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## MONEY CAN'T BUY INFLUENCE: WHEN LOBBYING FAILS IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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**Abstract.** Lobbying and bribery are two terms that are often used interchangeably, but they are vastly different from each other. While both involve the act of influencing policy, one is considered a legitimate and legal means of advocacy, while the other is an illegal and unethical practice. The main differences between corruption and lobbying was investigated in this research for better understanding the consequences of these two practices. Additionally, to understand why one of these practise is considered acceptable while the other one is not. This power is shaped by more complex and multifaceted factors which are investigated in this article. The scientific novelty of the article is that this research is the first broader research on identifying that money can't buy influence in the USA congress.

**Key words:** lobbying, lobby, diaspora, bribery, foreign policy, “decision-making process” USA congress.

**Introduction.** One of the most important tools for influencing decision making process in the USA congress and to influence the foreign policy of the USA is lobbying. Lobbying has underestimated power in political field. Both domestic actors of country and foreign governments which use officially registered lobbying organizations in the US for promoting their own interests. Two main types of lobbying have influence on decision making proses in the US congress: ethnic and professional lobby groups. Professional lobbying uses the method of hiring a professiona lobbying organizations for promoting its interests. However, ethnic lobby is exercised through different ethnic groups with various backgrounds in American community. The most prominent examples for it are jewish, armenian and greek lobbying groups (Ari, 2015, p. 156–157).

Following the adoption of the Lobbying Disclosure Act in 1995, all those engaged in lobbying process must be registered under the control of the U.S Senate and submit reports about their activities and expenditures (Political parties of the USA, 2011). Lobbyists are using methods such as grass-roots or investing voting campany for influencing law makers at all stages. Therefore, they usually do not pay directly to any official person or congressman for their contribution. If a diaspora or lobbying group has significant voting power in a certain state or district, their interests are taken more seriously for example, the strong Armenian community in California.

**The main text.** The purpose of study is to determine that the influence of lobbying in the decision-making process is not solely determined by a country's financial power.

**The methodology of the research** involves using content analysis, discourse anylysis methods and strong empirical background and descriptive method of study are used in this research.

### **The results and discussion**

**Lobbying: A Complex Political Instrument, Not Simply a Form of Corruption.** A strong and effective lobby requires several interrelated components, among which organization and professionalism, electoral influence and voting power, as well as the ability to shape media narratives and public opinion are essential (Aleskerova, 2021). Well-structured and professionally managed lobbying organizations are better equipped to develop long-term strategies, maintain continuity, and build sustained relationships with policymakers. Electoral influence particularly through voter mobilization and campaign contributions enable lobbies to support favorable candidates and exert political pres-

sure. Furthermore, the capacity to shape media discourse and influence public opinion allows lobby groups to legitimize their causes, raise awareness, and generate public support.

The Jewish and Armenian lobbies exemplify this model of effectiveness. Despite comparatively modest financial expenditures, they compensate through high levels of civic participation, professional organizational structures, and significant presence within the U.S. electorate. Their ability to mobilize voters, influence public discourse, and maintain consistent engagement with political institutions makes them among the most successful ethnic lobbies in the American political landscape.

On the contrary, a corruption more often occurs on an individual level. And it is anything but public. A bribing person gives corruption "under the table" for privacy. This could be paying a tax officer to clear reports with under-reported revenue or sending gifts without an invoice. That is why critics of lobbying claim that it can be considered "bribe in a suit". But the majority of researchers in political field does not agree with this view. A bribe is usually given an offer of money "under the table", but a lobbyist tries to influence public opinion and get suggestion in his favor on decision making process. Lobbyists have traditionally been seen as "information providers," aiming to influence legislation and government decisions in favor of their interests. Lobbying involves organized efforts to persuade public officials, whereas corruption is a more direct, often illegal method involving payments or benefits to gain influence. A corruption can be taken the form of a donations or non-monetary assistance. For example, a company's procurement manager might grant a contract to a supplier in exchange for an unfair personal benefit, despite company policies that require contracts to be awarded based on quality and price. Public officials may also be bribed to help individuals or companies avoid taxes and other legal obligations. In contrast, lobbying includes activities such as meeting with government representatives, negotiating the terms of proposed legislation, and advocating for or against presidential vetoes (Lobbying in the USA. Biggest spenders of foreign lobbying, 2018).

The bribe may be in the form of a donation or favor in kind. Lobbying examples include meetings and discussions with government representatives, influencing legislation by negotiating the details of a bill, and pushing for presidential vetoes. For example, a lobbying firm hired by a renewable energy company may meet with lawmakers to discuss the benefits of clean energy and advocate for policies that promote renewable energy sources.

#### Difference Between Lobbying and Bribery

Lobbying has always been considered as a dirty word in American community (Lester, 1963, p. 17–23). The crucial difference between lobbying and corruption is the legalization and ethical character of these two activities. Sometimes these two notions can seem complex to distinguish from each other. Lobby is a legal way of advocacy for influencing government policy by various methods. Due to rules and strict laws adopted in the US, lobbying is transparent process (Primary Documents in American History. The Articles of Confederation, 2025). Donations are one of the most popular way of lobbying for supporting candidates who share their views. On the other side donations can cross the line into bribery. For instance, if one company donates money to a political campaign and its expectation is receiving alterations in the decision on its favor, this action would be considered as a bribe. Giving bribe is an illegal and not considered to be ethical practice. Both lobbying and bribery is the way of trying for influencing officials for deciding in your favor, exception is that one is offering money, while the other offer property and support. As a result one is quite legal and ethical while the other is out rightly illegal.

#### High-Spending Foreign Actors in U.S. Lobbying: A Financial Perspective

An analysis of foreign lobbying through the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, compiled by the nonprofit watchdog group OpenSecrets.org shows that some countries spent much more money for making alterations U.S. policy in their favor (OpenSecrets, 2025). FARA law is only the tip of the iceberg. FARA makes some restrictions for foreign entities. Additionally, they face sharp penalties for breaking law. All lobbying process and its stages are under the control of laws and official acts.

Investing election campaigns for changing foreign policy in the US is strictly regulated, and there are more restrictions in this field than on employing U.S. based corporations in the economic field. The countries which are more successful in lobbying field are largely America's closest allies. They are considered to be more successful than countries that invest more money for lobbying.

The other high spenders on lobbying are South Korea and Japan which are America's closest allies, with including Canada, Germany and the United Arab Emirates. These countries can gain success in economical field rather than in political changes in the US foreign policy. China is a day-by-day growing rival to the America on the world's ranks. It also spends a lot of expenditure for lobbying in the US Congress. But Chinese lobby also is successful only in economical field for making alterations in the US Congress in favor of Chinese companies. Some countries, particularly Russia, China and Iran, may believe their money is better spent on covert activity rather than publicly trying to shape American debates (Lobbying in the USA. Biggest spenders of foreign lobbying, 2018).

Rank	Country	Approx. Total Lobby Spend (USD)	Notes
1	China	\$456 million	Long-term lobbying on trade, technology, education, and geopolitical policy
2	Japan	\$411 million	Strong economic, tech, and defense-related lobbying
3	Liberia	\$353 million	Massive 2023 spike; spent ~\$183M in that year alone
4	South Korea	\$322 million	Emphasis on U.S. security alliance and trade relations
5	Saudi Arabia	\$310 million	High-profile spending on U.S. firms, including ex-officials; ~\$45M in 2023
6	Marshall Islands	\$285 million	Strategic use of shipping registry influence and foreign investment channels
7	Qatar	\$256 million	Stepped up spending post-2017; \$6.5M in 2024 on lobbying alone
8	UAE	\$242 million	Focused on security, foreign policy, and economic outreach
9	Bahamas	\$241 million	Lobbied on financial regulation and tax matters
10	Bermuda	\$193 million	Heavy lobbying around corporate tax and offshore finance

### High Budgets, Low Results

This is comparative overview of the foreign countries that spend the most on lobbying activities in the United States. The analysis is based on data from OpenSecrets.org, which tracks financial disclosures filed under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) (OpenSecrets, 2025). The expenditures reflect the strategic priorities of these governments in influencing U.S. policy across areas such as trade, security, and foreign relations. Why do governments need lobbying? Simple answer is that companies lobby for getting “contribution” for their “investment.” This contribution can take special policies being enacted as tax provisions or revenues.

Governments need the further development of bilateral humanitarian ties, which served as a vivid example of strategic partnership between the republics in the new century, are noted (Efendiyeva,

2020, p. 27). The United States is currently the world's hegemonic power, and its foreign policy decisions directly and indirectly affect the role and positioning of other states in the international system. As a result, many countries seek to influence U.S. foreign policymaking in ways that serve their own national interests. This has made lobbying one of the primary tools through which foreign governments attempt to shape American policy agendas in their favor. The main purpose of lobbying process in the US is influencing government officials. However, the effectiveness of this influence depends on numerous other factors: the political context, U.S. national interests, public opinion, and the international standing of the lobbying country. For example, some states spend millions of dollars hiring lobbying firms, yet fail to achieve tangible results because their national interests conflict with U.S. foreign policy priorities.

#### Measuring Success Is Difficult

Defining what constitutes a successful lobbying activity is a complex and multifaceted question that does not lend itself to a simple or concrete answer. Success in lobbying can vary depending on numerous factors, including the specific goals of the lobbyists, the political context, the policy area involved, and the measures used to evaluate outcomes. Therefore, assessing lobbying effectiveness requires a nuanced approach that considers both tangible policy changes and broader influence on political agendas and public opinion (Tağıyeva, Hüseyinova, 2022, p. 127–131). Success can be considered prevention of sanctions or increased military aid from the U.S. or the creation of a positive international image of country also can be due to success of lobbying.

Some countries spend relatively little on lobbying but manage to secure significant support through strategic partnerships with the U.S. such as Israel and certain NATO member countries. On the other hand, countries with large lobbying budgets may struggle to gain influence due to internal issues such as political instability, human rights violations, or widespread corruption. In many cases, the historical depth of diplomatic relations and strategic importance prove more decisive than lobbying expenditures alone. For instance, The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are among the top spenders on lobbying in the U.S. (Lobbying in the USA. Biggest spenders of foreign lobbying, 2025). While both have achieved certain policy outcomes, they continue to face criticism and restrictions on multiple fronts. On the contrary, Qatar has achieved notable diplomatic impact with comparatively fewer resources by leveraging smart public diplomacy and influential media platforms such as Al Jazeera.

A review of lobbying expenditures by foreign countries in the United States reveals an important discrepancy between financial investment and actual policy influence. For instance, China has spent approximately \$456 million, Japan \$411 million, and even smaller nations such as Liberia and the Marshall Islands have recorded surprisingly high lobbying expenditures (OpenSecrets, 2025). Despite this substantial financial commitment, these countries have not consistently translated their spending into significant long-term influence on U.S. policy. In contrast, lobbying groups such as the Jewish, Armenian, and Greek diasporas representing relatively small nations or communities have often achieved disproportionate impact with comparatively limited financial resources. Their success stems not from the amount of money spent, but from the strategic use of soft power, cultural capital, electoral leverage, and long-term relationship-building with U.S. policymakers (Aleskerova, 2021, p. 169).

This contrast demonstrates a crucial lesson in lobbying effectiveness: influence is not merely a function of expenditure, but of strategic engagement. A well-organized, message-driven, and politically integrated lobbying effort can outperform high-cost campaigns that lack grassroots support, credible narratives, or political resonance. Financial resources matter, but they are not sufficient on their own. Key drivers of lobbying power include (Lobbying in the USA. Biggest spenders of foreign lobbying, 2018):

- Strong organization
- Strategic value
- Media influence



- Electoral leverage
- Professional lobbying tactics

**Conclusions.** The decision-making process in the U.S. Congress does not operate solely on a “money talks” basis. If financial power were the primary determinant of influence, then wealthy Arab states would dominate the congressional agenda which is clearly not the case. Lobbying power in Washington depends not only on financial capacity but also on strategic alignment with U.S. interests, long-standing diaspora engagement, public opinion influence, and the ability to mobilize electoral leverage. These factors collectively shape the success or failure of lobbying efforts, regardless of how much money is spent. Therefore, it becomes clear that lobbying influence in Congress is multifaceted and deeply embedded in political, social, and ideological contexts – not just economic strength. Biggest Spenders of Foreign Lobbying in the U.S. Comes from America’s Closest Allies. For instance, Azerbaijan has been using the services of professional lobbying organizations for years, such as BGR Government Affairs, Podesta Group, Skyline Capitol LLC. Additionally, Azerbaijan has spent millions of dollars for lobbying in the USA, despite spending a lot of money, they are unable to be effective in this field. For achieving greater effectiveness in the field of lobbying, Azerbaijan can draw valuable lessons from the strategies and organizational strength of the Jewish lobby, particularly in the United States. The Jewish lobby represents one of the most successful and influential lobbying forces globally. Its impact on U.S. foreign policy and public opinion regarding Israel is widely acknowledged across academic and policy-making circles. Azerbaijan, by developing narratives that emphasize its geopolitical significance, energy partnerships, and secular-democratic identity, can similarly align its messaging with the interests of powerful states and institutions. It is likely that Azerbaijani-Israeli relations will only increase in areas such as scientific cooperation, information technology, medicine, water purification, agriculture and so on. Successful lobbying groups such as Jewish or Armenian lobbies are highly organized and work with professionals in law, media, and politics. This gives them an advantage when influencing members of Congress (Feyziyeva, 2023, p.540-542). Although the Jewish and Armenian lobbies spend comparatively less money, they achieve greater success due to their active participation in election campaigns and the large number of U.S. citizens among their diasporas (Aleskerova, 2021). Their influence is rooted not only in financial resources but also in their ability to mobilize voters and establish strong political networks within the American political system. This civic engagement significantly enhances their lobbying effectiveness compared to many other ethnic interest groups.

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