

A normative approach on lobbying. Public policies and representation of interests in Argentina

Gabriel Sadi¹  | Marisa Ramos Meneghetti² 

¹School of Communication Sciences, Universidad Abierta Interamericana, Buenos Aires, Argentina

²School of Education and Communication Sciences, Universidad del Salvador, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Correspondence

Gabriel Sadi, School of Communication Sciences, Universidad Abierta Interamericana, 954 Humberto I, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
Email: gabriel.sadi@uai.edu.ar; gabrielsadi72@gmail.com

Public policies and regulations need to broaden the voices represented in the deliberation and search for solutions to societal problems. The practice of lobbying is a legitimate and legal way to reach public decision makers in order to contribute to a more participatory and plural democracy despite its bad reputation. As a general characteristic, Latin America still has shortcomings in the development of participatory democracy. Due to the lack of an organized civic culture, resources, or ignorance, civil society does not usually use planned methods for an effective exercise of the right to petition public authorities and reduces its areas of incidence to sporadic demonstrations around specific issues. However, it is possible to recognize certain key cases promoted in Argentina by civil society organizations that have achieved their purposes, such as laws related to eating disorders, equal marriage, and assisted fertilization.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Public affairs is the area of public relations that focuses on the field of action in which lobbying is framed, a professional activity that defends the legitimate interests of groups or companies before public administrations and transparently transfers relevant information and knowledge about a sector, activity, or collective (Xifra, 1998, 2011).

In a terminological as well as conceptual approach, Ferrer (2014) warns that, although the words lobbying and public affairs are often used indistinctly, mainly in Spanish-speaking countries, they are not synonyms. To simplify, public affairs is more comprehensive because includes sectoral analysis and intelligence, lobbying itself, all dialog and communication with the different stakeholders of an organization and the construction of alliances, delimiting lobbying to the incumbency over the exercise of influencing a public policy or legislative initiative. When indicating the context in which the application of public affairs and lobbying strategies is necessary, Ferrer does not hesitate to include nonprofit organizations because their function is the legitimate defense of collective interests and the participation of civil society in political and regulatory processes.

In this sense, lobbying is a communicative strategy of public relations (Davidson & Rowe, 2016) whose specificity lies in the public receiving the message and in its purpose: to influence the spheres of competence of executive and legislative branches at any scale, international, national, state, or local. In this way, the practice of lobbying,

also referred to as representing interests, implies effectively influencing executive and legislative branches of different jurisdiction and becomes a legitimate and legal way to make the arguments of different sectors of society reach public decision makers, in order to contribute to a more participative and plural democracy, an aspect on which we will place particular emphasis later on.

1.1 | The contribution of lobbying to the strengthening of participatory democracy

Since the 1980s, Latin America has returned to the democratic path. However, in many cases, it has been reduced to the periodic call to elections and to the introduction of new constitutional mechanisms of civic participation, which have not been sufficiently promoted nor exercised by citizens. Consequently, as a general feature, our continent still has shortcomings in the development of its participatory democracy. Due to the lack of an organized civic culture, resources, or ignorance, civil society does not usually use planned methods and suitable channels for an effective exercise of the right to petition public authorities, right recognized in the Argentinian Constitution (Article 14) as well as in most Latin American countries and other democracies.

It is indisputable that governments have the power to decide on legal norms, administrative acts, and public policies. However, civil society should not delegate the development of a fairer and

Si desea leer el artículo completo solicitarlo a investigacion@uai.edu.ar