchy and government weakness induces people to exaggerate or invent threats from outsiders and seek security in preemptive hostilities aimed at unfriendly neighbors, migrant populations,

would-be invaders, and assorted outsiders allegedly threatening the establish social order. Adopting this theoretical orientation to migration studies and translating it into an ambitious research program, Alexseev comes up with this proposition: “Immigration phobia in host societies is likely to be more intense, the more acute perceptions of emergent anarchy, the more ambiguous the sense of migrant intentions, and the more distinct and cohesive the perceived ‘groupness’ of migrants.” (p. 69).

With his framework in place, Alexseev examines the survey data from different parts of the world, shows how his security-dilemma perspective solves the puzzles left in the aftermath of existing studies, lays out an agenda for future research grounded in the new formulations, and offers policy recommendations to stem the rising tide of anti-immigrant activism. The author’s writing is lucid; the treatment he offers is comprehensive; there is little doubt that the book under review will be required reading for scholars and policy makers grappling with this thorny issue.

I see several problems with this study. The gist of the author’s critique of established theories has to do with their failure to connect anti-migrant attitudes to the objective realities they purport to describe. The real threat perspective fails to account for the rise in alarmism when no measurable threat is in evidence or for the absence of hostilities in situations where economic opportunities dwindle. The symbolic threat hypothesis does not explain why the host population grows alarmed about its cultural preeminence in some cases and not in other, even where immigrants have acquired visible presence and followed distinct customs. The fluctuation in anti-migrant attitudes is also weakly associated with observed contacts between local and migrant populations. Given this line of argument, one would expect the author to offer a theory that does a better job linking attitudinal measures with some demographic, economic, or behavioral data – that is not the case, however.

There is a half-a-page section in the book on the linkage between immigration phobia as the author defines the term and socio-demographic variables, which shows no significant association between the nonverbal parameters and the belief that “the arrival of immigrants strained the system of social benefits, harmed education, or contributed to crime” (p. 176). “This finding should not be prematurely interpreted as a claim that sociodemographic variables have no impact on antiimmigrant alarmism and hostility” (p. 172), concludes the author, yet he offers no further discussion of how the security-dilemma-based measurements can improve on the traditional theories which fail to align anti-migrant attitudes with socio-demographic characteristics.

Nor can I find in the book an explanation of why the rise in anti-migrant sentiments has not been reflected in voters’ behavior. In “situations where a more powerful ethnic group lost its privileged position in the pecking order to a less powerful group and opted to reverse the perceived injustice by force” (p. 42), one would expect a corresponding rise in voters’ support for the anti-immigrant parties. However, no strong association appears to sustain this case. The author reports the European Union polling data showing that in the late 1990s “44 percent of respondents found minorities threatening” (p. 151), but the voting patterns in the same time period indicate that the right-wing parties managed to attract less than a quarter of the electorate supposedly committed to Europe-fortress politics.

Now, such criticism might seem unfair in light of the security-dilemma framework’s emphasis on what is variously described as “an emotional logic,” “the logic of anxiety,” and “the perceptual logic of threat exaggeration” (pp. 37, 32). “Overall, the security-dilemma perspective . . . emphasizes the role of uncertainty and vulnerability in exaggerating socioeconomic and cultural threats,” explains the author (p. 209). And again (p. 210), “The security-dilemma logic is more

attuned to *perceptions* of ethnic imbalance and to the fact that such perceptions would be affected by the public's sense of central authority, by context-specific histories of intergroup relationships, by intergroup distinctiveness, by socioeconomic effects of migration, by individual sensitivities to majority-minority status reversal, and by priming effects of political discourses in the media." But elsewhere, Alexseev tells us that his study is meant to do more than dwell on anti-migrant attitudes and intolerance measured in traditional research, that his framework is designed to track "behavioral proclivities," "antiminority alarmism, hostility, and violence" (p. 48). The author cites Gordon Allport on how intolerant attitudes morph from negative language, avoidance, and discrimination into physical attacks and extermination, and then he tells us that his definition "encompasses primarily the third and the fourth 'degrees of negative actions' as defined by Allport: exclusionist discrimination and physical attack" (p. 29). I do not see the operational measures encoded in the surveys rising to this level of behavioral hostility. The author is firmly lodged in the dispositional domain; the impressive correlations he reports are due primarily to the fact that he operates with different sets of dispositional variables.

The fact that the respondents hostile toward immigrants and supporting exclusionist policies also profess to be concerned with dwindling job opportunities, encroaching migrant customs, and the government's ability to maintain law and order does not tell us much of how they are going to act. The causal link remains elusive here, as respondents with a hostile attitude blame it on the deteriorating economic, social, and cultural situation. Case studies cited in the text in support of the stated conclusions are of limited value, for they are retrospective and postdictive rather than prospective and predictive in nature. We do know from research on attitude-behavior consistency that the association between dispositional variables and overt behavior generally does not exceed the level of .20-.30, which means that about 10 percent of the variance in overt behavior can be accounted for by the attitudinal measures. By contrast, the author traces as much as 50 percent of the variance in the phenomena under study to the dependent variables. This is yet another sign that the present research remains ensconced in the verbal domain and does not enter the behavioral domain.

Since at least 1958 when De Fleur and Westie published their seminal paper, we have known that behavioral proclivities cannot be inferred from verbally expressed attitudes and written intentions. Hotel proprietors who refused to cater to minority clientele in their prior statements actually offered lodging to minority customers once they showed up on the doorstep. The real challenge is to explain what drove the prejudiced proprietors' conduct rather than how they acquired their discriminatory attitudes.

Clearly, the author is aware of the issue. As Alexseev informs the reader, his study "has focused predominantly on hostility rather than on actual conflict – and the distance between the two is still substantial even though they are interrelated" (p. 221). The term "behavioral proclivity" deployed by the author straddles the middle ground between attitudes and behavior, but it does not bridge the gap between the two. The Far East survey conducted by the author "was designed to identify bases of public support for aggressive antimigrant activism – something that would explain the probability of antimigrant behavior" (p. 146). Alas, I do not see how the security-dilemma framework developed in the book improves the predictive power of the attitudinal data when it comes to behavioral outcomes.

The problems I found in this study are endemic to survey research. Those working in this venerable tradition scout the popular domain for opinions, stereotypes, and discourses commensurate with the *zeitgeist*. Having zeroed in on a verbiage making round in a given population, survey researchers find reliable expressions of popular sentiments and invite respondents to

separate those they subscribe to from those they decry. The resulting measurement instrument reliably gauges the respondents' knee jerk reaction to a stereotypical expression in a context-free setting. Yet the more reliable the measurement it produces, the farther removed it is from the confused realities respondents experience in everyday life where their verbal attitudes are inexorably tied to the context and their behavior proves highly situational. The validation process must take the researcher outside the verbal domain into the ecologically realistic situation. Otherwise, the context-impooverished verbal markers get disconnected from the situationally-bound conduct, as the artificially induced reliability of survey data is purchased by the ecological validity of nonverbal behavior. Put differently, the relationship obtaining between reliability and validity is that of uncertainty – the two cannot be maximized simultaneously with an arbitrary precision. One way we can counteract the tendency to sacrifice validity to reliability in survey research is to supplement survey data with the insights from participant observation and ethnographic studies.

The proportion of noncitizens in some industrialized nations is now exceeding 20 percent. There is no doubt that we face a major problem with immigration phobia. The disarray that followed the Soviet Union's collapse has added to the anxieties of the local populations displeased with the influx of migrant workers. Mikhail Alexseev did an important service detailing the cost of immigrant alarmism and the exclusionist policies it engenders. The data he has assembled is revealing; the discussion he offers is enlightening, especially when it comes to what he calls "puzzles" and "paradoxes" plaguing researchers in this area; and it is my hope that in the future he will bring his theoretical framework to bear on the thorny issue of attitude-behavior consistency as it applies to immigration dynamics.

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