



# Lobbies, communication, and public perception in Spain: characterization and sociodemographic influences

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The way society perceives a lobby plays a critical role in shaping its potential influence. With this in mind, the present research aims to explore the public perception of lobbies in Spain based on three criteria: attributes associated with their activities, organizational types, and interests defended (O1). Additionally, it seeks to analyze the influence of five sociodemographic variables on the perception of lobbies: gender, age, ideology, economic status, and education (O2). **Methodology:** The methodological approach is quantitative and exploratory. Data collection involves N=418 questionnaires, while data analysis encompasses a range of statistical procedures, including variance analysis, binary logistic regressions, and analysis of B regression coefficients, among others. **Results:** The examination of the results reveals a polarized scenario with lobbies showing a predominantly negative public perception, particularly concerning their transparency and ethics. However, responses tend to be more neutral or even slightly positive in certain cases, such as for organizations advocating for social interests. As for the influence of sociodemographic variables, individuals with right-wing ideology, higher economic status, and tertiary education tend to have a more positive

perception of lobbies. **Discussion and conclusions:** These findings contribute to explaining one of the most decisive determinants in lobbies' ability to influence policy-making processes and underscore the importance of addressing public concerns to enhance transparency and legitimacy in their activities.

**Keywords:** lobbying; public perception; Spain; influence; governance, democracy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The determinants of lobbying influence have been widely studied in the academic literature. Research has focused on various determinants, including: economic resources (e.g., Stevens & de Bruycker, 2020; Woll, 2019), access to policymakers (e.g., Bouwen, 2002; Judd, 2023; Junk et al., 2022; Serna-Ortega et al., 2024), capacity to mobilize supporters (e.g., Lee & Stuckatz, 2024; Yates, 2023), willingness to form coalitions (e.g., Dwidar, 2022; Junk, 2020; Klüver, 2013), alignment of demands with prevailing social values (e.g., Raknes & Ihlen, 2020), communication strategies employed (e.g., Awad, 2024; de Bruycker & Beyers, 2019; Dür & Mateo, 2024; Lock & Davidson, 2024), stage of the policy-making process targeted for influence (e.g., Dockendorff & Lodato, 2024; Serna-Ortega et al., 2025; Truijens & Hanegraaff, 2024), and media coverage (e.g., de Bruycker and Beyers, 2015; Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2024, 2025), among others.

One critical determinant, however, remains underexplored: public perception (e.g., Dür & Mateo, 2014; Kollman, 1998; Rasmussen et al., 2018). Despite its crucial role in shaping the influence of lobbies, few studies have examined how society views these organizations.

In the lobbying context, the significance of public perception can be understood through three aspects. First, its legitimizing function, which reinforces the credibility and authority of the organization's claims (Rasmussen et al., 2018). Legitimacy strengthens its standing in policy debates, enhances the persuasiveness of its arguments, and ensures the long-term sustainability of its advocacy efforts. Second, the fact that politicians often respond to prevailing public sentiment (Lax and Phillips, 2012; Shapiro, 2011). Therefore, when public opinion opposes a lobby's position, policymakers are generally less inclined to support its demands (Junk and Rasmussen, 2024; Smith, 2000), as they must balance the electoral risks of backing unpopular policies against the potential benefits a lobby provides (Bouwen, 2004). Conversely, favorable public opinion can be a decisive factor in shaping policy outcomes (Gray et al., 2004) and influence capacity (Kollman, 1998; Rasmussen et al., 2018). Third, given the interdependent nature of the determinants shaping lobbying influence, public perception directly affects an organization's ability to leverage other determinants (Serna-Ortega et al., 2025).

Consequently, studying public perception of lobbies is crucial for understanding the broader dynamics of their influence. This research aims to take a step in this direction, focusing on the Spanish context. On the one hand, it seeks to explore the public perception of lobbies in Spain based on three criteria: attributes associated with their activities, organizational types, and interests defended. On the other hand, it aims to analyze the influence of five sociodemographic variables on the perception of lobbies: gender, age, ideology, economic status, and education.

Thus, from a scientific perspective, this article contributes to filling the research gap in one of the least explored determinants of lobbying influence: public perception. However, the potential implications go beyond this, as the findings are relevant for political regulations related to advocacy, the development of communicative strategies aimed at educating the public on the topic, and the growth of sociological debates surrounding it.

The distinctive element of this study lies in the fact that it is the first of its kind conducted in the Spanish context. In addition, its integrated analytical approach, which examines three perceptual criteria, provides a detailed view based on each and allows for comparisons between them. The inclusion of sociodemographic variables in

the analysis also introduces a novel line of research, which can help identify perceptual trends.

### **1.1. Background on the public perception of lobbies**

From the perspective of public perception based on attributes associated with lobbying activities, studies tend to link them with terms like opacity and corruption, projecting a negative evaluation (Campos & Giovannoni, 2007; Crepaz & Arikan, 2024; Kuzmova, 2011). Then, it is not surprising that transparency is often considered the most crucial factor for improving public perception of lobbies. It enhances trust in their activities (Crepaz & Arikan, 2024) and strengthens their perceived legitimacy within the political decision-making sphere (Kanol, 2018). In fact, policy-making processes that visibly incorporate input from external actors are often regarded as more legitimate (Bernauer & Gampfer, 2013; Beyers & Arras, 2021). Recent shifts toward proactive transparency, such as open data portals and public registers, equip citizens with direct tools to monitor lobbying activities (Dinan, 2021; Porumbescu et al., 2022). Access to this information allows society to evaluate lobbyists' integrity, which can potentially reduce perceptions of corruption (Chari et al., 2020).

In another line of thought, Crepaz (2024) notes that while transparency does not negatively impact the public perception of lobbies, it does not necessarily increase their trust or decrease perceptions of corruption. Its impact may be circumstantial and dependent on how information is presented and mediated, for instance, through the media.

Precisely, the impact of the media on the public perception of lobbies, while not addressed in this article, is a highly interesting and well-researched topic. Recent studies have increasingly highlighted the importance of media coverage for lobbying organizations, directly or indirectly (e.g., Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2022; Dyck et al., 2013; Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2024, 2025; Sobbrío, 2009). Media representations often shape how influence actions are perceived in terms of legitimacy, transparency, and ethical alignment with broader societal values (Crepaz, 2024), influencing whether these actions are seen as serving collective goals or as self-interested maneuvers. One consequence of this is that the media's framing of lobbying entities and their role in policy circles can foster polarized opinions, often reinforcing pre-existing beliefs (see e.g., Andina-Díaz, 2007; Hmielowski, 2020; Shehata et al., 2024). This phenomenon is intensified by the echo chambers found on social media, where selective exposure and confirmation bias can amplify both negative and positive views (Avin et al., 2024; Törnberg & Törnberg, 2024).

On the subject of public perception of lobbies based on their organizational types or the interests they represent, the scientific literature suggests significant variations among groups. Non-business lobbies, such as trade unions, non-governmental organizations, or volunteer groups, tend to receive greater public trust due to their apparent focus on the general interest (Frangi et al., 2017; Holyoke, 2020; O'Neill, 2009). These organizations are viewed favorably because they advocate for social causes perceived as legitimate and aligned with the common good, carrying a moral weight that resonates with societal values and a sense of justice (Berry, 2015; Grose et al., 2022). Also, many of these lobbies emerge from community movements, providing them with added authenticity and popular support (Rich, 2020; Yates, 2023).

In contrast, corporate lobbies, which primarily represent large companies or industry associations, often face skepticism and a negative public perception (Hrebenar et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2024; Kuzmova, 2011). Public opinion tends to view these groups as motivated solely by private interests and economic benefits, associating them with attempts to gain unfair advantages or evade regulations through ethically questionable influence (Crepaz, 2024; Koch & Schulz-Knappe, 2021). The belief that economic lobbies hold disproportionate power due to their financial resources also contributes to this distrust. Moreover, concerns raised about the lack of transparency in their activities heighten suspicions on their methods and intentions (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2022; Crepaz & Arikan, 2024), perpetuating a negative public perception. Again, based on these two perceptual

criteria, the role of the media is fundamental. There is a persistent tendency towards polarization and reinforcement of preconceived notions (Sobbrio, 2009).

Although the general trend distinguishes differences in public perception based on interests advocated, other research indicates that citizens perceive the participation of these actors as more legitimate when there is a balance between representatives of economic and social interests (Aizenberg et al., 2024; Beyers & Arras, 2021; Rasmussen & Reher, 2023). This may indicate that including diverse voices in the lobbying influence process could help mitigate distrust toward corporate lobbies representing private interests, fostering a more equitable and legitimate perception of their influence on political decision-making.

## **1.2. Background on the influence of sociodemographic variables on the perception of lobbies**

An intriguing aspect of lobbies perception is how individuals' sociodemographic characteristics influence their views. However, the scientific literature on this topic is virtually non-existent. One of the few studies that can be linked is the doctoral thesis conducted by Kuzmova (2011), who explored the public perception of lobbies among Slovak citizens. Although the research did not explicitly analyze the relationship between the perception of lobbying and the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, some interpretations can be drawn from the data, particularly since the sample predominantly consisted of young men with university education. The analysis within this sample reveals a positive association between the level of education and favorable perceptions of lobbying groups.

In addition to these findings, there is relevant research that addresses other aspects of lobbying from a corporate perspective. For example, Rudy and Johnson (2016), in their study, analyze how CEO demographic characteristics influence corporate political participation. They find that the age, experience, functional profile, and educational background of leaders determine whether and how a company will invest in political activities. Complementarily, Unsal et al. (2016) investigate how the political orientation of CEOs affects their lobbying efforts. Their study shows that managers with right-wing leanings tend to invest more in lobbying. This is also reinforced in the research of Nalick et al. (2023).

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The article is structured around two objectives:

- O1: Explore the public perception of lobbies in Spain based on three criteria: attributes associated with their activities, organizational types, and interests defended.
- O2: Analyze the influence of five sociodemographic variables on the perception of lobbies: gender, age, ideology, economic status, and education.

Based on the introduction, and despite the fact that research in this area is still in its early stages, a hypothesis is proposed for each objective:

- H1: Public perception of lobbies varies according to the three criteria. Lobbies tend to be perceived more negatively when assessed in terms of their transparency and ethical standards, when they are associated with private sector entities, or when they defend political-economic interests. In contrast, perception is more positive when evaluated in terms of their democratic necessity or perceived social benefit, when they represent civil society organizations or research/educational institutions, or when they advocate for social interests.
- H2: The sociodemographic variables that influence the perception of lobbies are ideology, economic

status, and education. Individuals with right-wing ideology, higher economic status, and tertiary education tend to have a more positive perception of lobbies.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach is quantitative. Also, given the limited research on this topic, especially within the Spanish context, the study is predominantly exploratory in nature.

#### 3.1. Data collection

The technique used for data collection is the survey, implemented through a questionnaire. Data collection occurs between October 2024 and January 2025. The process takes place within a single time frame, so the design is non-experimental and cross-sectional. To minimize sample bias and ensure maximum representativeness, the questionnaire is administered through phone calls.

##### 3.1.1. Variables measured

Before proceeding with the variables measured in the questionnaire, it is necessary to clarify that participants are first asked about their understanding of what a lobby is, as this knowledge is essential for forming a perception about them. If a respondent did not know what a lobby is, the call is terminated; if they did, the questionnaire continued.

Concerning the variables measured, four blocks are established. Block I corresponds to the sociodemographic variables of the respondents, while Blocks II, III, and IV individually cover the criteria used to explore public perception of lobbies: attributes associated with their activities, organizational types, and interests defended. The variables included in each block, along with their operationalization, are detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Operationalization of the variables measured in the questionnaire.

Block I. Sociodemographic variables (Category: General information)	
Variable	Operationalization
Gender	Categorical: (Male/Female/Other)
Age	Categorical: (18-22/23-27/28-32/33-37/38-42/43-47/48-52/53-57/58-62/63-67/68-72/73-77/78-82/83+)
Ideology	Categorical: (Left/Center/Right)
Economic status	Categorical: (Lower/Lower-Middle/Middle/Higher-Middle/Higher)
Education	Categorical: (Primary/Secondary/Tertiary)
Block II. Perception of lobbies based on attributes (Category: Perception)	
Variable (Association of lobbies with...)	Operationalization
Att 1. Opaque/Transparent	Numerical: Scale -3 (Opaque) to 3 (Transparent)
Att 2. Corrupt/Ethical	Numerical: Scale -3 (Corrupt) to 3 (Ethical)
Att 3. Unnecessary/Necessary	Numerical: Scale -3 (Unnecessary) to 3 (Necessary)
Att 4. Undemocratic/Democratic	Numerical: Scale -3 (Undemocratic) to 3 (Democratic)
Att 5. Detrimental/Beneficial	Numerical: Scale -3 (Detrimental) to 3 (Beneficial)
Block III. Perception of lobbies based on organizational types (Category: Perception)	
Variable (Perception of...)	Operationalization
Private sector entities	Numerical: Scale -3 (Negative) to 3 (Positive)
Public and mixed entities	Numerical: Scale -3 (Negative) to 3 (Positive)
Civil society organizations	Numerical: Scale -3 (Negative) to 3 (Positive)
Research/educational institutions	Numerical: Scale -3 (Negative) to 3 (Positive)
Block IV. Perception of lobbies based on interests (Category: Perception)	
Variable (Perception of lobbies defending...)	Operationalization
Political-economic interests	Numerical: Scale -3 (Negative) to 3 (Positive)



Mixed interests	Numerical: Scale -3 (Negative) to 3 (Positive)
Social interests	Numerical: Scale -3 (Negative) to 3 (Positive)

**Source:** Own elaboration.

To determine the organizational types and interests measured in the variables included in Blocks III and IV, the European Union's Transparency Register is consulted. Regarding the organizational types, the 13 categories from the platform's affiliation form are divided into the four groups used. For the interests, the process involved two phases. First, the 40 interest categories available on the platform are classified into ten subgroups, which are then streamlined into the three main categories of interests used. The streamlined processes are available at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/RBASE7>

### 3.1.2. Population and sample

The study population is defined as all individuals living in Spain who are over 18 years old: nearly 40 million people. Since it is impossible to encompass the entire population, a sample needs to be established. With a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, it is determined that a representative sample should consist of at least  $n=380$  randomly selected individuals. An additional 10% is added to ensure the validity of adjustments, resulting in a required sample size of  $N=418$  individuals.

The sampling method used is random with an inclusion criterion. As mentioned, the criterion for participation is that individuals must know what a lobby is: 21.58% ( $N=418$ ) of the total contacted individuals who were willing to respond were aware of what a lobby is.

The final composition of the  $N=418$  subjects in the sample included 203 men (48.56%) and 215 women (51.44%). The age distribution of the subjects shows a clear skew towards individuals over 40 years old. According to ideology, 131 identify as left-wing (31.34%), 135 as centrist (32.29%), and 152 as right-wing (36.37%). Regarding their economic status, 34 subjects consider themselves lower class (8.13%), 122 lower-middle class (29.19%), 206 middle class (49.28%), 36 higher-middle class (8.61%), and 20 higher class (4.79%). Lastly, 86 subjects have primary education (20.57%), 119 secondary education (28.47%), and 213 tertiary education (50.96%).

## 3.2. Data analysis

Given the numerical nature of the data, the technique employed for the research is statistical analysis. Its implementation involves a set of tools that include: descriptive statistical analysis, analysis of variance, independence tests, binary logistic regressions, and analysis of B regression coefficients.

### 3.2.1. Variables analyzed

In addition to the inherent variables from the questionnaire, which are self-explanatory and whose values are directly derived from participants' responses, other variables are generated throughout the analysis by combining or transforming the original ones. These variables, each with their own identifier (ID), are:

- Average attributes perception (ID=atr\_sc): numerical value between -3 and 3, derived from the average of the perception scores for the five pairs of attributes (Block II).
- Average organizational types perception (ID=org\_sc): numerical value between -3 and 3, derived from the average of the perception scores for the four organizational types (Block III).
- Average interests' perception (ID=int\_sc): numerical value between -3 and 3, derived from the average

of the perception scores for the three types of interests (Block IV).

- Average global perception (ID=per\_sc): numerical value between -3 and 3, derived from the average of the perception scores for the three perceptual criteria (Blocks II, III and IV). Each block carries the same weight (33.33%).

In certain analytical procedures, it is necessary to code these four variables, or any included in the questionnaire, as categorical, numerical, or binary variables. The necessary changes in the variable coding for each statistical method are specified in the following section and in the relevant parts of the results.

### **3.2.2. Data analysis procedure**

The structure of the results, and consequently the data analysis procedure, is organized around the research's objectives, defining two sections.

The first section, related O1, focuses on exploring the public perception of lobbies in Spain. It includes a descriptive statistical overview that contextualizes the public perception results based on the three criteria. The means of each perceptual variable are evaluated both individually and collectively, with the perceptual averages of each block (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc) incorporated into the analysis.

To evaluate the perceptual differences based on the three criteria, an analysis is conducted using isolines to examine the means of each criterion (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc), comparing them in pairs. Complementarily, to determine the differences among the various criteria, a variance analysis is performed on the individual perceptual variables within each block, as well as on the average values (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc).

The second section, related to O2, focuses on analyzing the influence of the five sociodemographic variables on the perception of lobbies. The analysis begins with the execution of 60 independence tests using the chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ). All possible combinations between the five sociodemographic variables from Block I and the twelve perceptual variables measured in Blocks II, III, and IV are explored. To perform these tests, categorical variables are required. Therefore, all numerical variables are coded as categorical by assigning a category to each integer value.

A binary logistic regression is then implemented. The purpose is to determine, based on a set of predictor variables, the likelihood of an event occurring (Peng et al., 2022); in this case, whether the overall perception of lobbies is positive or negative. The dependent variable is the mean general perception score (per\_sc), coded as a binary. Negative perception scores (from -3 to 0) are assigned a value of 0, while positive perception scores (from 0.001 to 3) are assigned a value of 1. The five sociodemographic variables are included as independent potential predictor variables.

After executing the regression and identifying the influential variables, the B coefficients are interpreted, indicating the direction and magnitude of the effect of each sociodemographic explanatory variable on the binary dependent variable. The interpretation is carried out in the final step of the regression and relative to the reference category within each sociodemographic variable. The reference categories are the last ones in the operationalization (gender: other; age: 83+; ideology: right; education: tertiary; economic status: high).

It is important to acknowledge that the binary logistic regression and analyses up to this point only allow for an understanding of the overall influence of sociodemographic variables on the general perception of lobbies. To provide a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon, 15 additional binary logistic regressions are implemented, one for each of the perceptual variable in each block and their corresponding averages (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc). It is necessary to code each dependent variables as binary, following the same procedure

as in the general regression. To determine the direction of the specific influences of sociodemographic variables within each of the 15 regressions, B regression coefficients are analyzed for each relevant variable.

The software tools used for data analysis procedures include conventional spreadsheet programs, SPSS, and R.

### **3.3. Data availability**

The dataset generated as a result of the data collection and used for the data analysis is available at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/RBASE7>, and will be provided upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Public perception of lobbies in Spain (O1)**

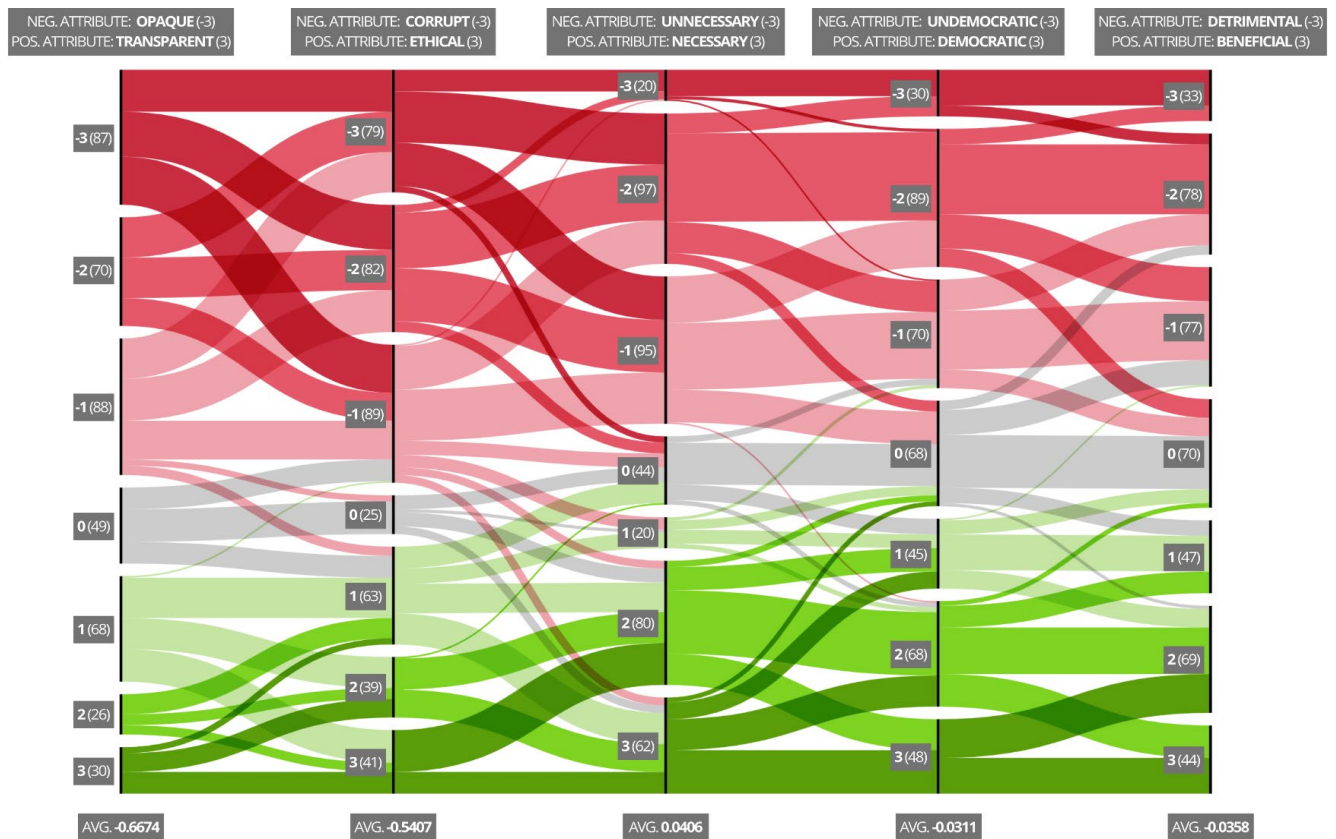
When evaluating the data corresponding to perception of lobbies based on attributes, a general trend towards those with negative connotations is observed. The pattern is particularly skewed in the first two pairs (opaque/transparent and corrupt/ethical), where the mean values are -0.667 and -0.541, respectively. In both cases, the median is -1.

The only pair of the five that shows a positive mean score is unnecessary/necessary. The average score is 0.041, nearly neutral, with a median of 0. Similarly, the pairs undemocratic/democratic and detrimental/beneficial show mean values close to 0, but slightly negative (-0.031 and -0.036, respectively).

As can be seen in the Sankey diagram provided in Figure 1, the distribution is far more polarized in the first two pairs of attributes, later converging toward the middle values of the scale.

**Figure 1.** *Sankey diagram of responses flows on the perception of lobbies based on attributes.*





Source: Own elaboration.

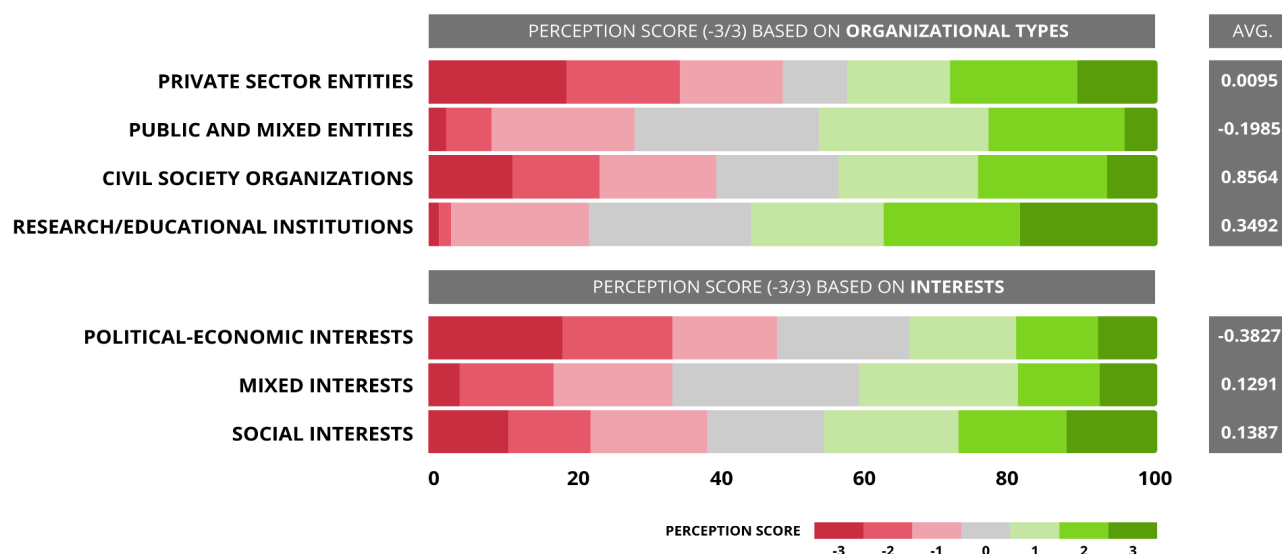
Regarding the analysis of the average value of the five pairs of attributes (atr\_sc), the mean score is -0.247, with 176 individuals (42.10%) showing positive average values.

Perception based on organizational types presents a different picture (see Figure 2). Only one of the four variables shows a negative average response: private sector entities. Although the median response is 0, the average score is -0.198, with a majority of respondents rating negatively (57.42%; n=240). The other three organizational types show average perceptual values above 0. The most notable case is that of research/educational institutions, which have a median of 1 and an average value of 0.856. Public and mixed entities, as well as civil society organizations, while also positive, present more neutral average values (0.349 and 0.009, respectively), with the median response being 0 in both cases. The average score of the perceptual ratings of the four types of lobbies (org\_sc) is 0.254, with 240 subjects (57.42%) rating positively.

The analysis of perception based on interests defended shows a negative average response regarding organizations with political-economic interests. The average score is -0.383, with only 142 respondents (33.97%) providing a positive perceptual score. Lobbies with mixed or social interests show a positive perception among the subjects in the sample, with average scores of 0.129 and 0.139, respectively (see Figure 2). The mean score among the three groups of interests (int\_sc) is -0.038, slightly negative.

**Figure 2.** Responses distribution on the perception of lobbies based on organizational types and interests

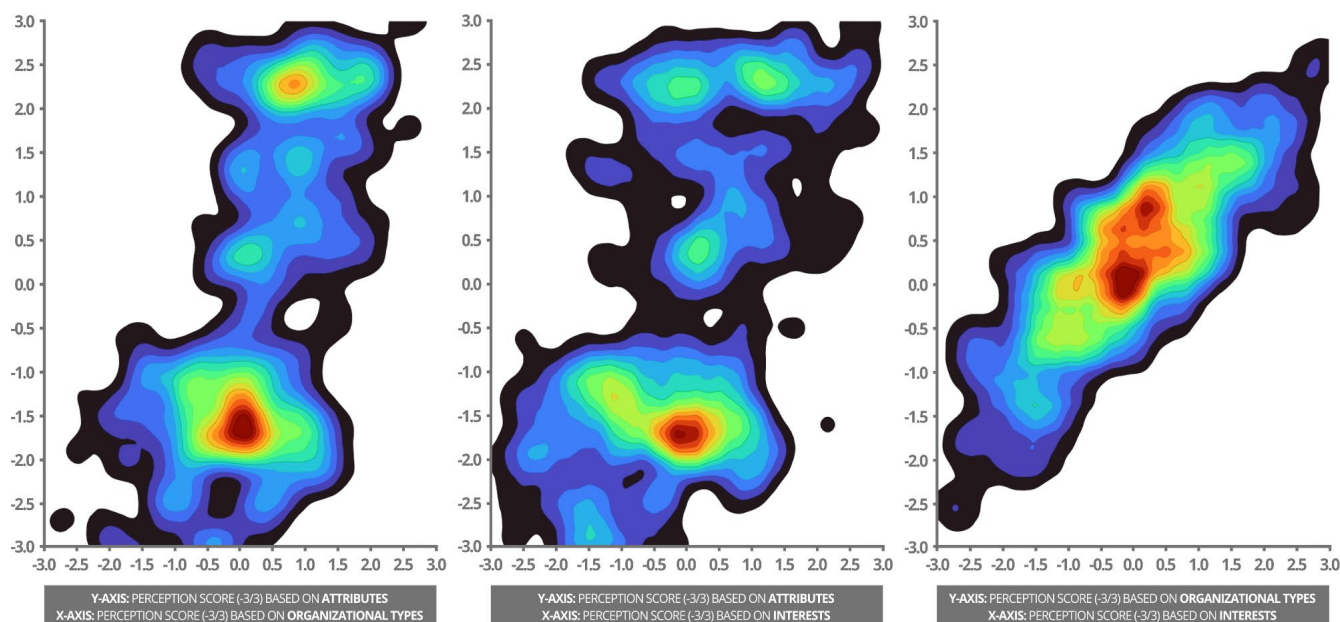
*defended.*



Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the statistical description provided, it can be stated that the analysis of the public perception of lobbies reveals differences depending on the criterion used. To further explore these differences, a comparison is conducted using isolines representing the average values across the three categories (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc). The graphical representation of the three possible pairwise combinations is shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** Analysis with isolines of the perceptual means of each criterion, comparing them in pairs.



Source: Own elaboration.

The first two graphs, where the y-axis corresponds to response values based on attributes, present a negatively polarized scenario. In contrast, the graph linking perception according to organizational types and defended interests shows centrality and neutrality in the responses. To analyze this phenomenon more closely, variance analyses are conducted on both the individual responses to each variable and the average values of each block (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc).

In the five variables related to the association with attributes, the individual variance in responses is similar:  $\sigma^2=3.373$  (opaque/transparent),  $\sigma^2=3.822$  (corrupt/ethical),  $\sigma^2=3.741$  (unnecessary/necessary),  $\sigma^2=3.464$  (undemocratic/democratic), and  $\sigma^2=3.368$  (detrimental/beneficial). Correspondingly, the variance of the average value (atr\_sc) is  $\sigma^2=3.151$ . This suggests consistency in individual responses, meaning that those who rate lobbies negatively on one attribute are likely to do so on others as well.

However, in the variables related to perception based on organizational types and interests defended, there are substantial discrepancies between the variance in responses of individual variables and the variance of the overall means (org\_sc and int\_sc).

For instance, in the case of the variables related to perception based on organizational types, the variances are:  $\sigma^2=4.265$  (private sector entities),  $\sigma^2=1.930$  (public and mixed entities),  $\sigma^2=3.204$  (civil society organizations), and  $\sigma^2=2.286$  (research/educational institutions); while the variance of the average value (org\_sc) is  $\sigma^2=1.071$ . Considering the differences, it can be affirmed that the same individual is assigning different perceptual values depending on the type of organization, with the most pronounced differences observed in private sector entities and civil society organizations.

Likewise, in variables regarding perception based on interests, the variances are:  $\sigma^2=3.594$  (political-economic interests),  $\sigma^2=2.434$  (mixed interests), and  $\sigma^2=3.486$  (social interests); and the variance of the average value (int\_sc) is  $\sigma^2=1.568$ . Thus, individuals who score their perception of organizations with political-economic interests positively tend to rate their perception of entities advocating for social interests negatively, and vice versa.

## 4.2. Influence of sociodemographic variables on the perception of lobbies (O2)

The first step in exploring the sociodemographic variables that influence the perception of lobbies involves conducting independence tests that analyze, through the chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), the degree of association between the five sociodemographic variables and the individual variables that comprise the three perception criteria (categorically coded). Table 2 reflects the results of the independence tests.

**Table 2.** Independence tests between perceptual variables and sociodemographic variables.

Perceptual variables (categorically coded)	Sociodemographic variables				
	Gender (df=6)	Age (df=78)	Ideology (df=12)	Economic status (df=24)	Education (df=12)
<b>Criterion 1: Attributes (Block II)</b>					
Opaque/Transparent	$\chi^2=3.792$ p=0.705	$\chi^2=75.909$ p=0.546	$\chi^2=99.124$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=59.104$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=36.734$ p=0.000
Corrupt/Ethical	$\chi^2=6.007$ p=0.422	$\chi^2=64.090$ p=0.872	$\chi^2=104.922$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=57.689$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=37.555$ p=0.000
Unnecessary/Necessary	$\chi^2=5.476$ p=0.484	$\chi^2=94.725$ p=0.096	$\chi^2=106.591$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=42.321$ p=0.012	$\chi^2=30.544$ p=0.002
Undemocratic/Democratic	$\chi^2=2.846$ p=0.828	$\chi^2=95.114$ p=0.091	$\chi^2=95.487$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=64.211$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=31.658$ p=0.002
Detrimental/Beneficial	$\chi^2=4.906$ p=0.556	$\chi^2=77.797$ p=0.485	$\chi^2=110.100$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=48.994$ p=0.002	$\chi^2=28.938$ p=0.004

<b>Criterion 2: Organizational types (Block III)</b>					
Private sector entities	$\chi^2=4.614$ p=0.594	$\chi^2=75.928$ p=0.545	$\chi^2=122.455$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=84.789$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=32.839$ p=0.001
Public and mixed entities	$\chi^2=9.705$ p=0.138	$\chi^2=89.262$ p=0.180	$\chi^2=6.014$ p=0.915	$\chi^2=18.667$ p=0.194	$\chi^2=14.177$ p=0.290
Civil society organizations	$\chi^2=6.222$ p=0.399	$\chi^2=75.269$ p=0.567	$\chi^2=64.449$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=22.354$ p=0.558	$\chi^2=13.478$ p=0.335
Research/educational institutions	$\chi^2=1.972$ p=0.922	$\chi^2=88.243$ p=0.201	$\chi^2=16.753$ p=0.159	$\chi^2=19.160$ p=0.743	$\chi^2=6.986$ p=0.859
<b>Criterion 3: Interests (Block IV)</b>					
Political-economic interests	$\chi^2=2.838$ p=0.829	$\chi^2=63.422$ p=0.884	$\chi^2=85.923$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=68.200$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=28.593$ p=0.005
Mixed interests	$\chi^2=3.386$ p=0.759	$\chi^2=94.174$ p=0.102	$\chi^2=5.209$ p=0.951	$\chi^2=16.819$ p=0.258	$\chi^2=11.614$ p=0.477
Social interests	$\chi^2=1.663$ p=0.948	$\chi^2=66.967$ p=0.809	$\chi^2=34.994$ p=0.000	$\chi^2=42.814$ p=0.010	$\chi^2=24.176$ p=0.019

**Source:** Own elaboration.

Overall, neither gender nor age is linked to any of the perceptual variables. However, ideology, economic status, and education show clear associations.

The scenario related to ideology is particularly polarized. Based on attributes, no discrepancies are found, with dependence observed across all five cases (average p-value=0.000). However, dependence based on the organizational types and the interests defended is more complex. Statistically significant associations between variables are only identified on four occasions. For the organizational types of criterion, dependence appears in the perception of private sector entities (p-value=0.000) and civil society organizations (p-value=0.000), while no dependence is observed for public or mixed entities (p-value=0.915) or research/educational institutions (p-value=0.859). Similarly, regarding interests, dependence exists solely for political-economic (p-value=0.000) and social interests (p-value=0.000).

Concerning economic status and education, a similar trend emerges, albeit with some variations. Regarding the perception of attributes, a consistent dependence is observed, although it is less pronounced (average p-values=0.014 and 0.002, respectively). Examining the relationships according to the type of organization reveals dependence only in the case of private sector entities (p-values=0.000 and 0.001). Lastly, when evaluating the values regarding the interests represented, dependence is again noted for both political-economic interests (p-values=0.000 and 0.005) and social interests (p-values=0.010 and 0.019).

After assessing the initial associations, a binary logistic regression is implemented, using the general perception average (per\_sc), coded as binary, as the dependent variable. This regression aims to determine, with sociodemographic variables as potential explanatory factors, whether an individual has a positive or negative perception of lobbies.

The first step of the regression is to identify the relevant variables, i.e., those with predictive power. Ideology, economic status, and education are statistically significant. An omnibus test confirms the regression's validity (p-value=0.000), showing that the independent variables help explain the binary outcome. R-squared tests indicate explained variance, while the Hosmer-Lemeshow test shows good fit, as predicted and observed values do not differ significantly.

The classification table shows a correct prediction in 76.79% of cases (see Table 3). This value is derived from comparing the regression predictions with the actual data. Considering this value, it can be said that knowing a subject's ideology, economic status, and education allows for a 76.79% accuracy in predicting whether their

global perception of lobbies is positive or negative.

**Table 3.** *Classification table of the binary logistic regression.*

Step	Sociodemographic variables	Observed		Predicted		
				per_sc		% Correct
				0 (per_sc<0)	1 (per_sc>0)	
Step 1	Ideology	per_sc	0 (per_sc<0)	189	35	84.38
			1 (per_sc>0)	77	117	60.31
		General percentage		73.21		
Step 2	Economic status Ideology	per_sc	0 (per_sc<0)	187	37	83.48
			1 (per_sc>0)	68	126	64.95
		General percentage		74.88		
Step 3	Education Economic status Ideology	per_sc	0 (per_sc<0)	173	51	77.23
			1 (per_sc>0)	46	148	76.29
		General percentage		76.79		

**Source:** Own elaboration.

To explore the direction and magnitude of the effect of each relevant sociodemographic variable on the binary dependent variable, the B regression coefficients are analyzed in relation to the reference category within each variable. Regarding ideology, B (center)=-1.661 and B (left)=-2.399. For education, B (secondary)=-1.135 and B (primary)=-1.351. In terms of economic status, B (higher-middle)=-19.225, B (middle)=-20.582, B (lower-middle)=-21.146, and B (lower)=22.102. Therefore, considering the progression of these values and their negative direction, it can be concluded that individuals with right-wing ideology, higher economic status, and tertiary education are more likely to have a positive perception of lobbies.

This conditioning trend applies only to the analysis of general perception. To thoroughly understand how the influence of variables is distributed, it is necessary to explore the relation between sociodemographic variables and every individual perception criterion.

For this purpose, the same process used for the general analysis (in which per\_sc is used as the binary dependent variable) is applied to each specific perceptual variable and the means of their respective blocks (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc). To carry this out, the same variable conversion procedure is applied, coding the dependent variables as binary. The result is a binary logistic regression matrix complemented by an analysis of B regression coefficients (see Table 4).



**Table 4.** Binary logistic regressions between perceptual variables and sociodemographic variables, complemented by an analysis of B regression coefficients for relevant variables in each regression.

Perceptual variables (binary coded)	Statistical analysis		
	Binary logistic regressions		B regression coefficients*
	% Correct	Relevant sociodemographic variables	
Criterion 1: Attributes (Block II)			
Opaque/Transparent	73.19%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=71.77%) Education (% Correct: Step 2=72.03%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 3=73.19%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4) –t–
Corrupt/Ethical	78.04%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=74.41%) Education (% Correct: Step 2=74.46%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 3=75.07%) Age (% Correct: Step 4=78.04%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4) B>0 (10/13)
Unnecessary/Necessary	73.37%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=73.66%) Education (% Correct: Step 2=73.69%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 3=73.37%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4)
Undemocratic/Democratic	74.27%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=73.40%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 2=74.49%) Education (% Correct: Step 3=74.27%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4) B<0 (2/2) –t–
Detrimental/Beneficial	74.29%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=73.66%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 2=74.61%) Education (% Correct: Step 3=74.29%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4) B<0 (2/2) –t–
Average (atr_sc)	75.75%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=74.23%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 2=75.12%) Education (% Correct: Step 3=75.75%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4) B<0 (2/2) –t–
Criterion 2: Organizational types (Block III)			
Private sector entities	75.14%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=70.26%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 2=73.45%) Age (% Correct: Step 3=75.14%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4) B>0 (12/13)
Public and mixed entities	58.90%	Economic status (% Correct: Step 1=58.90%)	B<0 (3/4) –t–
Civil society organizations	59.32%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=59.32%)	B>0 (2/2) –t–
Research/educational institutions	-	-	-
Average (org_sc)	63.90%	Economic status (% Correct: Step 1=59.27%) Education (% Correct: Step 2=63.90%)	B<0 (3/4) –t– B<0 (2/2)
Criterion 3: Interests (Block IV)			
Political-economic interests	69.13%	Ideology (% Correct: Step 1=69.88%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 2=70.76%) Education (% Correct: Step 3=69.13%)	B<0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (4/4) B<0 (2/2) –t–
Mixed interests	-	-	-
Social interests	65.52%	Education (% Correct: Step 1=56.45%) Ideology (% Correct: Step 2=63.40%) Economic status (% Correct: Step 3=65.52%)	B<0 (1/2) B>0 (2/2) –t– B<0 (3/4) –t–
Average (int_sc)	65.11%	Economic status (% Correct: Step 1=63.56%) Education (% Correct: Step 2=65.11%)	B<0 (3/4) –t– B<0 (2/2)
<b>* Note:</b> The parentheses indicate the number of categories that meet the specified criterion (B<0/B>0) out of the total possible categories within the variable (total categories minus the reference category). If “–t–” is also included, it means that the effect increases positively or negatively in a consistent manner. The breakdown of the coefficients is available at: <a href="https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/RBASE7">https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/RBASE7</a>			

Source: Own elaboration.



In all three regressions based on average values (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc), the economic status and education show predictive potential regarding the perception of lobbies. Furthermore, in each case, the B regression coefficients ( $B < 0$ ) indicate a positive relationship: individuals with higher economic status or education tend to view lobbies more positively.

The main differences between the general regression (per\_sc), the regressions based on average scores for each block (atr\_sc, org\_sc, and int\_sc), and those based on specific perceptual variables arise with the ideology variable. In the regression based on the average perception score in terms of attributes (atr\_sc), ideology proves relevant because there is a relative uniformity in perceptual ratings regardless of the attribute pairs. However, in regressions for perceptions based on organizational types (org\_sc) or interests (int\_sc), ideology is not generally significant but becomes relevant for individual variables. For instance, when examining specific interests, ideology (coded from left to right) shows a direct relationship with positive perceptions of groups defending political-economic interests ( $B < 0$ ) and an inverse relationship with those advocating social interests ( $B > 0$ ). This indicates that right-wing individuals are more inclined to view positively lobbies that support political-economic interests, while left-wing individuals tend to favor those promoting social causes. The same pattern holds for private sector entities ( $B < 0$ ) and civil society organizations ( $B > 0$ ).

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The results related to perception of lobbies based on attributes reveal two entirely different scenarios. The first scenario pertains to the two pairs of attributes tied to the operational activity of lobbies, where the scores clearly indicate a perceptual connection with lack of transparency and corruption. Thus, transparency is a critical element to improve for a positive public perception of lobbies (Chari et al., 2020; Crepaz & Arikan, 2024), as there remains a strong need for ongoing efforts to enhance accountability in interactions between lobbies and the institutions they seek to influence (Laboutková & Vymětal, 2023). The second scenario encompasses attributes regarding the democratic necessity or potential benefits of these organizations. Here, the observed pattern is much more neutral, suggesting some recognition of the need to include these organizations in public policy processes (Bernauer and Gampfer, 2013; Beyers and Arras, 2021). This gap between operational attributes and democratic justification may reflect deeper tensions in public opinion regarding their legitimacy. As suggested by theories of communicative legitimacy (Castells, 2007; Habermas, 1996), transparency and accountability are foundational to public acceptance, particularly in democratic contexts.

On the other hand, regarding perception of lobbies based on organizational types, the results reflect clear distinctions consistent with existing literature. Private sector entities are perceived most negatively. This aligns with studies suggesting corporate lobbies often face skepticism, being viewed as driven by private economic gains (e.g., Godwin et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2024). Moreover, this idea is reinforced by transparency concerns that contribute to doubts about the ethicality of their influence (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2022; Crepaz & Arikan, 2024; Ron and Singer, 2020). Conversely, non-business entities, particularly research/educational institutions, show a positive perception. Public/mixed entities and civil society organizations also score positively or neutrally, indicating greater trust in groups perceived as advocating for collective rather than private interests (Frangi et al., 2017; Holyoke, 2020; O'Neill, 2009; Richan, 2013). This aligns with findings that non-profit organizations carry a sense of legitimacy that resonates with public values (Berry, 2015; Grose et al., 2022). These distinctions also resonate with broader theories of political representation (Pitkin, 1967). Lobbies act as representatives of particular segments of society. However, when these representatives are perceived to primarily serve private or elite interests, their legitimacy is challenged. This echoes contemporary concerns about the democratic deficit in interest intermediation (Young, 2002).

Similar patterns are revealed when examining the perception of lobbies based on the interests defended. Political-economic lobbies are rated negatively, while those with mixed or social interests receive positive ratings. This reinforces the idea that advocacy aligned with the common good is viewed more favorably (Holyoke, 2020; Koch & Schulz-Knappe, 2021). This may also be interpreted through the lens of input legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999). As outlined, some further studies suggest that when lobbying efforts are inclusive of both economic and social interests, they gain public legitimacy (Aizenberg et al., 2024; Rasmussen & Reher, 2023), hinting that a balanced representation can mitigate distrust toward corporate lobbies and foster a more equitable perception of their influence on policy.

Therefore, considering these findings, it can be stated that H1 is largely supported by the research. The only caveat is that perceptual differences are much more pronounced based on the last two criteria.

The variance analysis of perceptual differences based on the three criteria shows notable results. For the attributes criterion, the variance of the general variable is high and consistent with individual variables. However, when analyzing variances based on organizational types and interests, the variances in the average response values for each block is low, contrasting with the higher individual variances. This shows that individual responses are inconsistent. The direct implication of this analysis is a landscape of perceptual polarization in the three cases. It can be related to the role of the media in shaping perceptions of lobbies, as media coverage tends to foster polarized opinions and reinforce pre-existing beliefs (Hmielowski, 2020; Shehata et al., 2024), particularly in political-related topics (Flamino et al., 2023).

Delving into this polarized context, the analysis of the influence of sociodemographic variables on the perception of lobbies reveals three main influential variables: ideology, economic status, and education. People with right-wing ideology, higher economic status, and tertiary education tend to have a more positive perception of lobbies. Hence, H2 is fully confirmed.

These results complement previous studies which also find that education plays a crucial role (e.g., Kuzmova, 2011; Rudy & Johnson, 2016). The association between variables may be due to a better understanding of the functions of these organizations and the recognition of their importance. Additionally, a marked perceptual polarization based on ideology is observed, both in the general analysis and in specific regressions. Individuals with right-wing ideology are more likely to value lobbies with political-economic interests and entities from the private sector. In contrast, those with left-wing ideology tend to favor lobbies oriented toward social interests and civil society organizations. This trend is also observed in studies like those of Nalick et al. (2023) and Unsal et al. (2016), which show how CEOs with right-wing inclinations tend to lead more extensive lobbying efforts. Precisely, the influence of ideology may be the most noteworthy finding of this part of the analysis. It aligns with affective polarization described in public opinion research. Such polarization can lead people to evaluate lobbies not by their function but by their perceived political alignment, also reflecting theories of motivated reasoning (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

In conclusion, the research conducted has successfully achieved its objectives through the proposed methodological approach, confirming both proposed hypotheses. The study reveals a highly polarized public perception of lobbying groups. Respondents generally exhibit a predominantly negative perception of lobbies, particularly regarding their transparency and ethical standards. However, there are differences based on organizational types and interests defended. Research/educational institutions tend to receive more positive evaluations compared to private sector entities, as do lobbies advocating for social interests rather than those focused on private interests. Regarding the influence of sociodemographic variables, ideology, economic status, and education emerge as significant predictors of individuals' perceptions of lobbies. Those with right-wing ideological leanings, higher economic status, or advanced educational backgrounds tend to have more positive views.

The implications of these findings span multiple areas. In the scientific realm, this research contributes to the analysis of public perception as a determinant of lobbying influence. Beyond academia, the implications are numerous. In the political realm, they highlight the need to develop and implement regulations that promote more transparent and ethical lobbying practices. Similarly, they reveal educational needs, offering insights for designing communication strategies that enhance public understanding of the role, functions, and significance of lobbies in democratic processes. These findings could also serve as a foundation for sociological debates on the impact of these perceptions on social cohesion and political behavior.

To correctly interpret the article's conclusions, it is essential to consider its limitations. Regarding data collection, several limitations must be considered. They can be grouped into three categories: respondent-related, design-related, and method-related. First, respondent-related limitations include the inherent subjectivity of perception responses and the potential social desirability bias in sensitive sociodemographic variables such as ideology or economic status. Additionally, requiring respondents to know what a lobby is has led to a sample with higher average age and education than a purely random sample, although this criterion is necessary to form a valid perception. Second, design-related limitations arise from the cross-sectional nature of the study, meaning perceptions may be influenced by recent events or specific contexts. Third, method-related limitations include the use of phone calls, which can lead to the underrepresentation of certain population groups; however, this method was chosen for its broad reach across a wide age range.

In terms of data analysis, two main limitations should be noted. First, although the quantitative approach provides a broad and structured overview of public perception of lobbying, it lacks the depth to explore the underlying motivations behind respondents' evaluations. Second, the geographic scope of the study, limited to Spain, which restricts the generalizability of the findings.

To address these limitations, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to track how public perception evolves over time, considering specific events, legislative changes, or socioeconomic contexts. Besides that, complementing these results with qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could help uncover the motivations behind the perceptions. A comparative approach would also be valuable, replicating this analysis in other countries to examine how different contexts shape public perception of lobbying groups.

Finally, beyond research lines aimed at addressing the identified limitations, it would be relevant to explore the media's role in shaping the public perception of lobbies. This includes examining its influence on polarization and the reinforcement of preexisting biases, as well as how specific interventions, such as transparency campaigns, impact public perception and contribute to strengthening the legitimacy and trust in lobbying activities.

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