#TxLege Gets Bigger

Analysis of the online conversation during the 88th Texas Legislative Session



our methodology

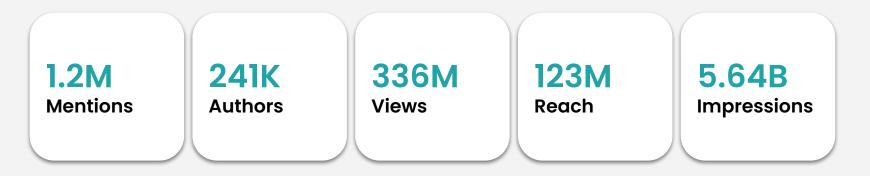
The following Digital Advance analysis highlights some of the social media trends we saw in the 88th Texas Legislative Session. Analysis details:

- Dates: January 10 May 29, 2023 (regular legislative session only)
- Channels: Twitter
- Content: Posts must include #TxLege
- Geography: Posts not limited to Texas

#TxLege on Twitter

The 88th Texas Legislative Session was one of the most unique and controversial in decades.

Marked by **unprecedented upheaval** at the highest levels and **unfinished business** on property tax reform and public education - all underscored by a **historic budget surplus**, the 88th Texas Legislative Session generated a historic amount of social media activity.



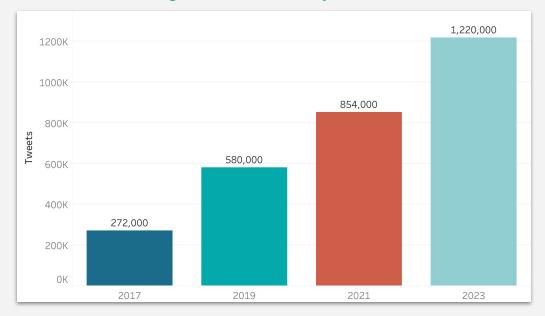
The numbers don't lie - hundreds of thousands of people joined the conversation!

#TxLege was used in an eye-popping 1.2 million tweets during the 88th session

The #TxLege hashtag continues to be the most widely used insignia of news & gossip under the Pink Dome.

This represents an incremental increase from past legislative sessions as more legislators, stakeholders, and influencers turned to social media to amplify their stance on various policies.

Number of **#**TxLege tweets over the years



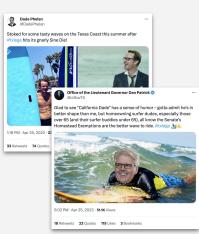


Unfinished Business

Following decisive electoral wins in November, Republican leaders entered the session in January determined to deliver on key campaign promises. As the session progressed, obstacles and distractions took center stage, prompting House and Senate leaders to leverage Twitter, #TxLege's mainstage, to make their case.

As important legislative deadlines loomed, Lieutenant Governor Patrick referred to Speaker Phelan as "California Dade" in a televised interview discussion on property taxes. This kicked off a spirited online debate as the two chambers sought to assert authority on their preferred solutions to Texans' rising property taxes.

Greg Abbott C Greg Abbott X Texas has a historic budget surplus. That money belongs to taxpayers. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history. This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history.



Following decisive electoral victories, January expectations for strong results around key kitchen table issues (property tax relief, public education, etc) are very high

As session progresses, top leaders struggle to find consensus on important issues

May 28

Jan 12

Apr 25

Patrick Svitek @PatrickSvitek

Abbott named seven emergency items at the start of session. With sine die tomorrow and a special session all but guaranteed, it looks like only three items are poised to make it to his desk in the regular session: ending Covid mandates, school safety and fighting fentanyl #txlege

1:13 PM · May 28, 2023 · 41.9K Views

55 Retweets 10 Quotes 98 Likes 8 Bookmarks

As Sine Die approaches, it becomes clear that the Legislature will adjourn without accomplishing major goals

Historic Upheaval

In the final weeks of session, two political scandals diverted time and attention from negotiations over property tax relief and school finance, both priorities of Governor Abbott and Lt. Governor Patrick.

The House voted on May 9 to expel Representative Bryan Slaton, marking the chamber's first expulsion since 1927. Then, with two days until Sine Die and no agreement on property taxes or school finance, the Texas House took another historic vote to impeach Attorney General Ken Paxton. As news of the impeachment broke, the Paxton's name trended on Twitter for more than five hours.

May 9



#BREAKING the Texas House just unanimously voted to expel far-right Rep. Bryan Slaton for allegedly getting a 19yo staffer drunk and having sex with her. His name was just taken off the roll call board.

Story coming @TexasTribune #txlege



The Texas House votes to expel Representative Bryan Slaton, marking the chamber's first expulsion since 1927



May 27 e Evan Smith

Reminder that is a GOP-led effort to impeach @KenPaxtonTX, and the committee that brought the articles is chaired by Coke Stevenson's grandson. Not a Democrat. Not the media. Don't be distracted #txlege



texastribune.org Live updates: Now impeached, Ken Paxton blasts House vote The vote to adopt the 20 articles of impeachment was 121-23, with three members absent.

9:08 AM · May 27, 2023 · 128.3K Views

828 Retweets 37 Quotes 2,610 Likes 6 Bookmarks

Just two days before the end of session the Texas House votes to impeach Attorney General Ken Paxton

Unprecedented Surplus

As the 88th Legislative Session gaveled in, the state's extraordinary \$33 billion budget surplus created widespread funding expectations. Amid the nearly 18,000 tweets on the topic, calls to use the surplus to pay down property taxes and increase public education funding saw some of the highest engagement.

Juli 12	Greg Abbott @ @Greg Abbott_TX		
	Texas has a historic budget surplus.	#1 most engaged w/ tweet	-
	That money belongs to taxpayers.	about the surplus - by far!	
	This session, we will deliver the largest property tax cut in Texas history #txlege		
	6:14 PM · Jan 12, 2023 · 1.2M Views		
	1,620 Retweets 381 Quotes 18.4K Likes 46 Bookmarks		
Jan 16			
Junio	Matthew Gutiérrez, Ed.D. 🤡 @DrMattGutierrez		
	Giving 350K Texas #teachers a \$5K raise would cost an estin \$1.75B. Texas has a historic \$33B surplus. TX pays \$8K below average. #txlege should prioritize investing in teacher pay. Wa raise promised before the last session? #txed #edchat #investinthefuture	v the US	
	4:45 PM · Jan 16, 2023 · 244.3K Views		
	540 Retweets 51 Quotes 2,581 Likes 11 Bookmarks		
May 20			
May 29	@DonHuffines		
	Texas received an unprecedented amount of your money this year. Taxpayers overfunded the government by \$62 billion. This massive surplus should have been returned to all Texans by eliminating the school property tax.		
	Instead, last night, #txlege passed corporate welfare, which gives tax relief to businesses on your dime. Giving tax breaks to politically connected companies while continuing to raise everyone else's property taxes to pay for the tax breaks is theft.	Texas AFT Texas AFT Texas AFT	
	Members of the Texas Legislature that vote for these programs—and governors that sign the bills that allow for them—are aiding and abetting theft. School district property tax abatements should not be renewed.	Texas teachers are not getting a raise in a state with a \$33 billion budget surplus. #TxLege #TxEd 11:00 AM - May 29, 2023 - 166.2K Views	
	The best economic incentive we can provide businesses (or anyone) is lower property taxes across the board. Texans deserve definitive action that permanently locks in property tax relief and puts Texas on the path to eliminating school M&O property taxes.	830 Retweets 92 Quotes 1,567 Likes 9 Bookmarks	_
	9:51 AM · May 29, 2023 - 169.8K Views		
	879 Retweets 60 Quotes 2,540 Likes 34 Bookmarks		

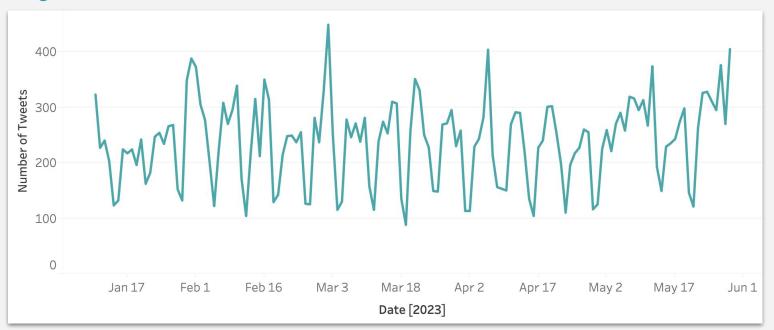
#TxLege: Legislators

96% of legislators (189) including statewide officials are currently on Twitter

Date: 01/10/23 - 05/29/23 | Channel: Twitter | Authors: TX Legislators

Legislators posted 33,000 tweets this session, averaging 193 tweets per day

Legislator Tweet Timeline



Education and Family dominated legislator tweets this session

Word Cloud of Texas Legislator's Tweets

HONORFAMILYMEMBERS SUPPORT LEADERSHIPBORDER LIVES MORNINGSTUDENTS LIFECOMMUNITY LEGISLATIONKIDSSESSION PARENTS CHILDREN FAMILIES NATION OPPORTUNITY COMMUNITIES HOMECOLLEAGUES COUNTRY WORK BILLSOFFICE **TEACHERS** CHILD SCHOOLS

Rep. Diego Bernal, Rep. Ron Reynolds & Rep. Brian Harrison were this session's top 3 tweeters

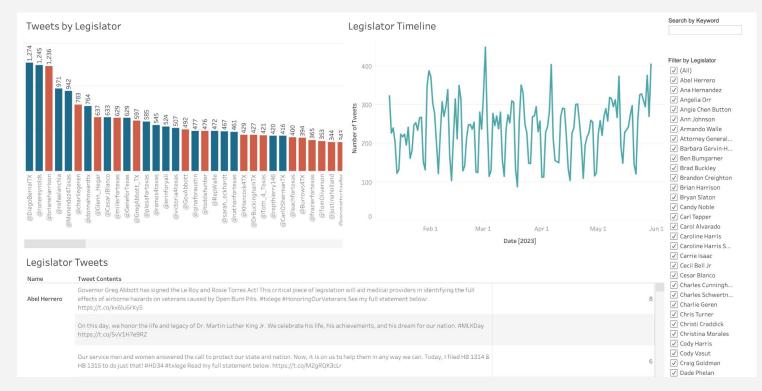
Top 20 Legislators by # of Tweets



472

@RepWalle

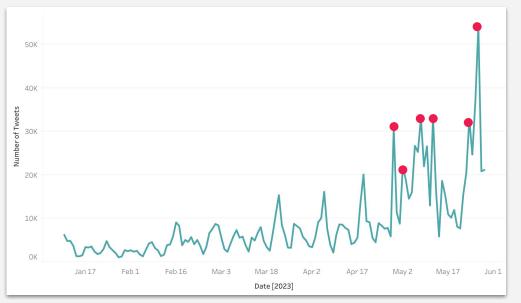
Take a deeper look into how legislators used Twitter on our interactive dashboard <u>here</u>



#TxLege: General Public

The end of session saw the highest traffic

General Public Tweet Timeline



The volume of tweets increased dramatically toward the end of session as coverage at the Capitol intensified around a number of major news stories:

May 2 - The LGBTQ+ Capitol gallery protest

May 6 - The Allen outlet mall shooting

May 8 - Resignation and subsequent expulsion of Bryan Slaton + attempts to raise the age to purchase AR-style weapons

May 12 - SB14 banning transition-related care for minors

May 24-27 - Ken Paxton impeachment + vouchers

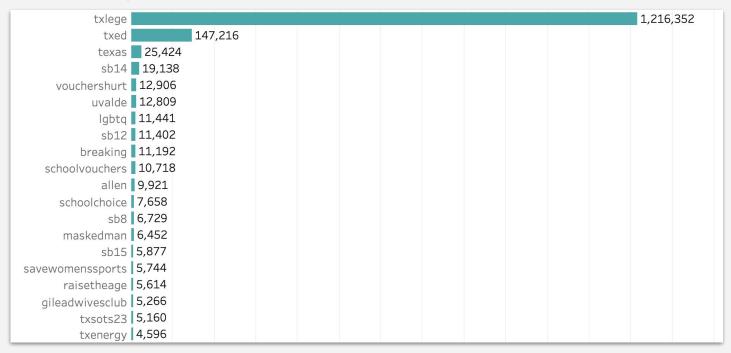
Education & guns were common themes among the general public's tweets this session

Word Cloud of Tweets by the General Public w/ #TxLege

OLD MAN KIDS TEACHERS OFFICE VOUCHERS ABORTION STATEMENT BILL AUTHOR FRONT YARD BILL SCHOOLS SHOT EXECUTION-STYLE SESSION PUBLIC SCHOOLS YOUNGEST VICTIM **REN** VOTE NEIGHBORING HOMESTUDENTS PARENTSCLASSROOM LEGISLATION BABY VICTIMS MONEY BILLS WOMEN COMMITTEEFIRE

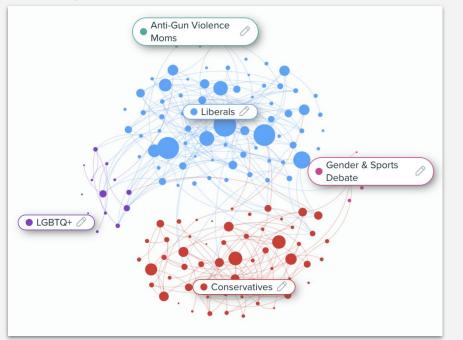
#txed & #sb14 were the most common topic hashtags used with **#TxLege**

Top Hashtags Used by General Public



Five online communities developed in the #TxLege conversation

#TxLege Communities



Community mapping allows us to look at the different communities and cohorts using the #TxLege hashtag.

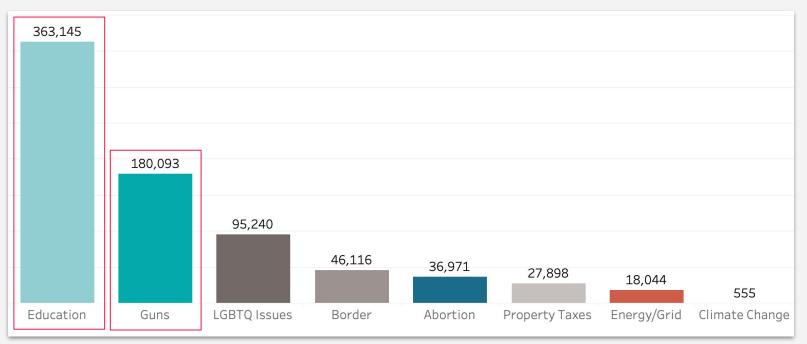
Big Takeaway: Left-leaning audiences were bigger than right-leaning audiences.

Communities engaged in issues connected to high levels of activism (guns, public education, and LGBTQ+ issues) saw the biggest engagement.

#TxLege: Trending
Topics

Education and guns were the top two #TxLege topics discussed by the general public

Trending **#**TxLege Topics



Trending Topic #1: Education

The push for school vouchers remains a top point of conversation in education policy

This session saw a significant amount of speculation over how the Legislature would address concerns about school curriculum, teacher pay, and the state's basic allotment appropriation. At the same time, the push for school vouchers - and their resistance from rural and inner city stakeholders - reached a fever pitch.





Texas Public Policy Foundation 🥥

Greg Abbott @ @Greg Abbott TX

Urban, suburban, & rural Texans agree: the time is NOW for school choice in Texas!

Parents in Amarillo & across our state deserve education freedom — plain and simple.

This session, we'll empower EVERY parent in Texas to choose the school that is best for their child. #txlege





Teachers, this is what your governor thinks of you.

"@GregAbbott_TX also said students are being taught a "radical, woke agenda"—despite @teainfo creating the curriculum standards taught in the #txed system."

He slanders you.

ppositio

0

ouche

To get vouchers. #txlege





7:54 AM · Mar 22, 2023 · 71.5K Views

494 Retweets 53 Quotes 931 Likes 8 Bookmarks



Here's my dispatch from West Texas for <code>@NBCNews</code> on the rural resistance to the GOP's signature policy goal this legislative session: Giving parents state money to pay for private school tuition and homeschooling.



nbcnews.com

In deep-red Texas, officials warn GOP plans could doom rural public schools Classroom battles over racism and LGBTQ inclusion have supercharged the movement for private school choice. Remote public schools like the one in ...

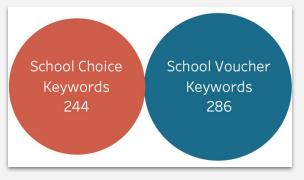
4:24 PM · Mar 21, 2023 · 56.8K Views

126 Retweets 15 Quotes 206 Likes 11 Bookmarks

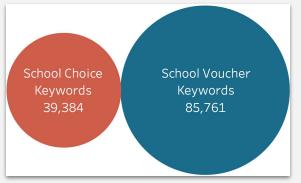
Proponents continue push to rebrand "vouchers"

Most of the online conversation about education centered around the debate over whether Texas should allow public dollars to pay for students to attend private schools. In recent years, those who support the use of public dollars for private education traditionally known as school vouchers have begun referring to the concept in other terms, including school choice, education savings accounts, and educational freedom. While efforts to align the issue with the broader parental choice debate gained some traction in online conversations, the Legislature appeared unmoved on the issue and the public was twice as likely to use the phrase voucher over school choice in their posts.

How legislators frame the issue:

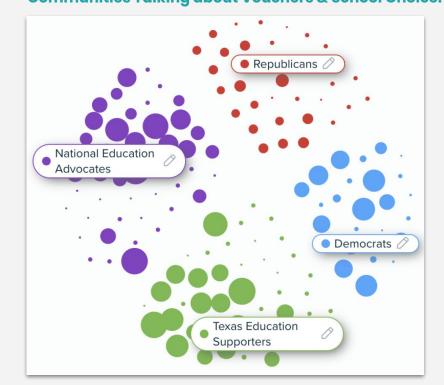


How the public frames the issue:



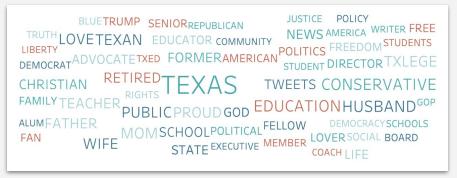
Four key communities talking about "vouchers" & "school choice"

Advocates, elected officials, and other stakeholders from both sides of the voucher debate took to Twitter to debate the pros and cons of the issue. We took a closer look at the way the informal online coalitions interacted around the debate over vouchers during the 88th session. In doing so, we identified cohorts from within and outside of Texas engaged in the voucher conversation.



Twitter bio descriptors among those using "vouchers" versus "school choice" in their posts highlight ideological differences

How People Using "School Choice" Describe Themselves in their Twitter Bios:



How People Using "Voucher" Describe Themselves in their Twitter Bios:



A look at the education advocate communities

We looked at the accounts most followed by members of each of the two education advocate segments to understand more about the positions of those most engaged in the conversation. The lists below show the type of accounts that each side engages with online. Both lists include several accounts that support keeping public dollars exclusively in public schools.

Most followed by the National Education Supporters:

Name	Biography	Affinity (i)	Reach 🛈
Jennifer Berkshire	Heartlander at heart. Podcasting about education, policy and politics @HaveYouHeardPod. Co-author of A Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door. Irrationally exuberant.	12.62% 3.5%	20.5K
Josh Cowen	Professor of Education Policy at Michigan State University; Data-driven critic of edu-privateering. Also @joshcowenmsu at the \$'s one	11.88% 3.33%	5.4K
NEPC NEPC	NEPC works with policymakers, community members, practitioners & others, using research to inform education policy discussions & promote democratic deliberation	5.09% 0.34%	7.5K
Diane Ravitch	l write about education. I blog at http://dianeravitch.net.	19.17% 7.45%	149.8K
Jack Schneider	scholar of education at @umasseduc co-host of @haveyouheardpod last book: http://wolfattheschoolhousedoor.com latest book: http://offthemarkbook.com	8.84% 2.4%	16.9K

Most followed by the Texas Education Supporters:

Name		Biography	Affinity (i)	Reach 🛈
TEA	Texas Education Agency	The Texas Education Agency oversees Pre-K through Grade 12 public education in Texas. #txed	23.71% 8.48%	97.8K
RAISE	RaiseYourHandTexas	Raise Your Hand Texas supports public policy solutions that invest in our students, encourage innovation, autonomy, and improve college and workforce readiness.	22.61% 8.02%	23.8K
ICAL SCHOOLS	Texas Association of School Boards	TASB serves and represents all local Texas school boards. School board members are the largest group of publicly elected officials in the state.	17.37% 6.21%	26.1K
TM	Texas Monthly	Texas news, politics, food, culture, travel, yee- haw, and more since 1973. 🤠	27.52%	233.3K
*	Texans4PublicEd	Public school employees, parents, students, and community members block voting together to defend our Texas Public schools from those who would destroy them.	16.69% 5.95%	9.8K

Trending Topic #2: Guns

Gun-related #TxLege tweets reference four mass shootings in our state's recent history

Most Common Words Used in #TxLege Tweets about "Guns"



The gun policy conversation during the 88th Legislative Session was driven by supporters of tightening firearm regulations

The relative messaging deficit among conservatives in favor of fewer/less restrictive gun laws could be partially attributable to Republicans' 2021 legislative successes, perhaps leaving few new laws to be desired or discussed. Two new mass shootings in Cleveland and Allen added to a sense of urgency among the fervor already in existence after last spring's tragedy in Uvalde

Moms Demand Action 🤗 @MomsDemand

In the wake of yet another mass shooting in Texas, our volunteers have gathered at the Texas statehouse to demand action to end this scourge on our families and communities.

We want a vote on HB 2744 to #RaiseTheAge to purchase and possess firearms from 18 to 21! #TXLege





233 Retweets 8 Quotes 785 Likes 3 Bookmarks



Demanding Liz 🤎 @ehanks2208



213 Retweets 3 Ouotes 573 Likes 1 Bookmark



NEW: Republican Rep. Frederick Frazier tells me he's willing to consider tightening gun laws in Texas.

Frazier's district borders #Allen.

He's defending the two Republicans who voted on Monday to advance #HB2744, which would raise the age to buy an AR-15 to 21



276.7K Views

tes 2,036 Likes 25 Bookmarks

The Breakout Star: Tik Tok

TikTok had 66M views on posts with #TxLege

Twitter remains the dominant space for legislative chatter, but as the digital sphere shifts, there's another platform worth paying attention to.

TikTok might be banned on Texas government networks, but that doesn't take away its distinct potential for reaching existing and new political audiences.

With over 66 million views under the #TxLege hashtag on the app, TikTok has proved to be a valuable space to explore messaging from political influencers and communicators.



Conclusion

Digital Roadmap Through The Chaos

It's no longer enough to think of social media platforms as simply a front row seat to the policy debates and conversations trending in the halls of power. Social media is an indispensable tool for elected leaders, think tanks, and advocacy efforts. While it used to be a supplemental tool to transmit a policy position, social media is now a mainstay for advocacy and communications operations. The sheer size of the conversation can be daunting: thousands of posts to sift through and digest - often too much content for most ground-level advocates and coalitions to read, much less understand and act on.

Digital Advance specializes in analyzing large digital data sets and providing key context and strategic direction. Our decades of experience working at the intersection of public relations and policy combined with our proprietary digital mapping technology position our clients for success with insightful campaign strategies and proven messages that reach key influencers, opinion leaders, and decision makers.

About the firm:

Digital Advance (D|A) operates at the intersection of public affairs, digital media, and traditional communications to help clients solve problems and achieve goals around complex policy issues. D|A uses proprietary digital technology and draws on decades of experience in strategic communications and media, community and public relations to:

- Identify the most important influencers and persuasive messages;
- Micro-target communications to key people and communities;
- Create strategic plans tailored to clients' specific needs; and
- Establish benchmarks to track success.

Our clients include a range of corporations, associations, and public entities operating locally, statewide, and nationally. We work with them to establish goals, define wins, provide critical research and intelligence, and develop and execute winning campaigns and initiatives.

DIGITAL ADVANCE