Foreign Agents Registration Act: a user’s guide

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Abstract
Foreign entities are among the most active interest groups that lobby policymakers in the US government. There is a long history of concern about foreign powers’ influence on public opinion and government policies in the USA, but little is known about the scope and magnitude of their influence. I introduce a new dataset that facilitates the measurement of lobbying activities by foreign entities: information extracted from lobbying reports submitted under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). The FARA requires that lobbyists representing foreign entities submit semi-annual reports detailing all their lobbying contacts. I highlight the difference in the disclosure requirements between the Lobbying Disclosure Act and the FARA and provide detailed guidance on how to extract information from reports submitted under the FARA. FARA data provide a unique opportunity to address unresolved questions in studies of interest groups as well as foreign entities’ lobbying activities in the USA.

Keywords  Foreign Agents Registration Act · Lobbying · Foreign Lobbying · LDA

Introduction

There is a long history of concern about foreign powers attempting to influence public opinion and government policies in the USA. In 1938, Nazi organizations spent considerable money to influence US political debates and this resulted in Congress passing the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) (Hart 2018). The FARA provides a legal channel for foreign governments and businesses to lobby the US government and to influence US public opinion (Waters 1988; Atieh 2010; Gawande...
et al. 2009). Since then, foreign entities have been actively involved in lobbying policymakers in the USA (Pevehouse and Vabulas 2019).

Despite a long history of concern about foreign powers trying to influence American public opinion and policy, little is known about the scope, magnitude, and influence of foreign lobbying activities. Explosive news stories detailing Russia’s involvement in the 2016 presidential election have brought foreign lobbying entities to the center of public attention. Foreign governments and firms are some of the most active interest groups that lobby policymakers in the USA, but the magnitude of their activities and their role in shaping American foreign policy is poorly understood. Which foreign governments and business interests engage in lobbying? What is the role of foreign lobbying in American foreign policymaking? How do foreign entities design their lobbying strategies? Does allowing foreign lobbying increase or decrease the capacity of US government officials to make policy?

In this article, I introduce a new dataset of information extracted from lobbying reports submitted under the FARA that facilitates measurement of lobbying activities by foreign actors. The FARA requires that lobbyists representing foreign entities, usually US lobbying firms, submit semi-annual reports detailing all lobbying contacts along with information on payments made by foreign entities to lobbying firms. The earliest image files of the semi-annual reports go back to 1942, and there were 46,107 semi-annual lobbying reports submitted by the end of 2017. The FARA dataset presents the most comprehensive descriptive statistics for foreign interests’ lobbying activities over time. The period that the FARA data cover coincides with many important world events, including the Cold War, the rise of Japan as an economic power, the collapse of the Soviet Union, democratization in Asia and Latin America, 9/11 and the prevalence of terrorism, and the rise of China as a rival to US power. Tracking lobbying activities by foreign entities over time will provide an invaluable description of how and when foreign actors have tried to influence the US policymaking process.

The dataset constructed from the FARA reports can also inform scholars who systematically study requests for and grants of access to various policymakers in the USA, especially concerning foreign entities. Access to policymakers is one of the most important and scarce resources sought after in the lobbying process (Langbein 1986; Hansen 1991; Lohmann 1995; Wright 1996; Austen-Smith 1995; Baumbergarten et al. 2009; i Vidal et al. 2012; Bertrand et al. 2014; Kalla and Broockman 2016). Scholars have used various measures to gauge the scope of access from survey methods (Langbein 1986; Wright 1989, 1990; Hall and Wayman 1990; Hansen 1991; Hojnacki and Kimball 2001) to campaign contributions by interest groups to proxy lobbying access (Grimmer and Powell 2016). Recent scholarship on interest groups has utilized lobbying reports submitted under the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (LDA). The LDA, which regulates lobbying activities of all domestic interest groups and some foreign commercial interests, only requires lobbyists to disclose the identity of the chamber of Congress or the federal agency contacted and does not require disclosure of the identity of contacted persons. Despite its merits, the data that were used in the previous research still leave many unanswered questions regarding the identities of legislators who were targeted and how intensely they were contacted (de Figueiredo and Richter 2014).
FARA requires that registrants who submit semi-annual reports on behalf of foreign clients detail all lobbying contacts, including information on to whom, when, why, and how those contacts were made. The lobbying contact data include not only contacts to members of Congress, but also contacts to bureaucrats in the executive branches and to personnel in the media and think tanks. This rich set of information allows scholars to measure the intensity of lobbying to each policymaker over time.

Lobbying contact data from the FARA reports also include information on the timing of the contact as well as campaign contributions made by lobbyists who worked for foreign clients during the period. The detailed lobbying contact data together with the information on the dates when contributions were made by lobbying firms and lobbyists to politicians, allow study of the timing of campaign contributions (McCarty and Rothenberg 1996; Stratmann 1998) and the relationship between contributions and access (Austen-Smith 1995).

In the next section, I briefly explain the background and history of the FARA. Then, I highlight the differences in the availability of contact information between the LDA and the FARA and explain how to extract contact information from the FARA. I present an example of an analysis of lobbying contacts by utilizing lobbying reports submitted by the governments of Colombia, Panama, and South Korea regarding their respective free trade agreements. I discuss potential limitations in the FARA data and the issue of generalizability and then conclude.

FARA: background

In 1938, the 75th Congress passed the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) in response to Nazi organizations’ efforts to influence American political debate (Powell 1996; Brown 1997; Atieh 2010). The FARA provides a legal channel for foreign governments and businesses to lobby the US government and other American organizations. Foreign countries and other entities have regular diplomatic relationships with the US government through official channels such as their embassies in Washington, DC. However, many foreign entities also have used non-governmental channels by hiring “agents” who represent their interests via various types of lobbying. The FARA requires that foreign entities hire agents based in the USA if they engage in lobbying, and those hired agents are mandated to submit semi-annual lobbying disclosure forms. The FARA unit under the Department of Justice (DOJ) that regulates and enforces the FARA states that “Disclosure of the required information facilitates evaluation by the government and the American people of the activities of such persons in light of their function as foreign agents” on its website.¹

There are two types of agents: in-house agents and contracted agents. In-house agents are usually organizations from foreign countries—mostly based in Washington, DC or New York City—that manage their US offices and monitor daily activities in US institutions. Examples include the Korea Economic Institute of America, the Austrian Tourism Office, and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO).

Contracted agents are usually US lobbying firms, law firms, or media consulting firms that provide their expertise during a given period for specific issues. Some foreign entities hire only one type of agent, while others hire both types.

When first implemented, the FARA required agents of foreign entities who were engaged in publishing “political propaganda” to register and disclose their activities, but it did not regulate political donations by foreign entities. In 1966, after congressional hearings in 1962–1963 revealed illegal campaign contributions to federal candidates by Philippine sugar producers and agents of Nicaraguan president Luis Somoza, Congress moved to prohibit political contributions in any US election by any foreign government, political party, corporation, or individual (Powell 1996; Brown 1997; Gawande et al. 2006). A series of attempts by foreign entities to influence US politics and policymaking processes resulted in the FARA requirements being made more comprehensive, and its differences from the requirements for domestic lobbying activities make the value of the FARA data clearer. Since the passage of the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) of 1995, foreign commercial entities are allowed to submit lobbying reports under the LDA instead of FARA, and many foreign business entities have chosen to do so because of the LDA’s less stringent requirements. As a result, most of the foreign entities submitting reports under the FARA since 1995 are foreign governments or political organizations.

Since May 2007, the FARA unit under the DOJ has maintained a website that posts image files of FARA disclosure reports (www.fara.gov). The earliest image files begin in 1942, and there were 46,107 semi-annual lobbying reports submitted by the end of 2017. Section 11 of the FARA requires the Attorney General to report to Congress every six months about the nature and the scope of lobbying services provided by the agents to foreign clients. I extract the lobbying information from the summary reports for the period between 1942 and 2017. There are more than 5000 unique foreign clients from 201 foreign countries over this 76-year period. There are 6067 unique agents who provided lobbying services for foreign principals during this period; 86% of them were US lobbying firms, PR companies, or individuals, and 14% were foreign principals’ in-house lobbying organizations.

Figure 1 presents the over-time patterns of foreign lobbying. Panel (a) shows the number of sovereign foreign countries in the world and the number of foreign countries from which foreign lobbying clients originated for the period between 1946 and 2017. I take the list of states from the Correlates of War Project for the period since 2007.
the end of World War II. This means that foreign clients that do not have a sovereign state status, such as Hong Kong, Tibet, and many small islands in Caribbean areas are not included in this analysis, although some of them have been active lobbying participants. In 1946, there were 65 sovereign countries in the world and foreign clients from 15 countries submitted lobbying reports under FARA. Since then, the number of sovereign countries has increased, and the number of foreign countries engaged in lobbying activities in the USA also closely followed that pattern.

Panel (b) shows the number of FARA reports submitted by in-house agents—usually representing only one foreign client—and by contracted agents such as lobbying firms—often representing multiple foreign clients. The number of FARA submissions by in-house agents is quite stable over time, whereas the number of FARA submissions by contracted agents dramatically increased around the 1980s. This is related to the professionalization of the lobbying industry over time. Before 1960, 35.77% of lobbying reports were submitted by individuals. During the 1960s and 70s, PR firms in New York slowly acquired political clients, including foreign interests. In the late 1980s, professional lobbying firms and firms that specialized in representing political clients were created and this led to the further decline of unassociated individuals as foreign agents (Sheingate 2016).

Figure 2 documents the total lobbying fees spent by two types of foreign clients. There is much missing data on lobbying fees before 1978 and the report to Congress for the period 1964–1977 entirely omitted information on lobbying fees. Therefore, this graph presents lobbying fees for the period 1978–2017. The solid line indicates the total lobbying fees paid by foreign governments. The dashed line displays the total lobbying fees spent by foreign business entities. Total lobbying spending by foreign government clients were stable over time. Until the mid-1990s, foreign business clients spent more than foreign government clients. Since the passage of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, foreign firms that have subsidiaries in the USA

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are allowed to submit lobbying reports under the LDA instead of FARA, and many foreign business entities have chosen to do so because of the LDA’s less stringent requirements. This explains a significant drop in lobbying fees by foreign business entities around the mid-1990s. This also implies that the FARA dataset is best for studying the long-term patterns of lobbying activities by foreign governments and political organizations.

Lobbying contact data: LDA versus FARA

Lobbying activities by US domestic actors, such as AARP or Citi Group, are governed by the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA). Since it passed Congress in 1995 and was reformed in 2007, lobbying reports filed under the LDA have provided useful guidelines to understanding the types of interest groups engaged in lobbying and their lobbying patterns in that process (Ansolabehere et al. 2003; Kim 2017; You 2017). Under the LDA, registrants who represent interest groups must submit quarterly lobbying reports. Domestic lobbying reports include information about the client paying for the service, lobbying registrants (in-house lobbyists or lobbying firms), amount of lobbying spending, timing of lobbying activities (in quarter), targeted federal agencies, issues and specific legislation lobbied, and the names of the lobbyists who worked during the reporting period. Despite its richness, domestic lobbying data have a significant shortcoming: the lack of specific contact information. The LDA only requires disclosure of the names of federal agencies (section 17)—for example, whether lobbying activities targeted the House of Representatives or the Department of Transportation—but it does not require disclosure of specific names of targeted policymakers or the exact dates of lobbying contacts.

The FARA requires that lobbyists representing foreign entities submit semiannual reports detailing all their lobbying contacts, including information on to
LOBBYING ACTIVITY. Select as many codes as necessary to reflect the general issue areas in which the registrant engaged in lobbying on behalf of the client during the reporting period. Using a separate page for each code, provide information as requested. Add additional page(s) as needed.

15. General issue area code TRD

16. Specific lobbying issues

| Standards and technical barriers to trade |
| Market access, including tariffs and non-tariff barriers |
| Issues related to customs and border protection |
| Issues related to export control regulations and foreign investment |
| Issues related to trade agreement negotiations |
| Issues related to data localization requirements in foreign countries |

17. House(s) of Congress and Federal agencies ☐ Check if None

| U.S. SENATE, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), Commerce - Dept of (DOC), State - Dept of (DOS), Homeland Security - Dept of (DHS), Defense - Dept of (DOD), Executive Office of the President (EOP) |

18. Name of each individual who acted as a lobbyist in this issue area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Covered Official Position (if applicable)</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Dobrozsi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Pearlman</td>
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<td>Walt</td>
<td>Kuhm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Marks Mosher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>Powderly</td>
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</table>

19. Interest of each foreign entity in the specific issues listed on line 16 above ☐ Check if None

Fig. 3 APPLE, INC.’s report under LDA (2019)

whom, when, why, and how those contacts were made. The lobbying contact data include not only members of Congress but also bureaucrats in the executive branch and media personnel. From each contact record in lobbying reports submitted under the FARA, the following information can be extracted: the name of the contacted individual, the date of the contact, the method by which the individual was contacted (phone call, email, in-person meeting, etc.), and the issues discussed with the contact. If the contact was made to a member of Congress, there also is information on the hierarchical level of the congressional contact (whether the contact was the elected official or his/her staff member), and, if the contacted individual was a staff member, the office for which he/she worked.

Figure 3 shows a lobbying report submitted by APPLE, INC. summarizing its lobbying activities in the second quarter of 2019 under the LDA. APPLE, INC. lobbied on issues related to trade (TRD), and section 17 lists the government entities that APPLE, INC. contacted to lobby on trade issues. APPLE, INC. lobbied both chambers of the Congress, as well as federal agencies and departments such as the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) and the Department of Commerce. Although the name of the contacted agencies is useful information, there is no information on specific individuals contacted within each institution. Figure 4 shows a lobbying report submitted under the FARA in 2018 by a lobbying firm, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, on behalf of the Embassy of Japan. It shows the date of the contact, the issues discussed during the contact, the name of the foreign client, the contacted person’s name and title, and the manner of
contact. In contrast to the report under the LDA, we can identify the members of Congress or their staff who were contacted.

Extracting contact information from lobbying reports under the FARA is not straightforward. As previously described, names of agents and foreign clients, as well as payment amounts between foreign clients and lobbying agents can be found easily in the summary reports prepared by the DOJ for Congress. To find more specific contact information, we must use the supplemental statement submitted by each agent. The supplemental statement includes the name of the registrant (foreign agent), a list of the registrant’s foreign clients, the amounts paid by foreign clients to the registrant, a list of lobbyists who worked for the foreign clients during the time period, campaign contributions made by these lobbyists during the same period, and specific contact information if contacts were made on behalf of the foreign clients.

To find the supplemental statement, use the search page on the FARA website. Figure 5 shows the interface of the search page. The “Search by Field” tab allows access to the supplemental statement by specific registrant. After choosing “Document Type = Supplemental Statement,” enter the registrant’s information as either its name or the unique number assigned by the DOJ. To find the registrant’s unique number and name, use the recently launched “Bulk Data” page on the FARA

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Fig. 5  FARA’s search page

Fig. 6  FARA’s bulk data page
Figure 6 shows a screenshot of the Bulk Data page. The FARA_All_Registrants.csv.zip file includes information on all registrants since 1942 that have provided lobbying services to foreign clients. This file includes the registrant’s unique ID, the registration date under the FARA, the termination date of the registration, and the registrant’s name and business address. Users can also find the supplemental statement by typing in the name of the registrant. To find registrants that represented clients from a specific country, use the FARA_All_Foreign-Principal.csv.zip file. This file includes the name of the foreign client, the foreign client’s country of origin, and the name and unique ID of the registrant that represented each foreign client.

Once the number or name of a registrant is entered, the FARA page will display every supplemental statement that the registrant has submitted. To restrict the time period, specify start and end dates for supplemental statements on the search page. Clicking on each image (PDF files of the supplemental statements) will reveal the specific contacts made by a registrant on behalf of each foreign client.

In recent years, the FARA unit under the DOJ has made significant efforts to increase data accessibility. It has announced that the FARA.gov Application Programming Interface (API) is now available and it will make FARA registration data and documents more accessible. The Center for Responsive Politics maintains a website, Foreign Lobby Watch; it collects the FARA reports daily using the API and provides summary information on lobbying spending and registrants since 2016.

Using the FARA.gov API combined with recent developments in data extraction from image files (e.g., Exchangeable Image file Format (EXIT) in Python) can make data extraction from the FARA website scalable.

**An example: foreign lobbying on free trade agreements**

In this section, I present an example of lobbying contacts extracted from the FARA reports by employing the method introduced in “Lobbying contact data: LDA versus FARA” section. I focus on the activities that the governments of Colombia, Panama, and South Korea undertook to lobby the US government regarding their respective free trade agreements (FTAs). Free trade agreements between the USA and each of those countries were signed in November 2006 (Panama) and June 2007 (South Korea and Colombia) by the George W. Bush administration; but due to various domestic political challenges and concerns, their ratifications were delayed. These challenges were eventually faced during the Obama administration. The administration started renegotiations with the South Korean government in 2009, and the parties reached an agreement on

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8 The FARA website offers two options in terms of finding a registrant by typing its name: exact match and “sounds like” match.
9 https://efile.fara.gov/ords/f?p=107:1::NO:::
10 http://www.opensecrets.org/fara.
December 3, 2010. On April 6, 2011, the government of Panama agreed to sign a tax treaty to clear potential tax haven issues. Finally, the administration received a letter from the Colombian president on April 19, 2011, which assured the US government of a plan to protect labor rights. These actions paved the way for ratification. Bills were introduced into Congress on October 3, 2011, and all three pacts were ratified ten days later without amendment.

I follow the three countries’ lobbying activities from the 108th Congress (2003–2004) to the 112th Congress (2011–2012) and extract detailed information from lobbying reports submitted under the FARA for over 5800 individual contacts that lobbyists made with policymakers, including legislators, their staffers, and government officials at executive agencies such as the Office of the US Trade Representative. To capture meaningful communication between lobbyists and policymakers, I only used contacts made via meetings or phone calls. Over the time period, 5831 such contacts were made. Table 1 presents the summary statistics of these data. Eighty percent of the contacts targeted members of Congress, but there were a substantial number of contacts made to those in federal entities, such as the USTR or members of the State Department. Moreover, 31% of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Lobbying contacts by foreign governments, 2003–2012</th>
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<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 7 FTA lobbying (South Korea)
contacts were made in meetings, and there is significant variation across the three countries regarding targeted institutions and contact type.\textsuperscript{11} Figure 7 presents the contact patterns over time by lobbying firms hired by the government of South Korea. The $X$-axis indicates the date of contact and the $Y$-axis indicates the DW-NOMINATE scores of members of Congress. Over time, the set of legislators who were contacted increased. In addition, the figure shows that a large fraction of total lobbying activities on each trade agreement occurred during the agenda-setting period, even though Congress was not formally involved in the trade negotiations. Figure 7 along with the information presented in Table 1 shows the unique contact-level information that FARA can offer. Existing studies on lobbying on trade policies mostly use the LDA data and measures on lobbying spending, types of contacted agencies (e.g., House of Representatives or the USTR), and the quarter-level information on lobbying timing can be identified (e.g., Kim 2017; Kim and Osgood 2019). Although the information from the LDA has enriched our understanding of lobbying process, it does not provide specific contact information at the member level. The lobbying contact information under the FARA allows measurement of the intensity of lobbying contacts at each member level, as well as the timing of lobbying contacts on a daily basis. This allows scholars to measure the sequences of lobbying contacts, which is critical information for understanding the lobbying strategies of interest groups.

**Limitations**

Despite its merits, lobbying data under the FARA has some limitations. First, foreign governments, political parties, and firms as interest groups are special cases. Since the passage of the LDA, most of the lobbying clients under the FARA are foreign governments and political organizations. It is possible that lobbying activities and contact patterns by foreign interests could differ from those by domestic interest groups. Therefore, scholars should be wary of generalizing results from the FARA data to domestic interest groups. However, since foreign interests often tend to be indirectly related to the interests of domestic constituents, data on foreign lobbying can provide a unique opportunity to study special interests, both domestic and foreign, that do not have a direct link to voters or district interests. Also, half of the lobbying firms hired by foreign governments also represent domestic clients under the LDA and these firms disproportionately perform a service when it comes to contacting members of Congress. This suggests that contact information from foreign lobbying can shed light on how US domestic lobbying firms design their lobbying strategies to influence US policies on behalf of foreign clients.

\textsuperscript{11} Among congressional contacts, 67.4\% targeted members of the House of Representatives and 21.1\% targeted senators. Congressional staff members in the Senate Finance Committee or House Ways and Means Committee whose jurisdictions covered international trade were targeted as well (6.4\% and 3.8\%, respectively). Among the executive branch contacts, 67.7\% targeted the USTR and 8.6\% targeted officials at the White House. Contacts to the Department of State and Department of Commerce followed at 5.7\% for each.
Second, there is a concern about non-compliance—such as missing reports or false statements on reports—under the FARA (Benner 2019). An audit report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) on enforcement of the FARA finds that 34 out of 78 (44%) foreign agents the OIG reviewed submitted supplemental statements in a timely manner but half, 39 of 78, did not. The FARA unit at the DOJ suspects that some of these are cases where the registrants terminated their contract with foreign clients but “either neglected to formally inform the FARA unit of the termination or were unaware of their obligation to do so.” Non-compliance is punished more stringently by FARA than by LDA. While a violation of the LDA is considered a civil offense, violations of the FARA are criminal and penalties for non-compliance are up to five years imprisonment and a $5000–$10,000 fine (Atieh 2010). Despite this legal statute, a lack of rigorous enforcement by the DOJ and loopholes in the FARA have drawn criticism, especially after special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. In June 2019, Senator Chuck Grassley introduced legislation (“Foreign Agents Disclosure and Registration Enhancement Act of 2019”) amending the FARA to improve overall compliance and enforcement. Increasing the resources that are available to the FARA unit (e.g., increasing its staff size) will enhance its enforcement capacity and will ultimately lead to a more robust implementation of the new legislation.

Third, extracting large-scale contact data across lobbying firms or over time is challenging since all these reports are uploaded as image files and each lobbying firm uses its own style to describe specific contacts in the FARA reports. Historical documents with unstructured forms remain a challenge for even the most advanced optical character recognition (OCR) software. To ease the burden of constructing a large-scale dataset from the FARA reports, the FARA unit can require FARA agents to submit their appendices along with their supplemental statements in a uniform format (e.g., csv format). Clearly announcing what information should be included in the supplemental statements and providing some formatting guidance will significantly facilitate large-scale data collection efforts.

**Conclusion**

The question of who influences US foreign policy, in both the security and economic realms, has drawn much attention among the media, general public, and scholars (Jacobs and Page 2005; Mearsheimer and Walt 2007). The role of foreign governments and their lobbying activities has received relatively little attention (Gawande et al. 2006, 2009; Pevehouse and Vabulas 2019). However, as lobbying reports submitted under the FARA suggest, the scope of participation and the level of expenditures by foreign entities are impressive. The comprehensive foreign lobbying data from the FARA will enable systematic study of the role foreign money plays in

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12 [https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2016/a1624.pdf](https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2016/a1624.pdf). Five of the foreign agents reviewed had terminated their contracts and were not required to submit supplemental statements during the audit period.
gaining access to US policymakers and significantly improve our understanding of the influence of foreign interests in US policymaking.

In addition, the detailed contact information from the FARA reports can provide comprehensive descriptions of lobbying access requested by and allocated to foreign interests in the USA. The allocation of access to politicians has important implications for understanding the strategies of interest groups as well as the degree of inequality in political representation. Scholars have long endeavored to find comprehensive sources for lobbying contacts. Despite numerous theoretical papers on lobbying access, the lack of systematic lobbying contact data has prevented scholars of interest groups from testing predictions from different theories as well as understanding the allocation of access in the political process. The degree of detail in the FARA data is far greater than in regular domestic lobbying reports, although its coverage is limited to mostly foreign governments and political organizations. It discloses not only the name of the contacted person and the date of contact, but also shows the method of contact and the issues discussed during the contact. The scope of contacts covers not only members of Congress, but also those working in numerous offices within the executive branch, the media, and think tanks. The detailed contact data from the FARA reports provides a unique opportunity for scholars to improve our understanding of many unresolved issues in special interest group politics.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

References


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Online Appendix: Supporting Information for
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Figure A1: Foreign Lobbying Over Time

(a) Ratio of Sovereign Countries in the FARA Dataset

(b) Ratio of FARA Reports Submitted by Contract Agents