

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

In the Spring of 2020, I completed a project on political lobbying as part of a course on data visualization. My team and I explored 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 from [Open Secrets](#), which has a collection of excellent resources on illustrating the impacts of lobbying, we attempted to explore the unique structures and relationships of lobbying in politics. We decided to examine efforts, key players, and the effects lobbying has on legislation and compare state sponsored bills between 2015-2016 and 2018-2019. We used R to put together the charts, graphs, and maps for this assignment and presented the project as both an interactive HTML output and a [Shiny Application](#) (due to the large size of the files used, the HTML output attached is recommended to view this project).

An overview of the U.S. lobbying landscape from 2015 to 2020 shows that tens of thousands of lobbying reports were filed each year by various agencies. Thousands of lobbyists and clients were mentioned by name in these reports, from consulting groups to universities to even the Burger King corporation. We looked at the top out-of-house lobbyists, determined by amount spent, and where they are employed. The largest employer for top lobbyists was Mehlman Castagnetti Rosen and Thomas, a firm which “fosters working relationships with Congressional leaders in the House and Senate, members of the Executive branch, and their staff” who [“seek \[their\] expertise in analyzing the impact of proposed legislation and regulations.”](#) We also added a density map of lobbyists who were labeled as former members of congress, with Texas having the most former members who entered the “revolving door” of political favors.

Politicians and lobbyists alike use their positions to push certain agendas and legislation, which could be at the expense of voters. A network chart reveals that top issues covered were federal budget and appropriations, health issues, and defense. Fiscal budgets are influenced by companies which seek to profit from legislation which allows for higher military spending and drug prices. A text analysis of client industries shows that “positive” traits associated with lobbying efforts include “trust,” “protect,” “reform,” “fair,” and “clean.” Negative sentiments associated with “disgust” included words like “cancer,” “petroleum,” and “Holocaust.” The data also provides information on bills sponsored through lobbying efforts by state. Density maps show that in 2015-2016 and 2018-2019, California had the most bills introduced via lobbying with 138 bills and 101 bills respectively. The top issues that these bills covered were energy and nuclear power during the presidential election years and taxes during the midterm years.

The datasets we used were extremely rich, and there was a lot to explore that our team was simply unable to cover within a limited project scope. If I were to expand upon this project, I would want to investigate the ties between specific firms and clients. For example, which organizations have connections to the Border Patrol Council? Which government officials and party are receiving the most lobbying money? Additional information on the actual monetary amount spent on lobbying from year-to-year would also be significant to examine. In light of the fight for abortion access and the desperate need for gun reform, an updated analysis on how lobbying groups are fighting for or against these measures would be insightful.