

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

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

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as the National Rifle Association.

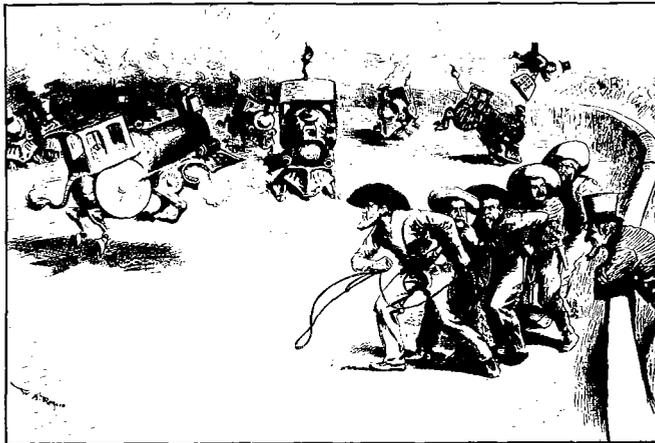
On some issues, such as abortion, say the authors, subjective feelings clearly do determine the degree of an individual's activism. But, as the gun control issue illustrates, the connection between individual action and organized efforts by special-interest groups is "more subtle and more reciprocal than is often recognized."

Progressivism's Ironic Fate

"The Discovery that Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism" by Richard L. McCormick, in *The American Historical Review* (Apr. 1981), 400 A St. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

Where does progressivism fit into American history? Did its burst of political and economic reforms in the early 20th century sever the unseemly ties of politics to Big Business and restore government to "the people"? Or was the Progressive Era an age of government accommodation with business and a triumph for "robber barons" who captured and controlled new regulatory bodies? Both views are partly correct, argues McCormick, a Rutgers historian.

Large-scale industrialization during the 1890s shook the complacency of many Americans over their governments' long-standing practice of boosting railroads, utilities, and other corporations. The economy's slow recovery from the Panic of 1893 touched off labor violence and



From Harper's Weekly, April 9, 1887.

Early U.S. regulators set out to tame the railroads; this 1887 cartoon shows the high hopes of Progressive reformers.