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GR5063: QMSS Data Visualization

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Money in Politics: Lobbying Visualization using U.S. Lobbying Disclosure Act Data

Abstract:

We are interested in exploring lobbying reports submitted in compliance with the U.S. Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (LDA) to find insights on how money influences the political process. Utilizing 7 datasets regarding LDA from [*Open Secrets*](https://www.opensecrets.org/), we will explore the unique structures and relationships of lobbying in politics:

* **Company/Client-Level:** Do most companies lobby using in-house lobbyists or using external lobbying companies? Which companies are found most frequently in the dataset? Which industry groups spend the most? Which years were the biggest for lobbying firms, and how do they relate to election cycles? Has lobbying become bigger in the past 20 years? How much money is spent in each lobbying transaction and how is the money being used?
* **Lobbyist-Level:** Who are the most connected lobbyists? Which lobbying firm does the most diverse work? Are former democrat or republican congressmen more likely to become lobbyists?
* **State-Level:** Which states have the highest occurrences of lobbying (join Open Secrets dataset with a geographical one)? What are the demographics of the areas affected by lobbying (join Open Secrets dataset with Census data)?
* **Legislation-Level:** What are the biggest issues present in the data that companies are lobbying for? Which legislation is attracting the most attention monetarily? How does lobbying impact if a bill was passed or not?

Techniques:

Social network analysis, NLP, ggplot2, interactivity with data tables and charts, spatial, regression analysis

Data Description:

* All submitted lobbying reports from 1998 Q1 to 2019 Q2
* Nominal variables of interest: Registrant name, client name, issue ID, catcode, government agency, specific issues lobbied for, names of lobbyist, client name, registrant name, name of bill
* Dichotomous variables of interest: If registrant belongs to a lobbying firm, if lobbyist is a former congressman, if lobbyist is a former government employee
* Numerical variables of interest: Lobby expenses in dollars, Year

Brainstorming:

* Interactive data table in which users can search to see if their former congressman has become a lobbyist.
* Time series graph examining the amount of money spent on an issue per year.
* Network analysis by industry to see which external lobbying firms are the go-to for each industry.
* Network analysis of lobbyists (ego) to see how connected they are with alters such as clients, fellow lobbyists and U.S. agencies.
* Visualize regression analysis to discover predictors in lobbying. For example, which companies are likely to be large spenders? Which parties, politicians, or legislation are most likely to be influenced by lobbying?

Citations:

<https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying>

<https://www.opensecrets.org/open-data/bulk-data>

<https://www.opensecrets.org/resources/datadictionary/UserGuide.pdf>

<http://lobbyview.org/networks#!/>

<http://web.mit.edu/insong/www/pdf/network.pdf>