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# European lobbies: a comparative study of the professional profiles of lobbyists in Spain and France

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This research consists of carrying out a comparison of professional lobbyists in Spain and France, using three broad areas of data: socio-geographical, academic, and professional. The objectives set are aimed at a general and specific comparison to obtain a typical profile of the professionals of both countries. To this end, an exploratory methodology has been used, with a multivariate statistical analysis, completed with a descriptive analysis of an inductive nature, through a sample of 1,000 professional lobbyists in Spain and France in 2024. The results obtained provide a profile of lobbyists in Spain and France based on their social, academic, and professional nature. The main conclusion is that in these two countries these professionals classify their work as being in the field of "Public Affairs," their academic background is mainly in Law and Political Science, and they live in large urban areas.

## KEYWORDS

lobbying, pressure groups, Spain, France, public affairs, influence, training, professional profile

## 1 Introduction

Citizen participation is fundamental in democratic societies, especially when public affairs are at stake (Álvarez Ugarte, 2018; Tijeras, 2018). Today there are many issues that deserve to be made visible and interiorized, and citizens have different ways of making them known. One that is especially important is through pressure groups, also called lobbies. In Europe, one setting where citizens can fight for a specific issue is the European Parliament, where they can group together to gain more strength (Barron, 2011). The United States is considered a veteran and creator of the tradition of lobbying, but it is also a common and legislated activity in Europe (Chalmers, 2013; Oliver-González, 2018, 2019; Stevens and De Bruycker, 2020). Both in Spain and France, the countries chosen for this comparative study, this activity is not very visible, but it is consolidated as a profession (Bernhagen et al., 2015). Lobbying is an activity that sometimes has a dubious reputation in the eyes of the public in terms of the pressure that they exercise on national and supranational organizations; but this does not depend on the activity but on the cause, which is more or less rooted in the political culture of the society that it aims to persuade.

Although lobbying work is largely carried out in the shadows, there is an important debate about the effects of its activity, both positive and negative. There are numerous voices that argue that lobbyists are professionals that, with their activity, can help legislators make informed decisions. However, there are others who argue that they are professionals who exert too much influence in the process of establishing certain policies benefitting those they represent, placing their particular interests above the general interest (Berry, 1989).

With regard to the professional dimension, Xifra (2009, p. 9) identifies lobbies as influence groups, that is, an organization that is established to defend common interests and does so by influencing public authorities either directly or indirectly. Lobbies have also been identified as “any union of individuals, autonomous and organized, that carries out actions to influence power (...) in the defense of common interests” (Rubio Núñez, 2017, p. 401). Transparency International, in its study of lobbies in Spain (Mulcahy, 2015, p. 15–16), defines them as a professional activity by framing them as “any direct or indirect communication with public officials, political decision-makers or representatives with the purposes of influencing public decision-making carried out by or on behalf of any organized private or non-governmental group.” This establishes that these professionals are not only intermediaries who relate to policy makers, but also, within this group, representatives of the private sector who perform this function in companies, think tanks, religious organizations, public relations consultants, NGOs, law firms, unions, and even professional and business associations.

Oliver-González (2019, p.54) discusses the origin of the word lobby. It originally referred to a large entrance hall in a public building and, with regard to the UK, denoted the covered area that connects the entrance with rooms that precede and surround the session chamber of the House of Commons. If the House of Commons in the UK. It was here where informal meetings were held a recurring practice by business groups to influence in favor of their interests and those of their sector laws discussed by the MPs in the House of Commons. In this way, companies established increasingly fluid communication with the MPs, forging more complex and less public relationships (Bentley, 1908), from which emerged the figure of the intermediary, who in many cases were no longer the same company managers who defended their interests, but rather they began to do it through the lobbies.

One of the first to define the concept of the lobbying was Milbraith (1963), who defined it as communication by a non-ordinary citizen with a government representative in the hope of influencing their decision. Although this definition does not identify the professionals who carry out their activity, it does describe what the process of lobbying consists of.

With regard to the lobbyists, they carry out their profession in business organizations, government institutions, public affairs consultancies, and so forth, in order to defend the interests of their clients in the face of new regulations or the modification of existing ones. That is why one of the jobs of lobbyists is to know and understand regulations, politics, negotiation techniques and legislative processes (Ridao, 2017; Ponce Solé, 2019). This enables them to identify and exploit opportunities for influence, which can be done through the promotion of laws, influence in the formulation of policies, or publicity, among others. In Spain, the work of lobbyists has been increasing in demand.

It should be noted that in the professional practice of lobbying, the main objective is to reach a direct impact on the design of the political agenda (Klüver, 2012). Normally, whether through direct action on policy makers or on public opinion, this activity attempts to modify attitudes regarding the application of certain policies that may affect the economic, business or social spheres of an organization. The lobbyist's activity is not only limited to intermediation between two parties: on the one hand, the client he/she represents; on the other hand, mediating with those responsible for making the corresponding

legislative decisions. As Correa Ríos (2010, p. 107) affirms “not only should the lobbyist have his own opinion regarding the conflict that affects his client; he should also be able to open in his client new perspectives of understanding regarding the public policies of the area involved, the international trends that affect it, and the interest and strategic lines of the authorities he has to dialog with.”

Santillán Buelna (2013, p. 8) argues that the activity of lobbying is based on two aspects. First, lobbyists use the media as a tool to shape the perception of public opinion. Second, they support the change in policy makers through reports, evaluations and analysis of experts that allow these legislative decisions to be beneficial for the organization they represent. Castillo-Esparcia (2015, p. 5) defines lobbyists as “agents or professional representatives of the associations and groups that are dedicated to intervening, primarily, on the legislators or on those who are in a position to make decisions that affect group interests.” It should be noted that lobbyists not only influence decision-making bodies but can also carry out their professional function with communication strategies that influence and shape public opinion so that they are favorable to the organizations they represent.

Currently, these professionals usually connect with their audiences (political representatives and public opinion) through different communication strategies (Barragán Romero, 2011; Harris and McGrath, 2012). Lobbying actions to reach public opinion have evolved substantially hand in hand with technology. These include, first of all, social media (X, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, among others), used to send messages aimed at a target audience, create quality content, foster debate, and connect with audiences through influencers (Casero-Ripollés, 2015). Second, blogs are an ideal means to create and disseminate quality content, presenting data and studies on specific legislative proposals or on a topic that may influence the organization represented. Informative blog content helps lobbyists convey information clearly and concisely. Third, email marketing, which is used by lobbies to target their audiences with a personalized message. This technique helps to raise awareness and mobilize citizens. Fourth, sponsored posts, which allow lobbies to reach their target audiences with a personalized message. This may include advertisements on television and radio and in print, as well as digital platforms and social media.

With regard to the lobbyist's campaign strategies, Zetter (2011, p. 37) makes a distinction between *insider* and *outsider* campaigns. The former refers to those campaigns carried out by organizations—whether it be a company, a charity, or a professional association—that have already established long-term relationships with officials, executive agencies, or the regulators that cover their legislative field. The latter refers to those campaigns carried out by organizations that have been excluded from the system and, by not establishing a continuous relationship over time, tend to create campaigns that are much more expensive, noisy and visible.

## 2 Development of lobbying in Spain and France

Although the concept of lobbying emerged in the seventeenth century in England, its regulation is not that old. Since it is an activity where interest groups send their demands to legislative decision-makers, a legislative framework that can regulate these practices is necessary. The phenomenon arose in England, but the United States,

in 1946, was the first country to enact laws on lobbying, its most recent one being in 1996. The United Kingdom finally passed their legislative regulation in 2014 (Fitzpatrick, 2024). Other interesting contributions by Arceo Vacas (2022) and Castillo Esparcia et al. (2023) on lobbies and the media, as well as on the use of social media by these pressure groups (Castillo-Esparcia and Smolak, 2017), complement the studies on communication and lobbying, although they do not make comparisons between professional lobbyists.

With regard to regulation in Spain, authors such as Álvarez Vélez and De Montalvo (2014, p. 374) highlight the need for regulation that responds to “a change in trend regarding the legal treatment of lobbies” that has moved from a position of “silence maintained by the majority of legal systems on this phenomenon, with the exception of Germany [...] to a situation in which a large number of countries have introduced or have initiated regulation of the activity carried out by these groups.”

In recent years, some progress has been made in Spain in the creation of voluntary registries for interest groups that are managed by the State (Galcerà, 2016). In 2013, the state body the National Markets and Competition Commission (CNMC) was created, which serves as a control tool for those professionals and companies that act as lobbyists in Spain. However, on the negative side, since it is a voluntary registration, there is no control over all the professionals that practice lobbying in Spain. In the absence of national legislation, there does exist legislation at the regional level in some regions: Community of Madrid, Catalonia, Valencian Community and Castilla-La Mancha. These regional regulations have made it possible to eliminate the opacity that exists in the exercise of this profession, but again these are regulations where not all lobbyists or their companies are registered.

Given the lack of political consensus, new legislation that regulates lobbying throughout Spain is not expected to be approved immediately (Web oficial del presidente del Gobierno y el Consejo de Ministros, 2022). However, on November 8, 2022, the Council of Ministers approved the Draft Law on Transparency and Integrity in the Activities of Interest Groups, through which mandatory registration is regulated and following rules on the relationship of professional lobbyists with public administrations. This new Law, however, is currently paralyzed, waiting for new contacts between the representatives of the parties to proceed with its parliamentary processing.

Another added drawback is that, in the exercise of their activity, professional lobbyists are defined as responsible for public affairs or institutional relations; they are never recognized as lobbyists. To defend its activities in Spain, the profession has the Association of Institutional Relations Professionals (APRI), which is defined as a professional body that demands the definitive regulation of the profession following models such as that of France. However, it should be noted that not all lobbyists who practice in Spanish territory are registered or represented in this association. In recent years, through the organization of events and activities, they have tried to promote and publicize the practices of the profession, as well as promoting dialog with public administrations and private entities. Arceo Vacas (2022) and Castillo Esparcia et al. (2023) advocate the need not only for a law regulating lobbying but also for creating a single and mandatory register for all Spanish lobbyists.

With regard to France, since July 1, 2017, interest groups that have influence over the authorities are obliged to register in a

directory made available by the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (Normand, 2018). These pressure groups are required to provide information about the identity of their organization and the issues they exert influence on (Association Française des Conseils en Lobbying et affaires publiques, n.d.; Castillo-Esparcia, 2011; Castillo Esparcia et al., 2023), as well as other obligations such as the precise annual report with data on actions, contacts, audiences, and so forth. One aspect of this regulation (Assemblée Nationale, 2015) that deserves special mention is the sanctions for non-compliance with current regulations. In this regard, it is worth noting the contribution of Sachet-Milliat and Igalens (2019), who study this new binding regulation with voluntary standards for the first time. Although it might seem evident that in France there are more control mechanisms, in practice the problem is that the control bodies are not provided with sufficient personnel to carry out their work, so their control work loses effectiveness.

A review of the studies carried out in France on lobbyists (Courty, 2017; Oliver-González, 2019; Sachet-Milliat and Igalens, 2019) shows that most of the research focuses the analysis on the phenomena of lobbies as pressure groups but not on the specific profession. In particular, there are studies of lobbying in France (Fitzpatrick, 2024) that analyze the diversity of pressure groups that currently exist in the French system. In addition, Ousselin (2024) provides greater clarity on the evolution of lobbying in France and talks about the professionalization and diversification that the sector is experiencing.

However, despite the existence of regulation, not all lobbying practices in France have been transparent: there has been pressure placed on public policy makers (Courty, 2023). Rival (2012) compares the pressure strategies of French and British companies, in addition to classifying and characterizing these types of lobbying in both countries. It can be said that in the French lobbying sector (Olivesi, 2019) there is a current of influence that is already part of the political system.

The absence of an official registry of lobbyists in Spain stands out in comparison with the existing regulation in other countries. In these countries, control and transparency in lobbying activities are stricter. For example, Austria, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom have implemented mandatory regulations for the registration and control of lobbying activities. At the supranational level, the European Union also created a voluntary lobby register, which promotes transparency and accountability in interactions with European institutions.

In Spain, a regulatory framework in this area should take into account the social, economic and cultural differences that distinguish it from other nations. Regulations in France, the UK and other countries have been tailored to their respective idiosyncrasies, reflecting distinct social contexts and political structures, which ensures effective regulation that is respectful of its environment.

### 3 Materials and methods

The general objective (GO) of this research is to analyze the profile of lobbyists in Spain and France to perform a comparative analysis in both countries in two different areas: one without regulation and one with regulation. As to the specific objectives, the first (SO1) aims to compare the analysis of the social and geographic characteristics of the lobbyists in Spain and France; the second (SO2) determines the

academic and professional data of lobbyists before their incorporation into the world of work; and, finally, the third (SO3) compares the professional data of lobbyists in Spain and France, creating a profile of the lobbyist prototype in these two countries.

To achieve these objectives, first a prior exploratory research was carried out with the aim of providing defining variables that define the profile of the lobbyist in the countries under study, using the comparative method for analysis and interpretation of the data obtained (Sartori, 1994). Second, a comparative multivariate statistical data analysis was carried out with a sample of 1,000 lobbyists in the first quarter of 2024. This attempted to reach conclusions that were generalizable to a population based on sample information summarized in a set of statistics called inferential (Hidalgo-Troya, 2019). Third, the study was complemented with a descriptive analysis of an inductive nature, resulting in a typical profile of lobbyists in Spain and France. This descriptive analysis of an inductive nature, according to Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018, p.108), “aims to specify the properties, characteristics and profiles of people, groups and communities, process, objects or any other phenomenon than is submitted to analysis.”

For the multivariate quantitative analysis, a database of lobbyists in Spain and France was set up in the first quarter of 2024 through an analysis model proposed by Castillo-Esparcia et al. (2023). The result amounts to 500 profiles of lobbyists in Spain and another 500 in France. However, variables from more relevant studies have been added to the model in order to obtain more specific results to adapt to the object of the study.

For the database of lobbyists in Spain, the main limitation is that there is no regulation of the profession, so the difficulty lies in the lack of information (Molins et al., 2016). However, there are voluntary registries at the national level, such as the aforementioned CNMC, which in 2016 created the Registry of Interest Groups. Nevertheless, they still do not include all the professionals or lobbies that act as such in Spain. There are others from different regions, but their voluntary nature makes it difficult to know the number of professionals who practice in these regions and their characteristics. In France there is regulation (Oliver-González, 2019) and a mandatory registry for all those professionals who wish to carry out lobbying actions throughout the country.

In Spain, a search and collation of data had to be carried out through different sources: (1) registries of the CNMC; (2) searches on the professional social network LinkedIn on those who practice Institutional Relations because the professionals themselves do not define themselves as lobbyists; (3) on the APRI website itself, the only association where professional lobbyists are represented in Spain; and (4) lists collected from some specialized media such as *Comunicación* (2024).

For the search of professional profiles in France, we relied mainly on three places: (1) the official registry, the website of the High Authority for the Transparency of Public Life (*Haute Autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique*, 2013), where lobbyists who want to practice in France must be registered; (2) The French Association of Lobbying and Public Affairs Consultants, where the names of the professionals and their companies appear in great detail; and (3) all the profile information collected from both listings, complemented and augmented with the data provided by LinkedIn. In this case, the searches focused on the professionals of public affairs and not only institutional relations.

The design of the database has been carried out as part of the research process, in which data collection has been done manually, which has added a significant level of complexity due to the need to organize, verify and process the information in a detailed and rigorous manner.

## 4 Results

The results obtained from the analysis are divided into three broad sections: first, we analyzed the social data such as gender and the geographical data of the lobbyists; second, we analyzed the academic data, which corresponds to the degree they have as a basis for professional practice and the university they graduated from, making a distinction between their ownership (private or public); and third, professional data, focusing on the job position, work history and seniority of the position they currently hold.

### 4.1 Social and geographical results

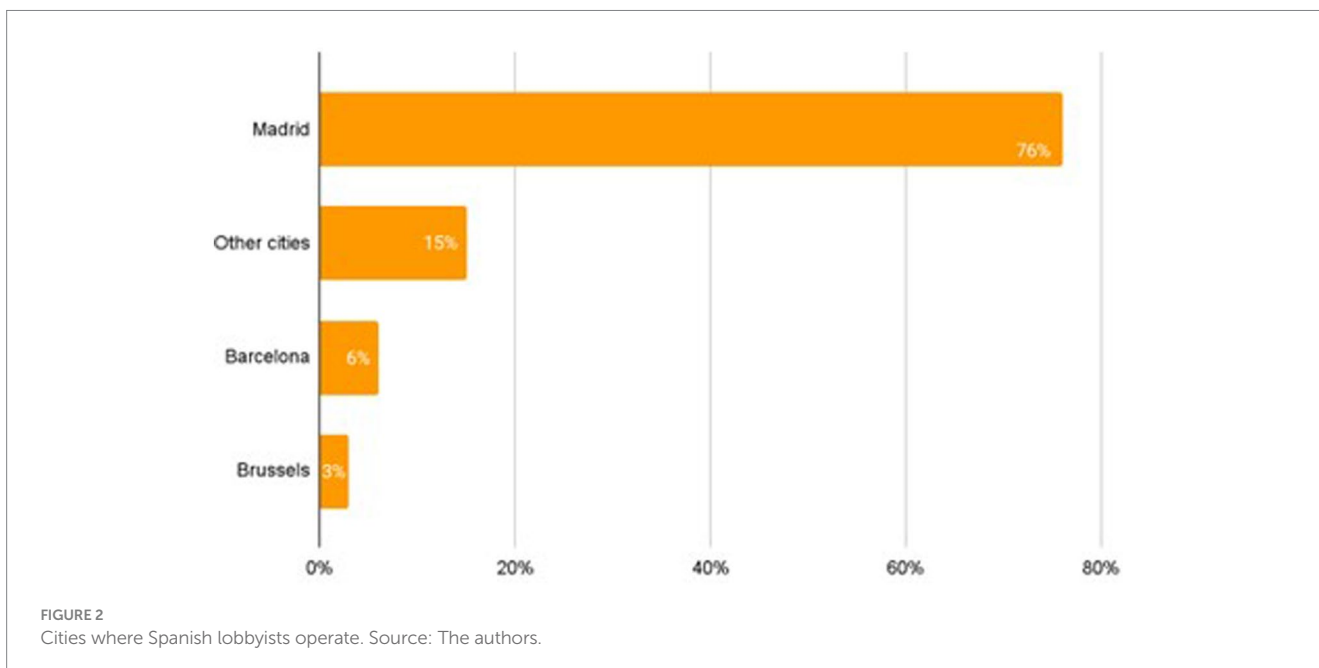
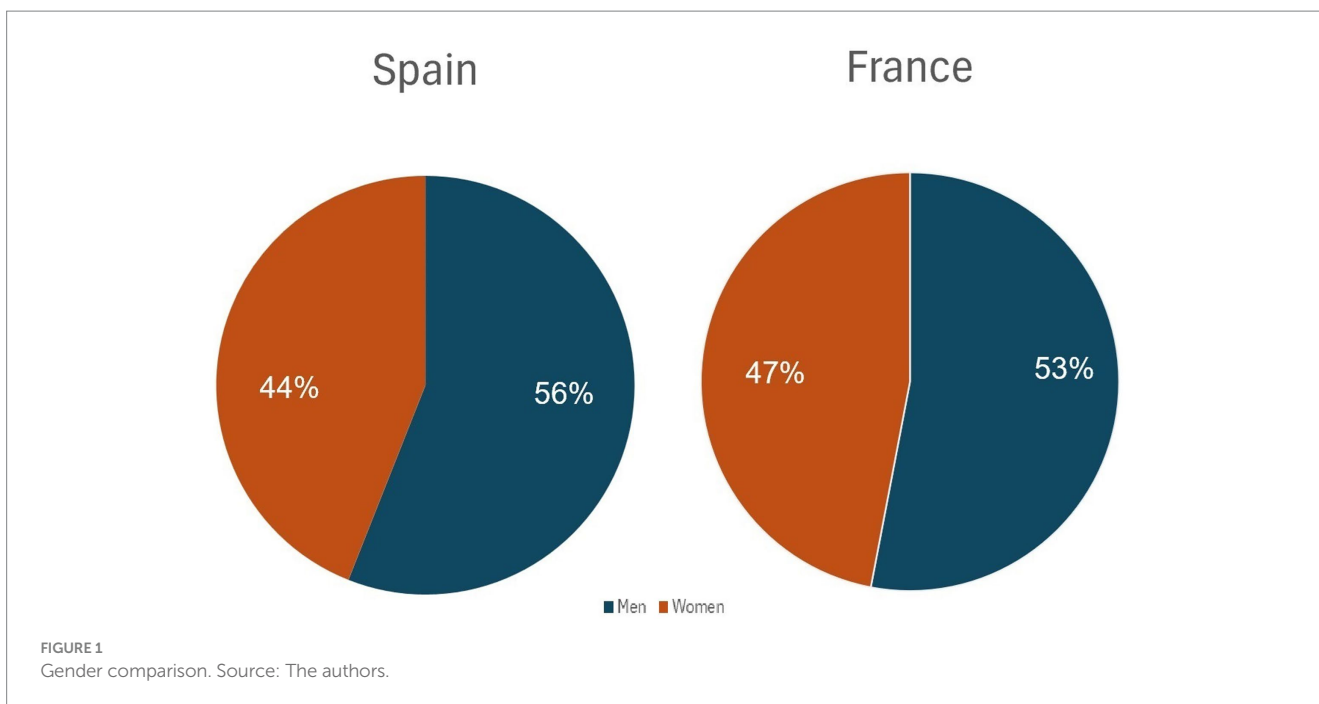
First of all, we studied the variables related to the social and geographical data, beginning with the comparison between genders, where very similar data was obtained from professional lobbyists in Spain and France. In Spain, we can see from [Figure 1](#) that there are 56% men compared to 44% women who work as lobbyists, while in France there are 53% men and 47% women. In both countries there is virtual parity between both genders, and the trend even indicates that the incorporation of women into the professional field is increasing ([Figure 1](#)).

It should be emphasized that in both countries, men stand out more among lobbyists, even though the difference may seem small: while in France there is a six-point difference, in Spain there is a 12-point difference. That is, in France there is a greater tendency for women to dedicate themselves to this activity than in Spain.

With regard to the geographical aspects, the geographical concentration of pressure group activities was studied. As [Figures 2, 3](#) below show, most of the profession's activities, approximately 85% in France and 91% in Spain, are concentrated in certain urban areas. In particular, Madrid, Barcelona, and Brussels appear as the main locations for pressure group activities in Spain, while Paris, Brussels, and Lyon are the main centers in France. It should be noted that the city of Brussels plays a fundamental role as the epicenter of European decision-making in both cases. It is worth remembering that Paris was a co-founder of the EU (it was among the countries that created, in 1952, the European Coal and Steel Community) and that Spain joined in 1986 (the then European Economic Community) ([Figure 2](#)).

A more detailed analysis shows that 76% of the lobbying activity in Spain is predominantly centralized in Madrid, while the concentration is notably greater in France, where Paris occupies 91% of such activity. The secondary urban centers show similar proportional distributions, with the main divergence being that while Barcelona hosts 6% of Spanish lobbyists, the second city for French lobbyists is the capital of the European Union, Brussels. This discrepancy may indicate a greater internationalization of the interest





group sector in France compared to Spain. In Spain, 3% of lobbyists practice their profession in Brussels, aligning with its intrinsic role as the center of decision-making. In addition, the data indicate that barely 1% of French lobbyists carry out their activity in cities located beyond the French capital.

The “Other cities” variables collect unified data whose percentages alone are less than 3% in Brussels in the case of Spain and less than 1% in Lyon in the case of France. In Spain, the cities that are within the 15% outside Madrid, Barcelona, and Brussels are very different (Valencia, A Coruña, Valladolid, Seville, Bilbao, Málaga, Pamplona, Cádiz, Oviedo, Mallorca and Murcia), with percentages even lower

than 0.05% each. In the case of France, there are a series of cities (Le Mans, Colombes, Nimes, Toulouse, Marseille and Nice) whose percentages are less than 1% (Figure 3).

#### 4.2 Academic results

With regard to the academic area, we have obtained data from the sample related to academic degrees that qualify them to practice their profession and the university where they completed these studies. It should be noted that the data refer to the basic university degrees and

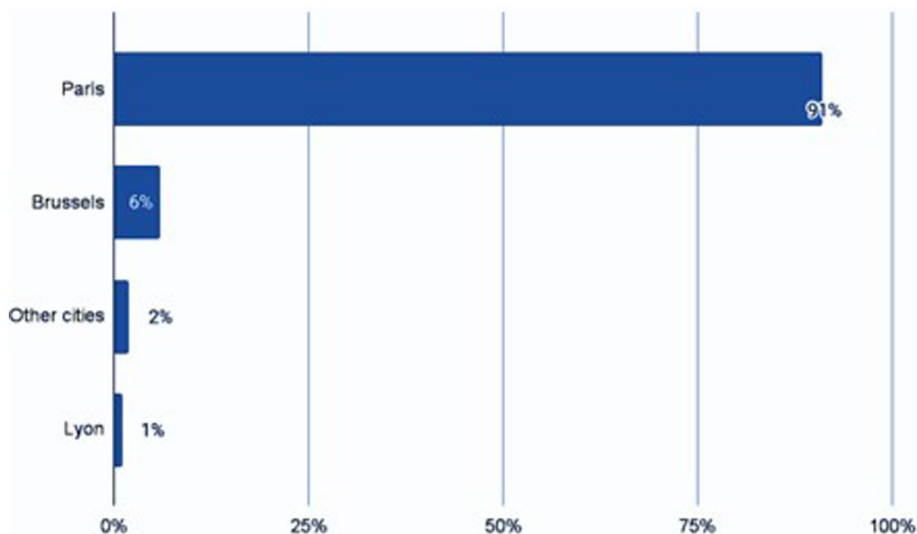


FIGURE 3  
Cities where French lobbyists operate. Source: The authors.

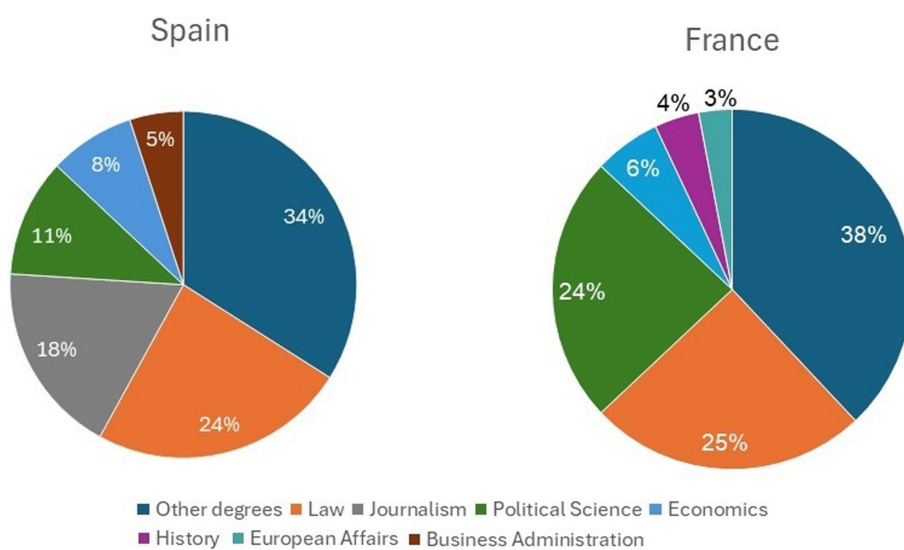


FIGURE 4  
Degrees of lobbyists in Spain and France. Source: The authors.

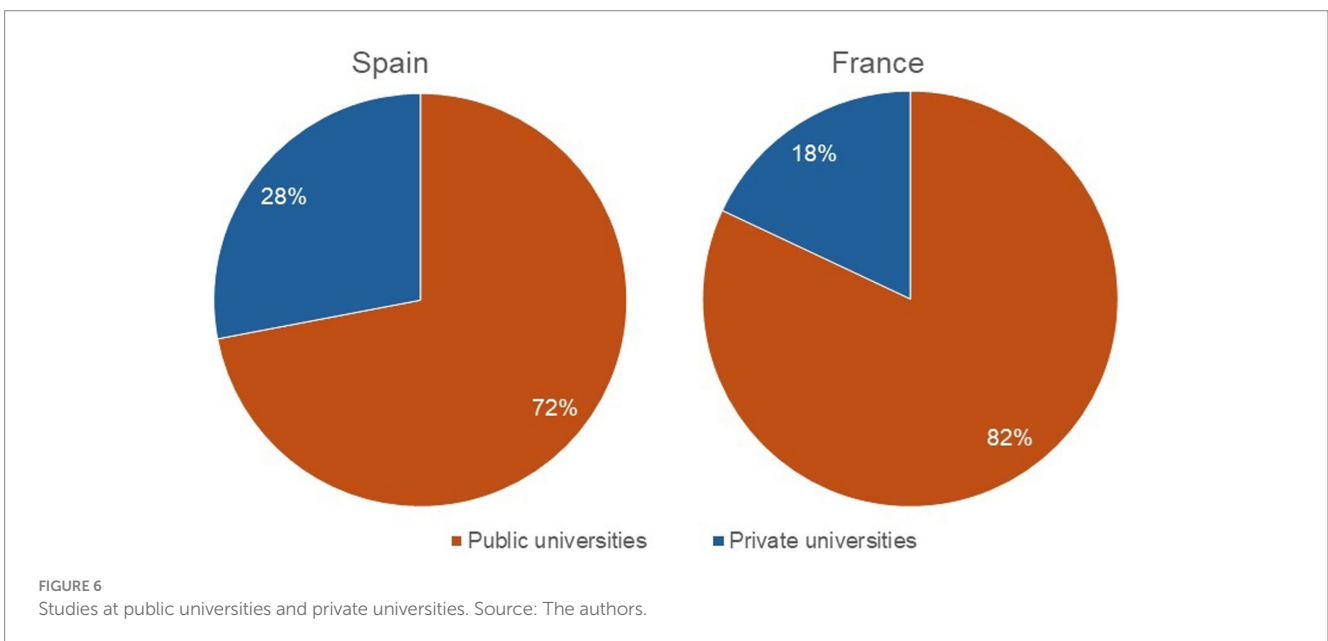
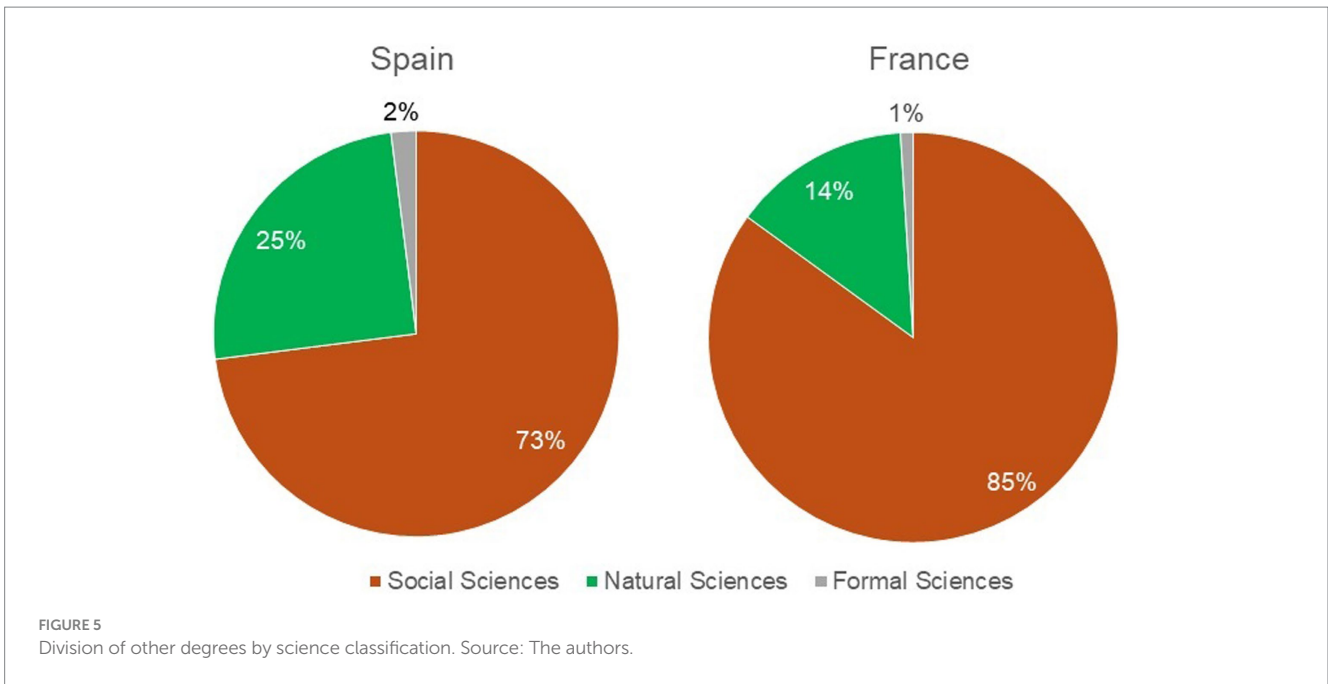
not to the various postgraduate specializations they might pursue afterwards.

In Spain, the majority of lobbyists considered studied Law (24%), Journalism (18%), Political Science (11%), Economics (8%) and Business Administration (5%). What most stands out is that 34% of the lobbyists graduated in a range of different disciplines, which we have placed in a category called “Other degrees” since separately they do not even reach 2%.

In short, in Spain three degrees—Law, Journalism and Political Science—stand out as the most studied by lobbyists, while Economics and Business Administration feature to a lesser extent, together with a category of different disciplines that are well below 5% (Figure 4).

In France, the most studied degrees are Law (25%) and Political Science (24%), followed at considerable distance by Economics (6%), History (4%) and European Affairs (3%). As in Spain, there are a range of degrees studied by a percentage that is too low to constitute a separate category. Bearing in mind that these “Other degrees” have a high percentage (38%) and given the impossibility of creating categories that are too small, we have analyzed the total number of degrees based on the traditional division of the sciences: Formal Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences (Figure 5).

In short, the lobbyists in Spain and France largely coincide in studying degrees in the Social Sciences (73 and 85%, respectively), with a minority in the Natural Sciences (25 and 14%, respectively)



and a tiny percentage in the Formal Sciences (2 and 1%, respectively).

More specifically, in Spain the graduates in the Social Sciences studied Law, Journalism, Political Science and Economics, among others, while in the Natural Sciences the degrees were in Environmental Science, Biology, Chemical Science, Pharmacy, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, and Physical Sciences, among others. In the Formal Sciences, the degrees were in Engineering, Mathematics, and Telecommunications, among others.

In France, the lobbyists who graduated in the Social Sciences studied Law, Political Science, Economics, History, and European Affairs, among others; in the Natural Sciences they studied Climate and Energy, Sciences, Geography, Biology, Physics, Natural Sciences,

Pharmacy, Medicine, Environmental Science, among others; and in the Formal Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering.

We also analyzed the universities the lobbyists graduated from, with the majority belonging to publicly owned institutions, both in Spain and France. In Spain, 72% of the lobbyists analyzed studied in public universities, while in France this percentage was even higher (82%). With these data, we can conclude that public universities are especially prevalent in the academic training of professional lobbyists in both countries, being more pronounced in France (Figure 6).

In Spain, the main public universities these professionals studied at are the Complutense University of Madrid, the Carlos III University of Madrid, the Autonomous University of Madrid, the Polytechnic University of Madrid, the University of the Basque Country, the

Pompeu Fabra University and the Rey Juan Carlos University. The main private universities are the CEU San Pablo University, Comillas Pontifical University and the University of Navarra. The public Complutense University of Madrid clearly prevails over the rest (25%).

In France, the main public universities chosen are Paris-Panthéon-Assas University, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, Sciences Po Bordeaux, Sciences Po Lille, Sciences Po Grenoble, Sciences Po Strasbourg, and Sciences Po Lyon, while the main private university is Science po Paris (12%), followed by the Catholic University of Paris.

In both countries, the universities where these professionals study are located in large cities such as Madrid, Bilbao, and Barcelona (Spain), or Paris, Bordeaux, Lille, Strasbourg, and Lyon (France). This is an important characteristic resulting from the type of work carried out by lobbyists due to the need for professional contacts and proximity to decision-making centers (Spanish, French, or European parliaments).

This data shows that while in Spain there is a predominant public university (the Complutense University of Madrid) with 25% of all lobbyists, in France there is a greater dispersion between different universities, with none of them reaching more than 12% and with the most popular university being a private one (Science po Paris).

### 4.3 Professional results

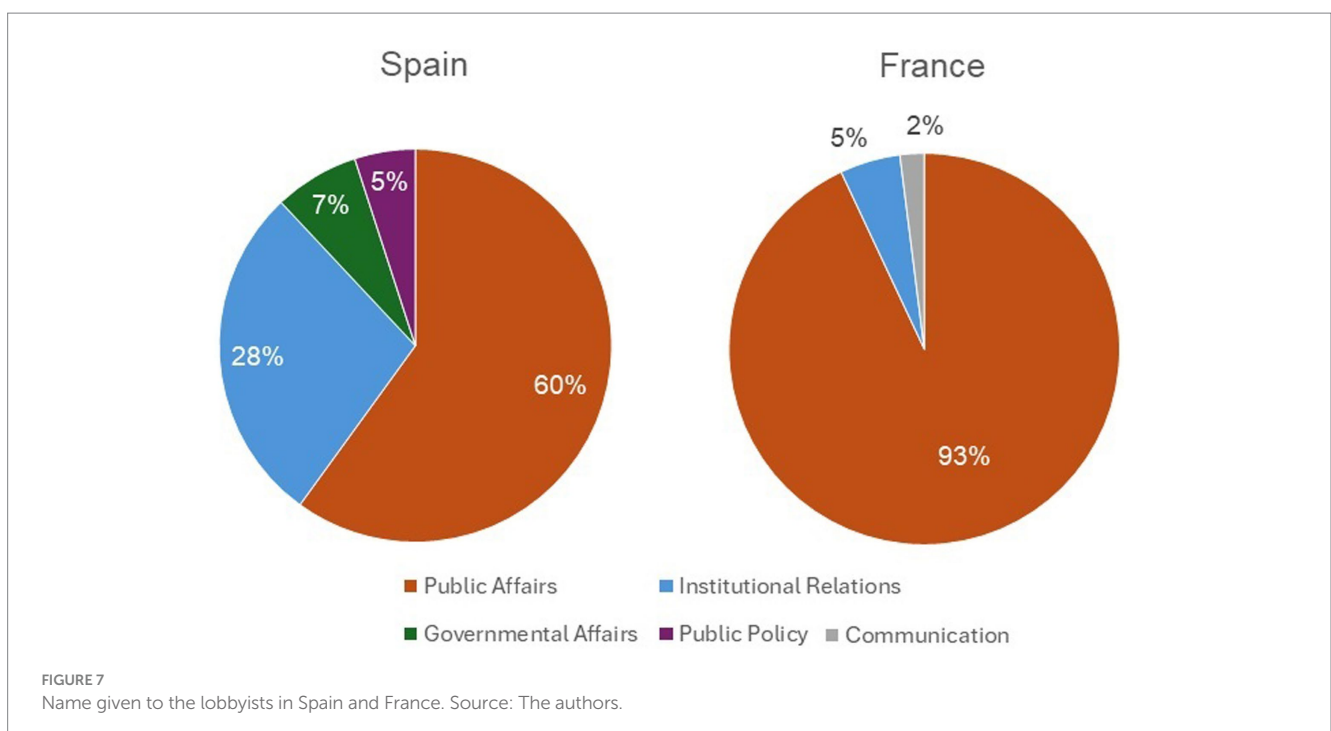
The second section of data analyzed, professional data, contains variables that give us information about the activity of lobbyists in Spain and France, specifically: the name of the field, seniority, background in public positions, and the type of connection with the company or administration.

With respect to the name of the field, within the lobbying sector, as in many others, there is a clear lack of consensus regarding the name that corresponds to the position of lobbyists in Spain and France

(Fernández-Rúa Mateo, 2023). After the extraction process and with the obtained data, we can see (in Figure 7) that in both countries lobbyists are recognized primarily as “Public Affairs” professionals. However, the results are different, with the percentage being much higher in France. In Spain, there are 60% of lobbyists who identify themselves as “Public Affairs” professionals compared to 93% of French lobbyists. Another important figure should also be noted: there are 28% of lobbyists who define themselves as experts in “Institutional Relations.” There are also significant differences between the two countries with regard to other names with which lobbyists identify themselves. In Spain there are 7% of lobbyists who practice the profession as experts in “Governmental Affairs” and 5% who carry out activities in “Public Policies,” while in France 5% place themselves within “Institutional Relations” and 2% simply as “Communication” (Figure 7).

The second variable to analyze is the seniority of the lobbyists in their respective professional positions to determine the stability of the profession. To do this we established a range of dates, the first three ranges in decades, to examine when most lobbyists joined their field of work. The highest figure—60% in Spain and 64% in France—was between 2020 and 2024. The second period in which most lobbyists started working in their field was between 2010 and 2019, with 31% in Spain and 28% in France. These two periods together—2010–2024—saw the greatest entry of professionals, totaling 91% in Spain and 92% in France.

With this data, we can conclude that it is most recently, coinciding with greater regulation and professionalization of the sector, that a greater number of lobbyists in both Spain and France have entered the professional field. There is therefore greater specialization and a greater volume of work with the emergence of new economy companies that are producing a greater incorporation of these professionals to meet the new demands that are arising (Figure 8).





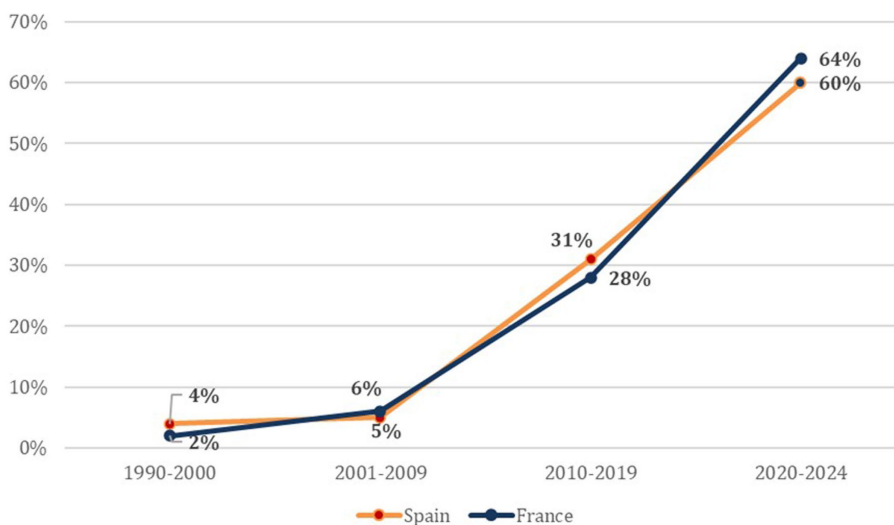


FIGURE 8 Time intervals of entry into the profession. Source: The authors.

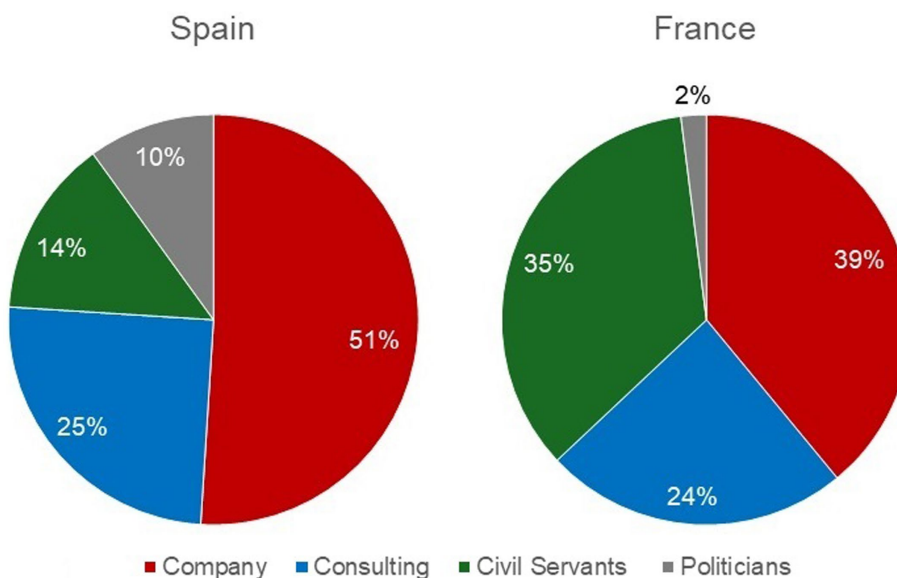


FIGURE 9 Lobbyists who worked as civil servants or were politicians. Source: The authors.

The third variable within the professional data section is the work history of the lobbyists. The objective is to find out, both in the case of Spain and France, which lobbyists worked in the public administration, as politicians, in positions within large companies, or as external consultants.

The data obtained in Figure 9 show that in Spain there are 24% (118) of professionals that worked for the public administration, either as civil servants (14%) or in political positions (10%) within it. In France, 37% (185) of lobbyists worked as civil servants (35%) or in political positions (2%). However, if we make a distinction between those who held political positions in Spain and France before joining the professional field of lobbying, the data are

different: in Spain the figure is 10%, while in France it is only 2%. This may be due to the greater regulation of the sector in France than in Spain, where none exists. If there were regulation and legislation of lobbying in Spain, the number of former politicians entering the sector might decrease. The lack of regulation sometimes leads to the perception that lobbying in Spain facilitates the entry of former high-ranking political officials over professionals trained for such work.

When comparing the hiring of lobbyists within companies and the provision of external consulting services, clear disparities can be observed between Spain and France (see Figure 9). In Spain, 51% of professionals assume the role of internal lobbyists, indicating a pronounced dependence

on internal strategies, while 25% operate as external consultants, hired for specific public affairs strategies. In France, on the other hand, while lobbyists who work in companies predominate, with 39%, there is also a more substantial presence of public affairs consulting, which represents 24% of professionals in the field.

These differences can be attributed to disparities in the professionalization of the sector and the existence of French standards and regulations, which are absent in Spain. The data show that in Spain lobbying actions from the companies themselves play a predominant role. This data contrasts with the French data, where the difference between lobbyists who work in companies versus consultants is smaller (Figure 9).

#### 4.4 Profiles of professional lobbyists in Spain and France

Having obtained the results and completed the analysis, we can now establish, through a descriptive analysis of an inductive nature that goes from the general to the particular, the typical profile of lobbyists in Spain and France.

First of all, the typical lobbyist in Spain is a man who is located in the city of Madrid, graduated in Law from a public university, joined the profession in the period 2020–2024, works in a private company, and whose position is called professional in “Public Affairs.” And the typical lobbyist in France is a man who is located in the city of Paris, graduated in Law from a public university, joined the profession in the period 2020–2024, works in a private company, and with a professional title in “Public Affairs.”

As we can see, there are many common traits in these two profiles: in terms of gender, living in the capital, having the same name, and entering the profession in the same period. While no differences can be seen in the main trends regarding a global profile, there are some other differences. For example, women represent a high percentage, but without constituting the majority; the dispersion of basic university degrees is high; and lobbyists have mostly worked in private companies, although there is a significant percentage that have worked in public organizations. With regard to the name, they work in “Public Affairs,” since it seems that there is a tendency to use this name, more so in France presumably due to mandatory regulations.

### 5 Discussion

As general conclusions to this study, we note that the literature than exists on the matter is relatively recent, despite the fact that the phenomenon of lobbying arose in England in the eighteenth century. This may be due to the lack of consideration of the profession in a transparent manner at the European level (Álvarez Vélez and De Montalvo, 2014), but also in Spain (Moya Díaz, 2018; Castillo Esparcia et al., 2023) and France (Mulcahy, 2015; Normand, 2018; Oliver-González, 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2024). This situation makes this research—which examines the profile of a representative sample of 1,000 professionals from Spain and France, focusing on social and geographical, academic, and professional data—essential.

The social and geographical data helps us see that the majority of lobbyists are men that live in the capital cities of Spain and France (Madrid and Paris). However, the percentage of female lobbyists is

close to that of men, much more so in France. With respect to the academic data, both in Spain and France there is great diversity in terms of the lobbyists initial qualification for their professional development, with Law and Political Science being key degrees for many. Specifically, in Spain, 57% completed their studies in public universities situated in the Community of Madrid. In France, only 23% decided to study in universities specialized in the profession of lobbying, which are called Institutes of Political Studies (IEP), mostly located in Paris but with a much greater dispersion than in Spain: they are distributed in Paris, Strasbourg, Lille, and Lyon, whereas in Spain only in Madrid, the Basque Country, and Barcelona.

With regard to the name chosen by lobbyists in Spain and France, most agree with the term “Public Affairs,” and they share the name “Institutional Relations.” In France the first term is more widespread (93%), perhaps due to the prevailing regulation leading to a more common name.

The practice of the profession in Spain tends to be associated with the name of Institutional Relations professionals since the association where they are represented, the Association of Institutional Relations Professionals, has this name, contrary to what happens in France where the majority association of representation is the French Association of Lobby and Public Affairs Advisors. On the other hand, this denomination of professional of Institutional Relations tends to avoid the word lobby since it is associated with a professional practice with few ethical values, contrary to what happens in France where its regulatory framework allows to speak of lobby and public affairs because it is a legitimate and regulated activity.

In this study, we have analyzed the profile of lobbyists taking into account the absence of regulation in Spain and its presence in France. There are clear differences but also points of convergence between the two countries. France has a regulation that obliges professionals to register in order to practice, something that does not exist in Spain. The key aspect of regulation in France is the need to register on an official list to provide greater transparency and control over lobbying activities. In Spain, although there are voluntary registrations in some institutions, the transparency and regulation of the sector is not as formalized as in France, which leads to less control over the profession.

The main limitation in Spain is that there are no laws requiring lobbyists to appear in this register. In France, it is mandatory to appear in an official register in a transparent manner. The official register in Spain is that of the Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia (CNMC), but it is not necessary to be registered in this register in order to work as a professional in this field.

With regard to the entry of lobbyists into this professional field, a very large number of lobbyists in both Spain and France did so in the period 2020–2024, perhaps conditioned by greater specialization and a greater volume of work with the emergence of new economy companies that favor the incorporation of these professionals to meet the new demands that are emerging. This period coincides with the Covid-19 pandemic, an unprecedented crisis an unprecedented crisis that could be directly related to the expansion of lobbying—a question that warrants specific research and goes beyond the limits of this article.

It should be noted that, perhaps due to the lack of regulation and transparency in Spain, the number of former politicians who work professionally as lobbyists is much higher than in France. However, this trend is reversed if we compare it with lobbyists who have previously worked in public administration, where in France it is more pronounced than in Spain.

To sum up, the typical lobbyist is a man who lives in the capital of the country where he works, has a degree in Law or Political science, joined lobbying in the period 2020–2024, and whose work is paced in the area of “Public Affairs.”

As a final point, although we consider that the methodology used is appropriate for carrying out this comparative study, there are some limitations, especially in Spain, where there is no mandatory registration of lobbyists and where there is a negative perception of lobbying, so the name that publicly and clearly defines this profession is avoided.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Author contributions

SG-H: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. GL-M: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization. PM-M: Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JE-G: Formal analysis, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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