

PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

My Countries, Right or Wrong

"Ethnic Groups and Foreign Policy" by Charles McC. Mathias, Jr., in *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1981), 428 East Preston St., Baltimore, Md. 21202.

Of late, foreign governments—Taiwan, South Korea, South Africa—have sought to affect U.S. foreign policy by lobbying Congress. But the "real powerhouses of foreign influence are homegrown" and frequently cultivated by vote-conscious politicians, writes Mathias, the Republican senior Senator from Maryland.

Irish-Americans were the first ethnic activists, in the early 20th century. Their opposition to British rule over the Emerald Isle helped delay U.S. entry into World War I and strained U.S. relations with London during the crucial interwar years. More recently, powerful Irish-American politicians such as the "Four Horsemen" (U.S. Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Daniel P. Moynihan, Governor Hugh Carey of New York, and House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill) have called for a "united Ireland." Dublin has cautioned U.S. legislators against giving in to demands by private U.S. groups (such as the Irish National Caucus) for congressional hearings on the subject.

American Jews, by contrast, remained quiet on foreign issues until after World War II, for fear of arousing Gentile hostility. The Nazi Holocaust helped change that. As early as 1946, respect for the "Jewish vote" had pushed Harry Truman into endorsing the establishment of Israel against advice from diplomatic and military aides. More recently, the influential "Israel lobby"—at Israel's behest—has fought closer U.S. military ties with oil-rich Saudi Arabia. Jewish groups also induced Congress to pass the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment linking more trade with the Soviets to freedom of emigration for Soviet Jews. The amendment backfired. The Kremlin angrily canceled a 1972 U.S.-Soviet trade pact and curtailed the Jewish exodus.

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In 1974, groups claiming to represent three million Greek-Americans pushed an arms embargo through Congress in retaliation for Turkey's (unlawful) invasion of Cyprus. Turkey, a NATO ally like Greece, closed 26 valuable local U.S. installations. Even so, the embargo remained in force for three years. (The Turks are still on Cyprus.)

Ethnic lobbies have reminded legislators of the "moral" issues in foreign policy (e.g., the plight of southern Africa's blacks), Mathias observes. But their single-minded devotion too often hinders coherent U.S. diplomacy. Ethnic interest groups must realize that solutions to world problems now transcend "the boundaries of ethnic group, race, and nation."

Emotion and Single Interests

"The Attitude-Action Connection and the Issue of Gun Control" by Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser, in *Annals of the American Academy* (May 1981), American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, 3937 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.

Congress has never passed a gun control law, despite the fact that public opinion polls over the past two decades have consistently shown 70 percent of the population favoring such legislation. The standard explanation for this discrepancy has been that gun control opponents feel much more strongly about the issue than do proponents. Schuman and Presser, sociologists at the University of North Carolina, dispute this.

In 1978, they inserted two questions into a University of Michigan survey to gauge the "intensity" and "centrality" of the gun control issue in respondents' minds. Surprisingly, slightly more people who favored gun permits reported holding "extremely strong" convictions (18 percent) than did anti-permit people (17 percent). At the other end of the "intensity scale," the results were similar. Only 17 percent of the pro-control respondents said their feelings were "not strong at all," while 24 percent of their foes gave that response.

The "centrality" question asked respondents how the issue would affect their vote for or against a candidate for Congress. This time, 7.7 percent of the anti-permit respondents said the issue would be "one of the most important" determinants of their vote, compared to 5.4 percent of those favoring permits. Schuman and Presser note that because there are so many more people who favor permits, the percentages translate into a nearly equal number of "single issue" voters.

But later, the authors asked the same people what they actually did about their beliefs. About 12 percent of all respondents said they had written a letter to a public official or donated money to a lobbying group. But almost two-thirds of these "activists" were opponents of gun control legislation. Put another way, slightly more than 20 percent of all the opponents surveyed were "activists," versus only 7.1 percent of the supporters. That big difference, Schuman and Presser suspect, was the result of mobilization efforts by anti-gun control lobbies such