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# Toward a new paradigm of convergence in lobby-state interactions: global challenges, communication, and transparency

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**Introduction:** As decision-making processes and institutional structures have become more complex, lobbies have gained social relevance. Their role in the governance approach, as well as the strategies they use to exert influence, are constantly changing and require ongoing adaptation to the environment in which they operate.

**Methods:** With this in mind, this theoretical article aims to explore the current paradigm of interactions between lobbying groups and the state. To achieve this objective, a systematic literature review is conducted, focusing on the conceptualization, characterization, and classification of these entities, while considering the evolution and changes over time as key factors in evaluating trends in contact with decision-makers.

**Results:** Overall, the dynamic nature of lobbies is highlighted, both in their organizational structure and modes of operation. Additionally, it is noted that the turbulent socio-political context of recent years has led to changes in social issues and how they are perceived by the public.

**Discussion:** From the authors' perspective, these developments have fostered a convergence of public and private interests, giving rise to a new landscape in lobby-state interactions. Illustrative areas where this convergence is particularly evident include climate policy, technological governance, public health, and international trade, among others.

## KEYWORDS

lobbying, pressure groups, politics, democratic governance, society, transparency, information asymmetry

## 1 Introduction

The increasing interconnection between various sectors and social actors has led to heightened awareness of existing issues, especially considering the emergence of new communication channels (Severo et al., 2019). This, in turn, has resulted in greater demands for concrete solutions and measures to address these concerns (Boon and Edler, 2018). Within this context, lobbies are organizations that seek to influence the authorities' decision-making processes (Campos and Giovannoni, 2007; Lock and Davidson, 2024; Woll, 2006). They act as intermediaries in defending civil society's interests against the state and are viewed as a fundamental part of democratic practice,

particularly due to the specific and adaptable information they possess, which aligns with the legislative procedures they aim to influence (Awad, 2024; Chalmers, 2013).

Given the importance of these organizations in the current political sphere, and the dynamic, evolving nature of their actions, this perspective article is structured around the general objective of exploring the current paradigm of interactions between lobbying groups and the state. To achieve this, the methodological proposal consists of a systematic literature review that integrates three sections: (3) conceptualization and characterization of lobbies, (4) classification of lobbies, and (5) discussion of the current paradigm in lobby-state interactions.

The contribution of this article to the scientific literature should be understood as a starting point to better comprehend the evolving role of lobbies in political decision-making processes. This research does not aim to exhaust the debate or provide definitive answers; rather, it offers a theoretical synthesis that enhances understanding of the dynamics surrounding these organizations and their interactions with the state. In doing so, it seeks to lay the groundwork for future empirical and comparative studies that examine how lobbies engage with authorities across varying institutional settings, thematic areas, and geographic regions.

In that sense, the distinguishing element of this research stems from its integrative approach, which goes beyond describing or classifying lobbies. Instead, it systematically connects the conceptualization, characterization, and classification of these organizations with the evolving paradigm of their interactions with the state. By bridging these three dimensions, the study offers an interpretation of the transformations that have recently reshaped the relationship between lobbies and public authorities. This allows for a deeper understanding of how lobbying practices adapt to contemporary political, institutional, and societal shifts, thereby enriching theoretical discussions and informing future empirical inquiries.

## 2 Methodology: systematic literature review

As outlined above, the systematic literature review is structured around the three core sections of the article: (3) conceptualization and characterization of lobbies, (4) classification of lobbies, and (5) discussion of the current paradigm in lobby-state interactions. This review follows a structured and transparent approach designed to enhance rigor and minimize potential selection bias.

The first step of the review process consists of identifying the relevant literature. To this end, two types of documents are considered: peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books. The primary sources of information are the academic databases Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, with a particular focus on specialized journals dedicated to interest groups, lobbying, and European governance. Across the three sections of the review, the search keywords consistently included “lobbying,” “lobby,” “lobbies,” “interest groups,” and “pressure groups.” These general terms are complemented with additional, section-specific keywords and timeframes to ensure thematic precision:

- (3) conceptualization and characterization of lobbies: the review prioritizes literature published from 2000 onwards to capture contemporary conceptualizations of lobbying activity within modern democratic contexts. The search strategy incorporates

keywords such as “definition,” “concept,” “conceptualization,” “characteristics,” “characterization,” “structure,” “advocacy,” and “influence” to identify works that elucidate the nature, functions and structural features of these organizations.

- (4) classification of lobbies: a broader timeframe, starting from 1950, is applied to encompass both seminal works and recent developments in the typologies of lobbies. Keywords such as “typology,” “classification,” “taxonomy,” “organizational forms,” “public,” and “private” are used to identify literature that examines how lobbies are categorized according to their organizational structures, sectors and modes of interaction with policymakers.
- (5) discussion of the current paradigm in lobby-state interactions: to ensure a focus on recent developments, the review concentrates on literature published from 2010 onwards. The search emphasizes keywords such as “state,” “interaction,” “globalization,” “governance,” “transparency,” “accountability,” “trends,” “communication,” and “regulation.” This approach allows for the identification of studies that analyze how the relationship between lobbies and public authorities evolves in response to global challenges, regulatory transformations, and changing governance practices.

The specific selection of sources is guided by their relevance to the three sections of the review. Included are works that define lobbying, explore their theoretical foundations, and describe their organizational structures, strategies and operational characteristics. Studies that propose typologies or taxonomies based on the type of interests represented or the organizational forms of lobbying groups are also taken into account. In addition, priority is given to research that examines recent evolutions in lobbying practices, the relation between public and private interests, and shifts in lobby-state interactions driven by socio-political developments. To ensure balance and comprehensiveness, the review incorporates literature that reflects diverse geographic contexts, addresses different types of lobbies, and employs a range of theoretical and empirical approaches.

Consequently, the inclusion criteria focus on works that provide conceptual clarity, theoretical depth, or empirical evidence directly related to the three sections, particularly in international contexts. The exclusion criteria eliminate publications with a solely historical focus unrelated to current lobbying practices, opinion pieces or commentaries that lack analytical rigor, and studies on non-political advocacy that do not involve interactions with state institutions.

It is also important to note that sources are selected based on their academic rigor, theoretical contribution, and recognition within the field. Particular emphasis is placed on works authored by leading scholars in lobbying, interest group politics, or public affairs; publications featured in established academic journals or issued by reputable academic publishers; and studies that are either frequently cited or widely regarded as foundational or influential within their respective thematic areas. These selection criteria are also informed by the expertise of the authors of this article, who are specialists in the subject matter.

## 3 Conceptualization and characterization of lobbies: focus on the decision-making process

When it comes to conceptualizing lobbies, the first challenge is terminological. The opaque nature of their activities often leads these

entities and their workers to operate under various names. This lack of transparency complicates the clear understanding of their true role (Laboutková and Vymětal, 2023). The most common terms used to refer to lobbies are “interest groups” and “pressure groups.” In academic literature, these terms are often used interchangeably, although they carry different connotations.

Many authors have explored these differences, concluding that interest groups gather individuals around shared concerns, fostering social cohesion, while pressure groups focus on influencing political decisions through strategic actions aimed at institutions (Binderkrantz, 2005; Castillo, 2011; Galan, 2012; Grant, 2021). The key distinction lies in the execution of actions designed to sway policymakers in favor of the interests they represent. Accordingly, Berry and Wilcox (2008) and Grant (2003) consider that pressure groups directly intervene in the political sphere to influence or change decision-making.

The most common way to classify the strategic actions of lobbies is by distinguishing between direct and indirect tactics. Direct lobbying influences public authorities through direct contact with officials and legislators, using techniques such as meetings and participation in committees to communicate their arguments (Chamberlain et al., 2023; Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2024). In contrast, indirect or grassroots lobbying seeks to shape public opinion and apply pressure on decision-makers through media, social networks, or citizen mobilization, aiming to strengthen the group's position in the political process (Cluverius, 2021; Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2025; Olejnik, 2023; Yates, 2023).

Beyond terminology, the theoretical conceptualization of lobbies also presents discrepancies and inherent complexity, shaped by the varied interests and demands of contemporary society. A common view is that lobbies seek to impose particular interests, whether their own or those they represent, over general ones (Hernández-Vigueras, 2013). Under this assumption, the ideal relationship, from the organization's standpoint, links lobbying with the preservation and achievement of advantages for business sectors over the public sector, emphasizing its role as a political action rooted in the “right to petition” (Mascott, 2007; Pascual and De Uribe-Salazar, 2012).

Although this traditional perspective on the predominance of particular interests in operational development applies mainly to economically motivated lobbies, it can also encompass a wide range of groups focused on social issues. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the concept requires examining it from multiple dimensions. Various studies have examined the public or private nature of the interests represented by lobbies (e.g., Bitonti, 2020; Coen and Katsaitis, 2024; Grose et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2024; Raknes and Ihlen, 2020; Richan, 2013), leading to diverse conclusions. This diversity may be explained by the fact that, today, these actors face a variety of issues, many of which involve converging interests between the public and private spheres. These overlaps stem from the global nature of the challenges they address, which often require collaborative action. The authors view this as a key factor driving the alignment of interests and actions between lobbies and the state, a topic further explored in the discussion section.

In seeking common defining elements about lobbies, some alignment among perspectives can be observed. As noted, most authors agree that, for a group to be considered a lobby, it must direct its demands toward government bodies; additionally, some argue that these efforts must originate outside the institutions and aim to shape public policy (e.g., Choi et al., 2015; Coen et al., 2024; Dwidar, 2022;

Weymouth, 2012). It is essential to nuance this idea by distinguishing between attitude, the development of action methodologies oriented toward a cause, and the consideration of the direct influence of these actions. The common denominator is the representation of interests before the state, without making a subjective evaluation of the outcome. Additionally, the breadth of this assertion requires caution against potential confusion with other groups attempting to influence decision-making, such as social movements or political parties (Jolicœur, 2020; Solís-Delgadillo, 2017).

Therefore, lobbies should be understood as bridges between society and political institutions (Bouwen and McCown, 2007). This relationship necessitates the autonomous nature of the parties involved. Independence is presumed for the state, but it must also be respected reciprocally. One factor that can strengthen this mutual autonomy is the stable and enduring structure of the organization, an element commonly found in most definitions of lobbies. Indeed, a stable organizational structure is crucial for an organization with common interests to undertake actions that influence decision-making processes in favor of its objectives (Berkhout, 2024; Solís-Delgadillo, 2017; Vesa et al., 2020).

## 4 Classification of lobbies: evolution of interests and organizational complexity

Just as the conceptualization and characterization of lobbies generated discrepancies among researchers, the classification of these actors is also a complex issue that has sparked considerable interest and study within the scientific community. Taxonomies have been established using criteria such as the internal structure of the organization (Castillo, 2011; Hall, 1969), the domain in which they operate (Merle, 1959), the legal categorization under which the entity is grouped (Del Campo-García, 2001), the types of actions they implement (Xifra, 2009), or the individuals exerting potential influence (Binderkrantz et al., 2017). However, two main classification approaches prevail.

The first approach relates to the nature of the interests they represent. Different terminologies are used, but many frameworks establish a binary division between pressure groups that promote public interest causes and those that defend economic or private interests. Public perception varies significantly between these types of entities, being more favorable toward groups whose interests benefit the common good.

The origin of this dichotomy lies in the classification established by Sauvy (1956), who differentiated lobbies based on whether their interests involve broad or narrow pressure. Von Beyme (1986) further categorized them depending on whether the interest is specialized economic or public, aligning closely with Grant (1989). Watson and Shackleton (2003) associated public interests with social issues and private interests with economic matters, while Córdova (2010) explicitly clarified the difference between these categories, distinguishing between public and private interests. Finally, Molins López-Rodó et al. (2016) took this a step further by listing subcategories based on the type and specificity of the interests.

Additionally, in terms of classifications based on interests, it is important to consider a framework that accounts not only for the organization's overarching goals but also for the extent to which it

incorporates its members' concerns and the intensity of those concerns. Holyoke (2014) used these classification criteria, distinguishing four types of lobbies accordingly (see Figure 1).

In this regard, it is noteworthy that many of the aforementioned categorizations involve a hybridization between the type of interests and the nature of the organizations. For example, Von Beyme (1986) divides groups into five additional categories based on the nature of the entity: business and investor organizations, trade unions, professional and corporate groups, promotional groups and private initiative civic associations, and political associations.

In fact, the organizational nature serves as the second most common classification criterion in the scientific literature. To contextualize the activities of lobbies, it is not enough to understand the interests driving them; it is also necessary to delve into the structural forms under which they operate. Based on this premise, Ortuño (2022) proposes five typologies: economic groups (employer associations, agricultural and farming organizations, unions and cooperatives, professional organizations, companies, and public enterprises); social groups (cultural and educational associations, youth and student movements, humanitarian associations, and religious societies); political groups (ideological organizations and specialized political organizations); institutional groups (the military and related associations, the church and related associations, and public servant organizations); and other organizations. Numerous authors (e.g., Anastasiadis, 2014; Graziano, 2001; Gurvitch, 1950; Hall, 1969; Nicoll, 2007) present very similar classifications that could generally be framed within the five categories established by Ortuño (2022).

One of the most relevant and widely used classifications in lobbying research is the one adopted by the EU's Transparency Register. This classification also distinguishes lobbies based on their organizational nature, establishing 13 different categories: "Academic institutions," "Associations and networks of public authorities," "Companies and groups," "Law firms," "NGOs and similar organizations," "Other organizations, public or mixed entities," "Organizations representing churches," "Professional consultancies," "Self-employed workers," "Think tanks and research institutions," "Trade and business associations," and "Trade unions and professional associations."

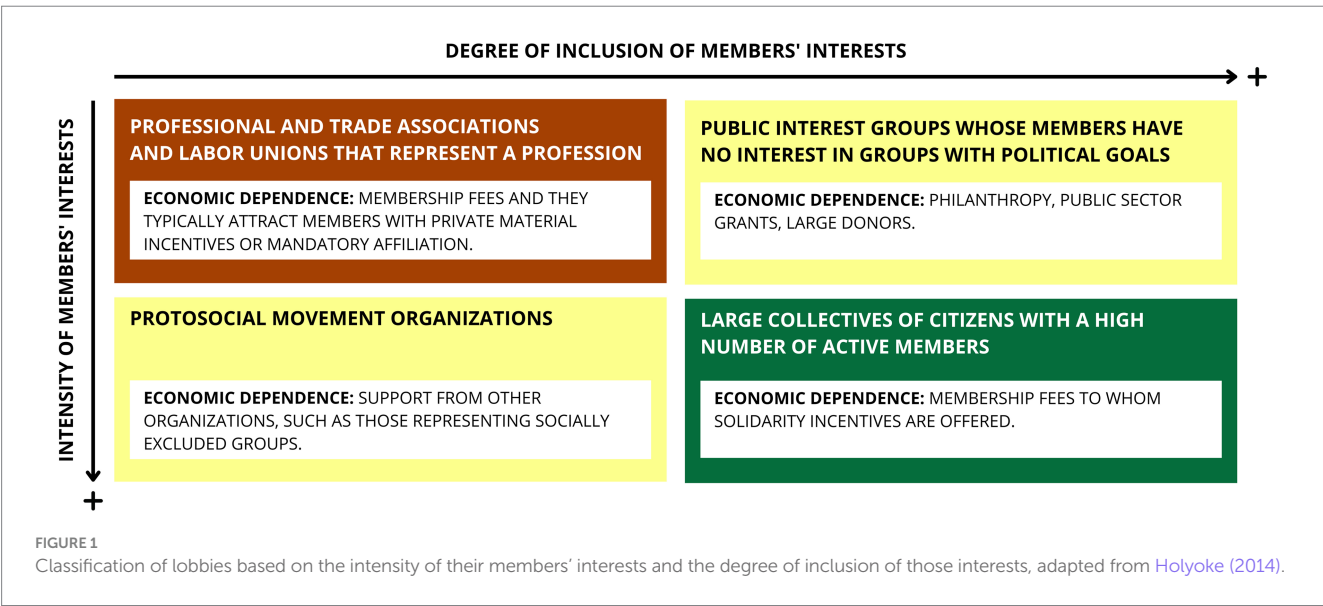
5 Discussion of the of the current paradigm in lobby-state interactions

This discussion section, based on the systematic literature review on the concept, characteristics, and classifications of lobbies, aims to explore the current paradigm of interaction between lobbies and the state.

The most notable observation in the theory of lobbies is their dynamic nature. It is crucial to examine their actions from an evolutionary perspective, considering their operational environment and assessing their progression and adaptation to changes (Awad, 2024; Coen et al., 2024). This adaptability is particularly important today, as it has contributed to create an optimal environment for the strengthening of relations with public officials. The necessity of interaction with the state, alongside with the nature of these interactions, is one of the most prominent elements in the conceptualizations of lobbies that have been explored (Binderkrantz, 2005; Castillo, 2011; Galan, 2012; Grant, 2021). The proximity of these interactions has evolved recently, making it relevant to examine the changes and their relation to the classification of lobbies, ultimately assessing the role they play in public policy formulation.

From the authors' perspective, the conceptual, operational, and classificatory evolution of lobbying groups, along with the analysis of the socio-political context, suggests a potential convergence in the activities and interests between lobbies and the state. To delve into this convergence, it is essential to evaluate the causes from the perspectives of the three key actors in the process: society, lobbies, and the state.

The starting point is society itself and its perceptions and responses to social issues. In this context, the interdependence among existing problems in the political, social, and economic spheres is particularly important (Genc, 2023), especially within the framework of the new context of information consumption and dissemination (Severo et al., 2019). As problems become globalized, they increasingly intersect, resulting in the overlap of issues concerning both state and private organizations across various areas. Moreover, the growing public awareness of these issues and the demand for coordinated solutions (Boon and Edler, 2018) contribute to the coexistence of





lobbies and the state and facilitate their organic and structured integration into decision-making processes.

The main demand of society when addressing these issues is transparency in the actions taken by the state. Closely related to this, one of the main trends in recent years among lobby groups has been the promotion of accountability in their interactions with decision-makers (Dinan, 2021; Serna-Ortega et al., 2025), with legislation in this area playing a particularly significant role (Bitonti and Mariotti, 2023). A clear example of this is the creation of transparency registers and other tools that promote accountability in interactions between lobbies and decision-makers (Dinan, 2021; Greenwood and Dreger, 2013; Serna-Ortega et al., 2024a). This transition to transparency can be interpreted in both positive and negative lights. From a skeptical perspective, it could be seen as a strategy to align with prevailing social values, which, according to Andersen and Eliassen (1991), can condition the influence of these organizations, also partially in line with Scott (2014). On the other hand, assuming the good intentions of lobbying groups, this trend could signify a move toward public interests, at the expense of private or economic interests. In other words, a mutual rapprochement between the state and lobbies may be occurring, with both parties working together to improve their relationship and the quality of governance processes.

Regardless of how lobbies operationalize new social demands and the potential factors influencing their approach, the state has also made efforts to bring positions closer together. In recent times, there has been exponential growth in the presence of pressure groups on political agendas (Coen et al., 2024; Hanegraaff and Poletti, 2021; Serna-Ortega et al., 2024b). The trend and the ease with which lobbies monitor and document their interactions have been helpful in this process.

All of this has challenged the traditional dichotomous distinction found in many studies, which classified lobbying groups according to whether they defended public or private interests (e.g., Córdova, 2010; Grant, 1989; Molins López-Rodó et al., 2016; Sauvy, 1956; Von Beyme, 1986; Watson and Shackleton, 2003), by beginning to blur the boundaries and making the line between these interests increasingly diffuse (Serna-Ortega et al., 2025). This idea is disruptive compared to

many of the approaches in studies conducted a decade ago (Hernández-Vigueras, 2013; Mascott, 2007; Pascual and De Uribe-Salazar, 2012). Related research is still in its early stages, making it highly relevant to explore how interests are gradually converging and the possible causes of this phenomenon as a future line of inquiry. It would also be interesting to investigate who benefits most from this convergence and whether it has arisen autonomously or in response to specific needs from one of the parties involved.

Paradoxically, classifications of lobbies based on their organizational nature have led to a proliferation of typologies. A clear example of this complexity can be found in Ortuño's (2022) proposal, which is more elaborate than previous categorizations based on this criterion (e.g., Anastasiadis, 2014; Graziano, 2001; Gurvitch, 1950; Hall, 1969; Nicoll, 2007). This phenomenon may be due to increasing institutional complexity or the fact that greater specificity in organizational typologies facilitates the acquisition and presentation of precise and detailed information on the global problems mentioned, which require specific solutions in particular areas. This specificity revives the debate on informational asymmetry in the lobbying field (see e.g., Potters and Van Winden, 1992; Stadelmann and Frank, 2024). Adopting an optimistic perspective on the intentions of lobbying groups, if the disparity in access to information is managed ethically and directed toward public interests, the asymmetry resulting from the broad organizational spectrum could ultimately prove beneficial. This also opens a new research avenue into how the convergence of interests and the need for specific information can lead to partial but effective solutions.

In Figure 2, the causes and consequences of the proposed convergence of interests between lobbies and the state are summarized.

Illustrative areas where such convergence becomes evident are primarily related to globalized phenomena that require collective action. Among these, climate policy stands out as particularly prominent (Johal and Ulph, 2002). For instance, in initiatives such as the European Green Deal or the promotion of hydrogen as an energy vector, lobbies have worked hand in hand with decision makers. Case studies are already emerging that examine their role in these processes (e.g., Flath and

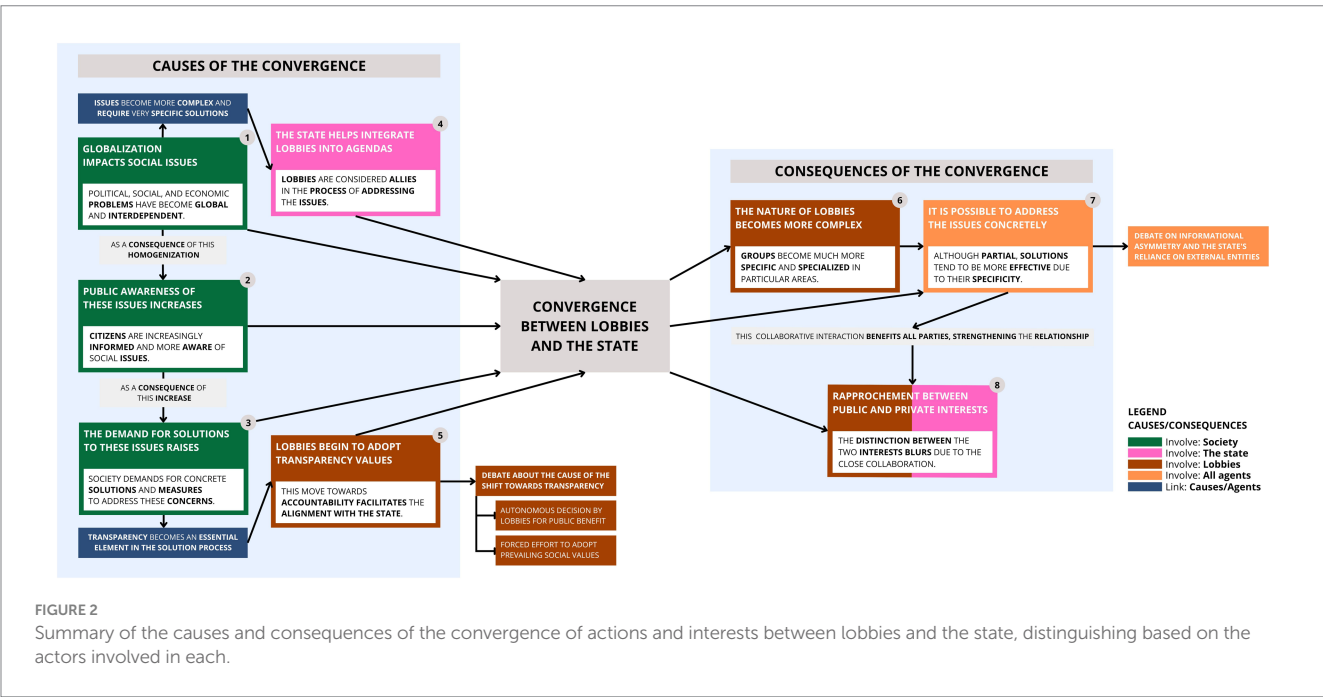


FIGURE 2 Summary of the causes and consequences of the convergence of actions and interests between lobbies and the state, distinguishing based on the actors involved in each.

Quittkat, 2025). Nevertheless, beyond the environmental sphere, there are numerous other areas that foster collaboration between lobbies and the state. These include technological governance, public health, international trade, among others. In such areas, the complexity and transnational nature of the issues often necessitate multi-stakeholder cooperation, with lobbies contributing expertise, resources, and sector-specific knowledge, a dynamic that can be linked to the findings of Taminiau and Wilts (2006). An insightful contribution on this matter is offered by Harris (2002), who identified a correlation between the extent of state involvement in a given issue and the level of engagement exhibited by interest groups.

The communication dimension in the collective response to these global challenges represents a crucial domain where coordination and cooperation are essential, particularly in crisis contexts (Blazhevskaya, 2015; Nour and Kisa, 2024; Sedeño-Alcántara et al., 2023). Effective communication frequently underpins successful joint responses to complex global problems, underscoring the need for the involvement of not only lobbying groups and public authorities but also the media itself (Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2025).

To conclude, it is important to reiterate that the aim of this article is not to empirically demonstrate the convergence between public and private interests in lobby-state interactions, but rather to theoretically explore the plausibility of such a trend. By advancing this theoretical perspective, the article seeks to open new avenues of inquiry and lay the groundwork for future empirical analyses that may test and substantiate the identified trends. In this regard, the adoption of transparency values and the growing emphasis on accountability among lobbies are fundamental, as they will enable the scientific community to explore the phenomenon through reliable sources.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not required, for either participation in the study or for the publication of potentially/indirectly identifying information, in accordance with the local legislation and

institutional requirements. The social media data was accessed and analyzed in accordance with the platform's terms of use and all relevant institutional/national regulations.

## Author contributions

AC-E: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AA-M: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. ÁS-O: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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