

# #TxLege Gets Bigger

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

DIGITAL | ADVANCE

# ***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.

**1.2M**  
Mentions

**241K**  
Authors

**336M**  
Views

**123M**  
Reach

**5.64B**  
Impressions

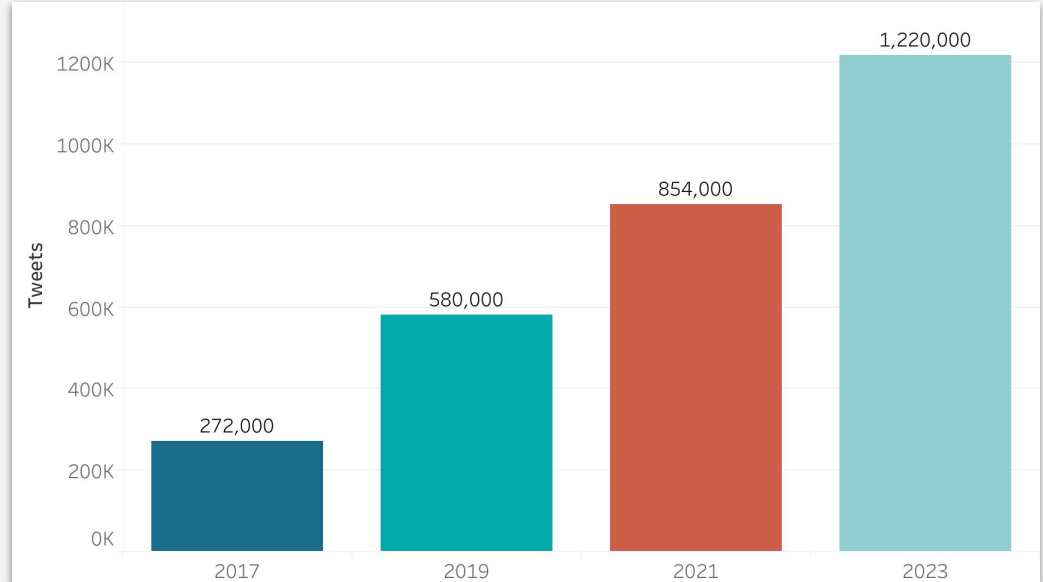
**The numbers don't lie – hundreds of thousands of people joined the conversation!**

# #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



# Themes

# 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.

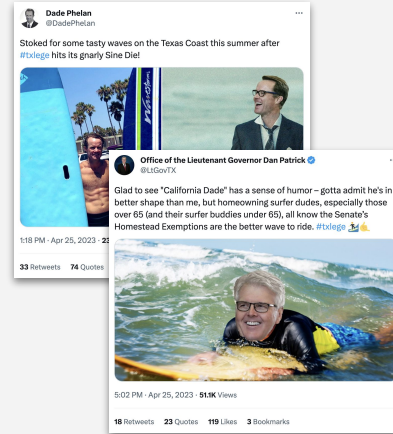
As important legislative deadlines loomed, Lieutenant Governor Patrick referred to Speaker Phelan as "California Dade" in a televised interview discussion on property taxes. This kicked off a spirited online debate as the two chambers sought to assert authority on their preferred solutions to Texans'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

Jan 12



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

Apr 25



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

May 28



*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



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

May 27



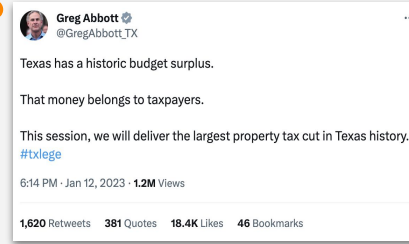
*Just two days before the end of session the Texas House votes to impeach Attorney General Ken Paxton*



# Unprecedented Surplus

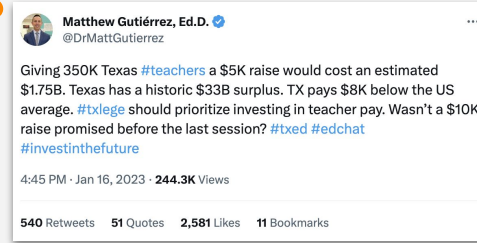
As the 88th Legislative Session gaveled in, the state's extraordinary \$33 billion budget surplus created widespread funding expectations. Amid the nearly 18,000 tweets on the topic, calls to use the surplus to pay down property taxes and increase public education funding saw some of the highest engagement.

Jan 12



*#1 most engaged w/ tweet about the surplus – by far!*

Jan 16



May 29

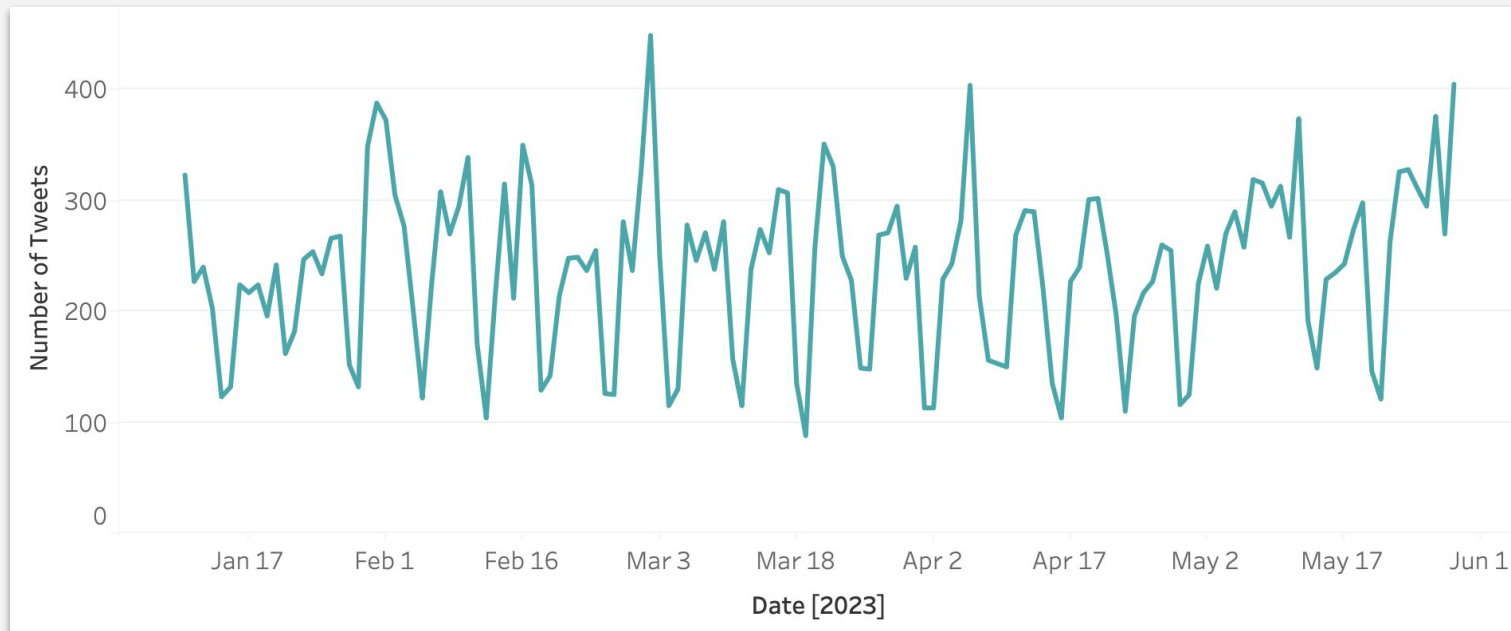


**#TxLege: Legislators**

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

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

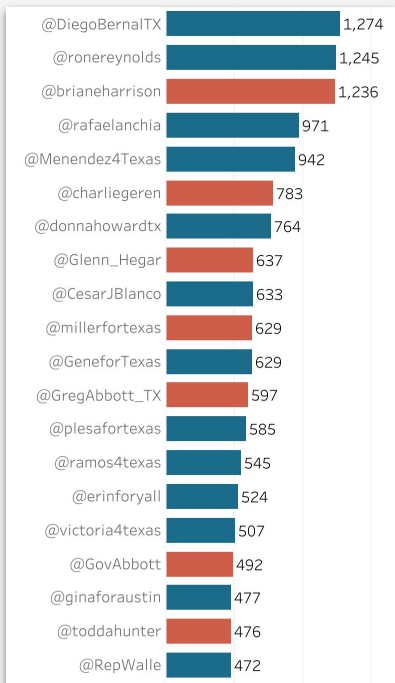
## Legislator Tweet Timeline





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

## Top 20 Legislators by # of Tweets



1

**Diego Bernal**  
@DiegoBernalTX

Texas State Representative for HD 123. Daddy to Xan. Lawyer. Artist. Advocate.  
IG/FB: @DiegoBernalTX

San Antonio, TX [instagram.com/diegobernaltx/](https://www.instagram.com/diegobernaltx/)  
Joined December 2010

6,544 Following 29.1K Followers

Followed by The Back Mic, Texas 2036, and 34 others you follow

2

**State Representative Ron Reynolds**  
@ronereynolds

I'm a Texas State Rep. for #HD27, Chairman, Texas Legislative Black Caucus and Past Chair of the TX Progressive Caucus. #TeamReynolds

Missouri City, TX [Joined May 2009](#)

1,700 Following 5,474 Followers

Followed by Sima Ladjevardian, Texas 2036, and 21 others you follow

3

**Brian Harrison**  
@brianeharrison

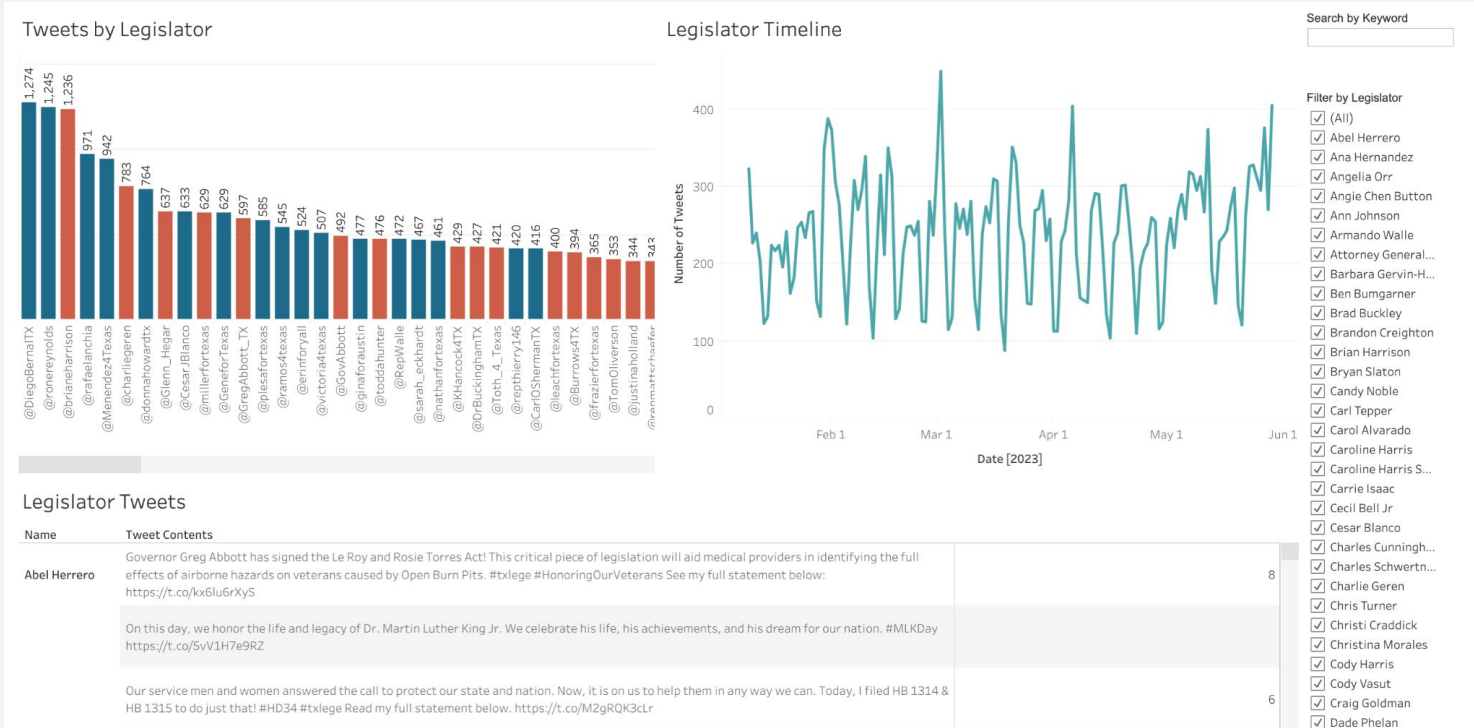
Texas State Rep (#HD10). Native Texan. Aggie. Husband. Father of 4. Former small biz owner, HHS Chief of Staff, Trump and Bush Admins. Believer in freedom.

Ellis County, TX [votebrianharrison.com](https://www.votebrianharrison.com) [Joined August 2009](#)

1,289 Following 8,886 Followers

Followed by Texas 2036, Evan Smith, and Evan

# Take a deeper look into how legislators used Twitter on our interactive dashboard [here](#)

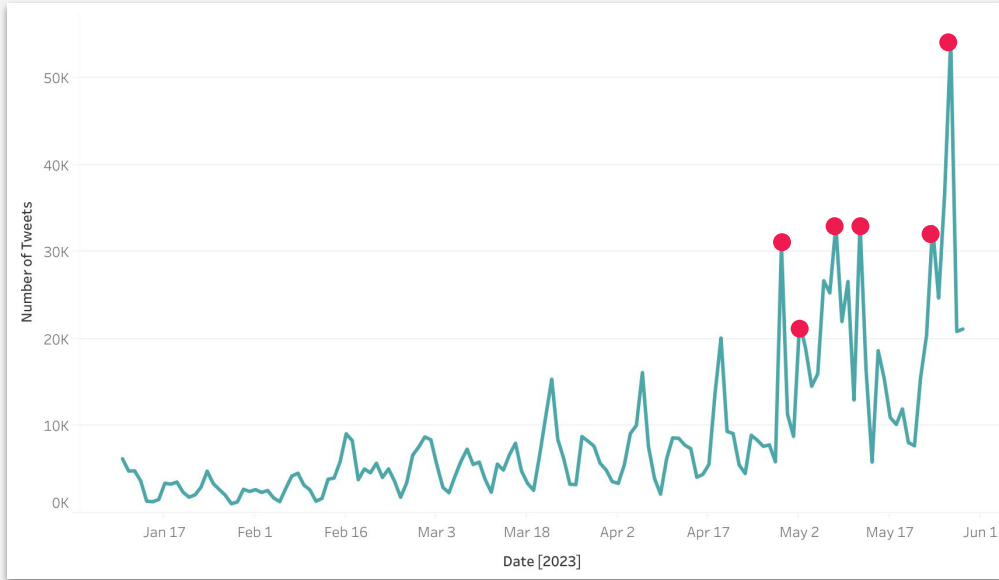


**#TxLege: General Public**



# The end of session saw the highest traffic

## General Public Tweet Timeline

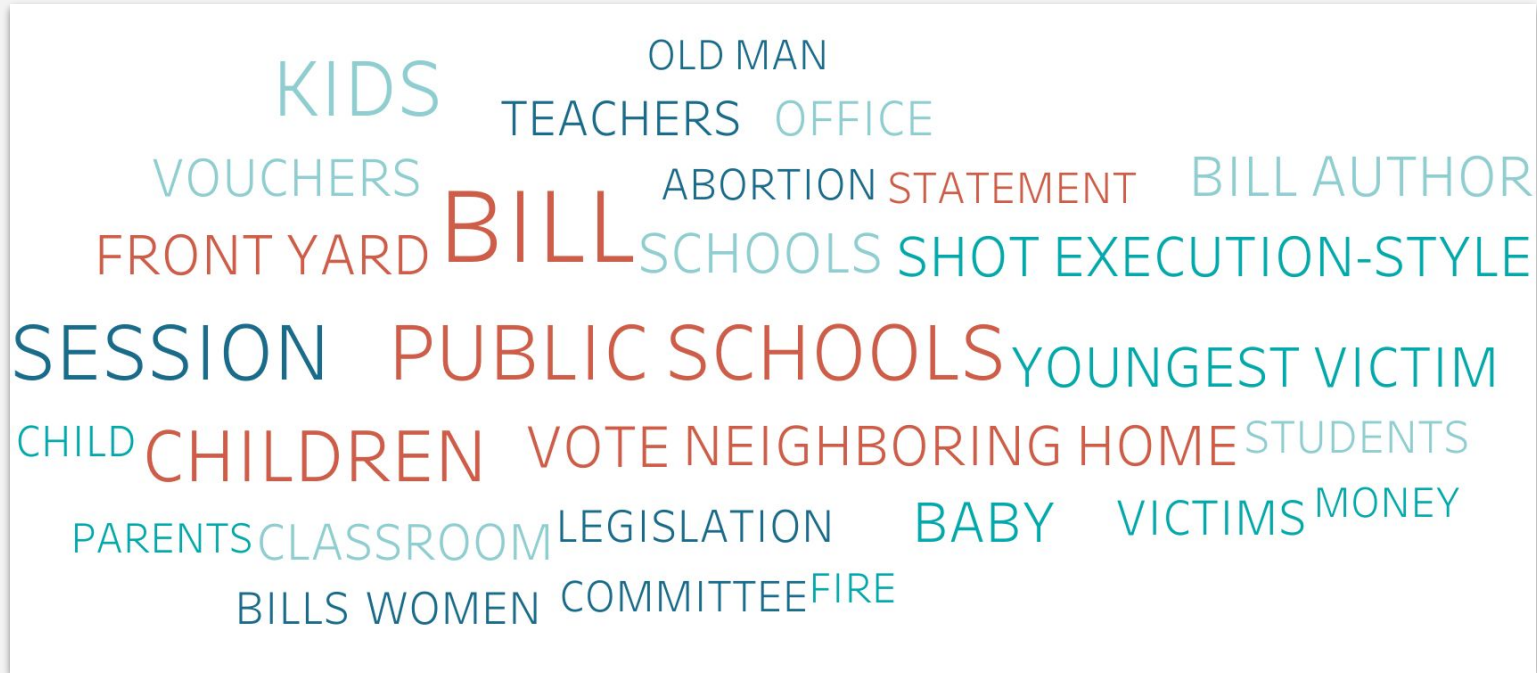


The volume of tweets increased dramatically toward the end of session as coverage at the Capitol intensified around a number of major news stories:

- 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

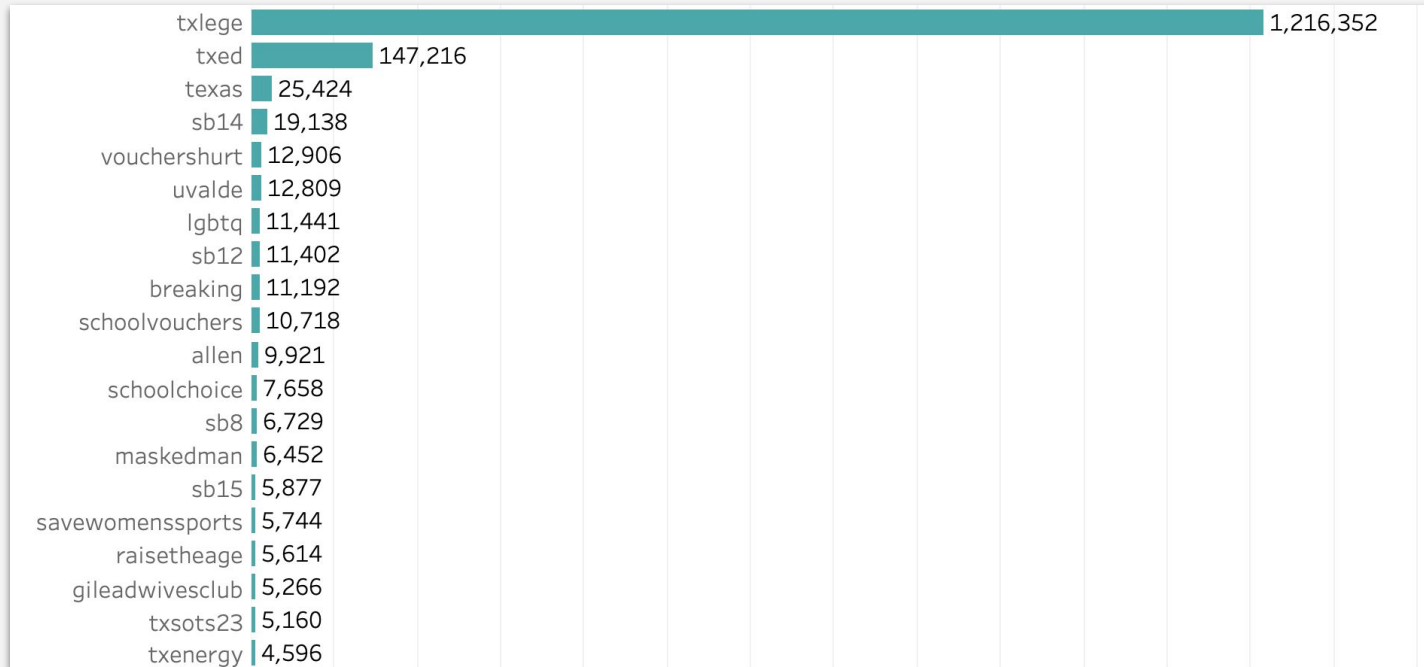
# Education & guns were common themes among the general public's tweets this session

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



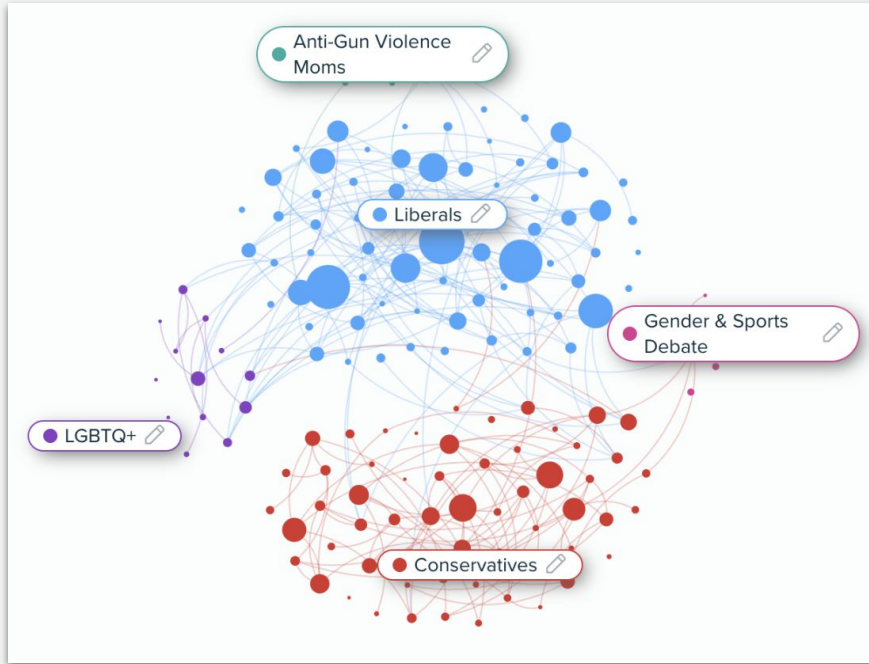
# #txed & #sb14 were the most common topic hashtags used with #TxLege

## 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.

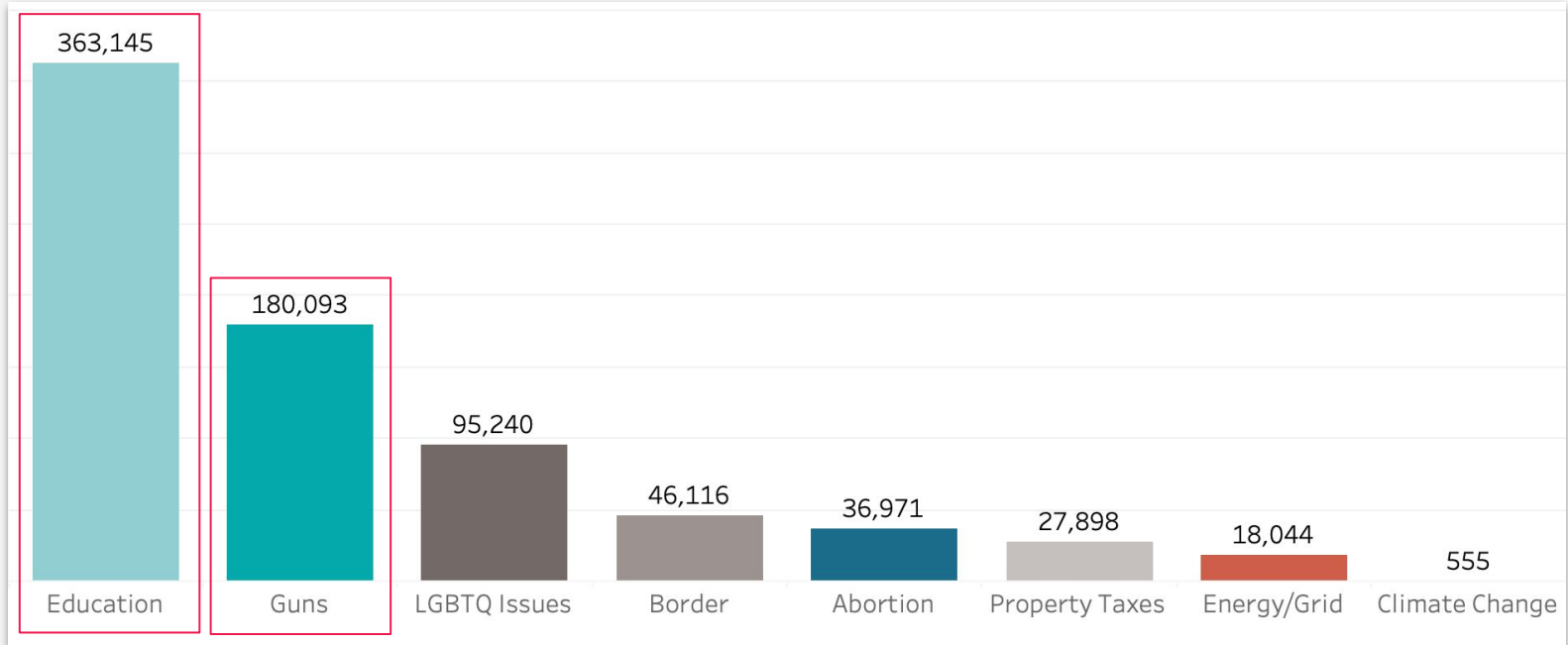
**Big Takeaway:** Left-leaning audiences were bigger than right-leaning audiences.

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.

Voucher Support



Voucher Opposition

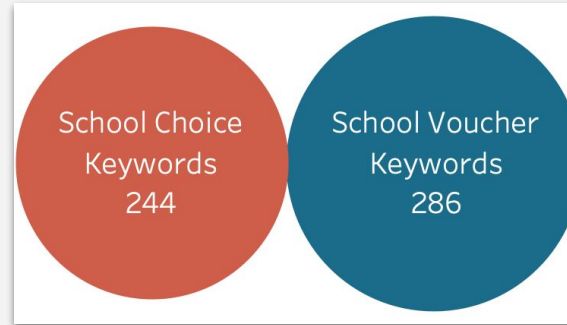




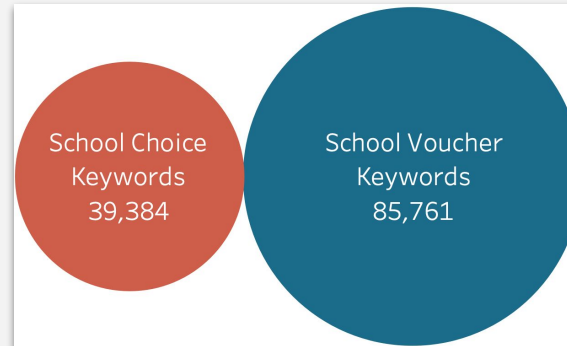
# Proponents continue push to rebrand “vouchers”

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:



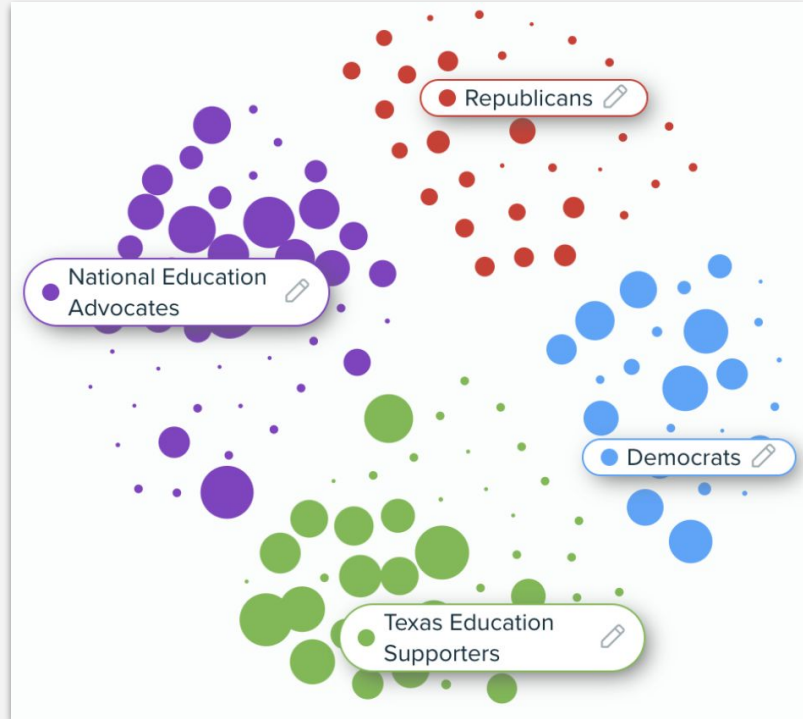
## How the public frames the issue:



# Four key communities talking about “vouchers” & “school choice”

## 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.

























# 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 ⓘ	Reach ⓘ
 <b>Jennifer Berkshire</b>	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
 <b>Josh Cowen</b>	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
 <b>NEPC</b>	NEPC works with policymakers, community members, practitioners & others, using research to inform education policy discussions & promote democratic deliberation	 5.09% 0.34%	7.5K
 <b>Diane Ravitch</b> 🇺🇸 🌈 🇺🇸	I write about education. I blog at <a href="http://dianeravitch.net">http://dianeravitch.net</a> .	 19.17% 7.45%	149.8K
 <b>Jack Schneider</b>	scholar of education at @umasseduc   co-host of @haveyouheardpod   last book: <a href="http://wolfattheschoolhousedoor.com">http://wolfattheschoolhousedoor.com</a>   latest book: <a href="http://offthemarkbook.com">http://offthemarkbook.com</a>	 8.84% 2.4%	16.9K

## Most followed by the Texas Education Supporters:

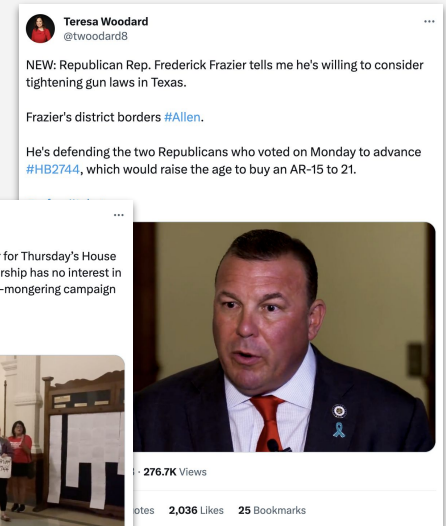
Name	Biography	Affinity ⓘ	Reach ⓘ
 <b>Texas Education Agency</b>	The Texas Education Agency oversees Pre-K through Grade 12 public education in Texas. #txed	 23.71% 8.48%	97.8K
 <b>RaiseYourHandTexas</b>	Raise Your Hand Texas supports public policy solutions that invest in our students, encourage innovation, autonomy, and improve college and workforce readiness.	 22.61% 8.02%	23.8K
 <b>Texas Association of School Boards</b>	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
 <b>Texas Monthly</b>	Texas news, politics, food, culture, travel, yee-haw, and more since 1973. 🤠	 27.52% 11.3%	233.3K
 <b>Texans4PublicEd</b>	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



# 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.



# 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.

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