

# WHEN GOVERNMENT LOBBIES ITSELF: WHY TEXAS SHOULD BAN TAXPAYER-FUNDED LOBBYING

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## KEY POINTS

- Taxpayer-funded lobbying expenditures more than doubled from the 85th to the 89th Legislature, now reaching as high as \$111.5 million.
- Taxpayer-funded lobbyists consistently opposed legislation involving property tax reform, local regulatory preemption, and school choice.
- Taxpayer-funded lobbyists also engaged on highly controversial social issues such as abortion, gun control, men and women's spaces (bathroom bill).

## INTRODUCTION

Lobbying occupies an uneasy but well-established place in American constitutional and political life. As an outgrowth of the First Amendment's Petition Clause, lobbying by private individuals and voluntary associations is generally understood as a legitimate and protected mechanism for conveying information, policy preferences, and grievances to politicians as well as regulators ([Devore, 2017](#)). Yet this settled understanding becomes far less clear when the practice is undertaken not by private citizens, but by governmental entities.

Over the past several decades, federal, state, and local governments have increasingly engaged in what has come to be called taxpayer-funded lobbying (TFL), which involves using public funds to advocate for or against legislation, regulations, or administrative action ([Clemens et al., 2010](#); [Griffin & Whittmann, 1995](#)). This practice has generated sustained controversy, particularly in states such as Texas, where governments are otherwise subject to significant constraints, including a prohibition on taxpayer-funded electioneering, property tax revenue limitations, and a prohibition of taxpayer-funded lobbying on state agencies ([Quintero, 2025](#)). Critics argue that TFL distorts democratic accountability by allowing government actors to deploy coercively collected funds to advance institutional interests that may diverge from those of taxpayers.

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Proponents such as the Texas Association of School Boards and Texas Municipal League contend that intergovernmental advocacy is a necessary component of modern governance ([Devore, 2019](#); [Texas Association of School Boards, 2025](#)).

Despite the salience of this debate, systematic data on TFL remains limited. Existing research has largely focused on aggregate spending estimates, statutory analysis, or illustrative case studies, leaving unresolved how TFL operates in practice across policy domains, legislative sessions, and bill outcomes ([Quintero & Bonura, 2025](#); [Crockett, 2025](#); [Drogin, 2025](#)). In particular, little scholarship has examined TFL at the bill level, linking lobbying registrations to testimony, subject matter, and legislative success or failure over time.

This study addresses that gap by providing a multi-session, bill-level empirical analysis of TFL in Texas from the 85th through the 89th legislative sessions. By integrating lobbying registrations, witness testimony, subject classifications, compensation disclosures, and legislative outcomes, this study offers a more granular account of how TFL functions within the Texas legislative process and how it compares behaviorally to privately funded advocacy.

## BACKGROUND

Taxpayer-funded lobbying can be broadly defined as the practice by which government entities directly or indirectly seek to influence legislative or administrative action using public funds. This definition is tied to reporting requirements in [Sec. 140.0045](#) of the Local Government Code. Put simply, it is government lobbying government for greater authority, funding, or both. Unlike private lobbying, which is financed through voluntary contributions, TFL relies on resources derived from taxation or other compulsory public revenues. This practice creates a perverted incentive structure, obscures governmental accountability, and undermines the Framers' constitutional design. One policy analysis by Bonura and Quintero succinctly defines taxpayer-funded lobby-

ing as a governmental entity "utiliz[ing] public funds to influence the legislative process, either through a contract lobbyist, an intergovernmental relations team, or a pro-government association" ([Bonura & Quintero, 2025, p. 2](#)).

In practice, TFL manifests through three primary channels. First, local government entities may contract with registered lobbyists, which may include individuals or firms required to register under Chapter 305 of the Texas Government Code, to advocate on their behalf in and around the Legislature. Second, entities may employ in-house government relations or intergovernmental affairs staff whose official duties include legislative advocacy. Third, government entities may fund or maintain membership in a non-profit state association that are primarily composed of similar entities and which engage in lobbying activities on behalf of their members, such as the Texas Municipal League or the Texas Association of School Boards.

These forms of advocacy are not uniformly regulated. Texas law imposes strict limits on lobbying by state agencies, including prohibitions on the use of appropriated funds to employ registered lobbyists in [Title 5 Government Code 556.005a](#), yet places comparatively few constraints on lobbying by local governments ([National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019](#)). As a result, cities, counties, school districts, and special districts retain broad discretion to allocate public funds toward legislative advocacy, whether directly or through intermediaries.

The institutional context in which TFL occurs further complicates its analysis. Local governments already enjoy routine access to legislators through elected officials, staff communications, and formal intergovernmental processes. The addition of professional lobbying, when funded by taxpayers, may alter legislative incentives, crowd out citizen participation, or systematically favor governmental interests over those of private constituents. Indeed, observers note that lobbyists funded by local governments often "lobby for higher taxes, greater spending, and more

regulatory power,” leaving individual taxpayers at a distinct disadvantage in competing for their representatives’ attention (Devore, 2017, p. 2).

Understanding the scope, structure, and policy orientation of TFL requires moving beyond aggregate expenditure figures toward a more detailed examination of how public funds are used to influence specific legislation. The sections that follow place this inquiry within the existing literature, outline the study’s methodological approach, and present an empirical analysis of taxpayer-funded lobbying behavior in the Texas Legislature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on taxpayer-funded lobbying begins with a recognition of the constitutional distinction between the right of citizens to petition and the powers delegated to government. While private lobbying is widely understood as protected political activity derived from the First Amendment’s Petition Clause, multiple scholars and policy analyses argue that this protection does not extend to government entities themselves. Governments, it is emphasized, possess authority and power—not rights—and therefore lack a constitutional basis to deploy public funds to influence other governmental actors (Devore, 2019, p. 2). This critique frames TFL as a structural inversion of the constitutional order: the state, rather than responding to petitions from citizens, uses coercively collected resources to amplify its own institutional preferences within the legislative process (Brenner & Muska, 2023). On First Amendment grounds alone, taxpayer-funded advocacy is often deemed indefensible, as it entails government speech funded by unwilling citizens (Brenner & Muska, 2023). Justice Alito makes this point succinctly writing for the majority in *Janus v. AFSCME*:

Free speech serves many ends. It is essential to our democratic form of government ... and it furthers the search for truth ... . Whenever the Federal Government or a State prevents individuals from saying what they think on important matters or

compels them to voice ideas with which they disagree, it undermines these ends. When speech is compelled, however, additional damage is done. In that situation, individuals are coerced into betraying their convictions. Forcing free and independent individuals to endorse ideas they find objectionable is always demeaning, and for this reason, one of our landmark free speech cases said that a law commanding ‘involuntary affirmation’ of objected-to beliefs would require ‘even more immediate and urgent grounds’ than a law demanding silence. ... Compelling a person to subsidize the speech of other private speakers raises similar First Amendment concerns. (*Janus v. AFSCME*, 2018)

A second strand of the literature situates TFL within public choice and political-economy frameworks, emphasizing the asymmetric incentives facing public versus private advocates (Bennett & DiLorenzo, 1987). Private organizations are constrained by voluntary funding, competitive pressures, and internal accountability, whereas government entities can externalize lobbying costs across taxpayers and persist regardless of effectiveness. Several studies argue that this asymmetry undermines democratic accountability by allowing government actors to lobby for expanded authority, spending, or regulatory discretion without bearing the political or financial discipline faced by private interests (Devore, 2017; Welton & Quintero, 2023; Bonura & Quintero, 2025). According to an analysis by Sivasailam & Stokes, the practice of government using tax dollars to lobby other governments often appears to be a “lose-lose proposition for taxpayers. In many cases, if the lobbying succeeds, government expands; if it fails, government wastes tax dollars” (Sivasailam & Stokes, 2012, p. 1).

Individuals, private groups, and firms incur personal and private costs when they choose to lobby by themselves or through third parties; they typically only lobby to the extent that the benefits of lobbying outweigh these costs. Firms, for example, face limited resources that can be

dedicated to lobbying. If lobbying activities are consistently unprofitable, the firm—responsible to its stakeholders—cannot continue to sustain these activities. Certainly, government budget limitations constrain the practice somewhat. But like most other government practices, the accounting system is not set up to measure costs versus benefits. Taxpayer funded lobbying is simply not subject to the same level of cost-benefit analysis in the public sector as it is in the private sector, and the potential that government will continue to lobby beyond any effective limit is real. (Sivasailam & Stokes, 2012, p. 2)

The empirical literature on taxpayer-funded lobbying, while limited, underscores both the scale of the practice and the difficulty of accurately measuring it. Clemens et al.'s (2010) state-level analysis demonstrates that when lobbying expenditures are reclassified by funding source rather than statutory category, government and government-adjacent entities account for a substantial share of total state lobbying expenditures, approaching one-quarter in California during the late 2000s. More recent Texas-focused analyses estimate that local governments spend tens of millions of dollars annually on contract lobbying alone, exclusive of in-house intergovernmental relations, suggesting that conventional disclosure regimes materially understate the true scope of taxpayer-funded advocacy (Welton & Quintero, 2023). Across studies, authors consistently note that fragmented disclosure laws, exemptions for public entities, and inconsistent reporting standards impede systematic empirical evaluation.

Finally, policy-oriented literature advances a range of reform proposals, from enhanced disclosure requirements to outright prohibitions on the use of public funds for lobbying. While some scholars emphasize transparency as a politically feasible first step, others argue that disclosure alone cannot remedy the structural distortions created by taxpayer-funded advocacy and instead call for bans on contract lobbying by political subdivisions and restrictions on publicly financed lobbying associa-

tions. Notably, much of this literature relies on aggregate spending figures or case studies, leaving unresolved how TFL operates at the bill level, how it aligns across policy domains, and how it compares behaviorally to privately funded advocacy over time. This gap motivates the present study's contribution: a session-spanning, bill-level empirical analysis of TFL activity in Texas that integrates lobbying registrations, witness testimony, subject classifications, and legislative outcomes.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method data integration and classification approach to identify and quantify TFL in Texas. The analysis was conducted by cross-referencing lobbying registration records with multiple publicly available legislative datasets, followed by quantitative aggregation and comparative analysis.

### Data Sources

Lobbying registration data were obtained from the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC) for the 85th through the 89th Texas legislative sessions. These records include lobbyist-client relationships, reported subject matter, compensation ranges, and payment methods. Each observation represents a unique lobbyist-client pairing, permitting analysis at the level of individual lobbying engagements rather than aggregate registrant counts.

Legislative data were drawn from Texas Legislature Online (TLO) and include bill captions, witness lists, bill status, general subject classifications, and fiscal notes. Witness list data were used to link lobbying activity to specific bills and legislative outcomes, enabling analysis of both the volume and direction of advocacy.

To supplement and validate classifications of taxpayer-funded lobbying, the study also incorporated data from Transparency USA's TFL database, where available.

## Classification of Taxpayer-Funded Clients

The central methodological challenge of this study is the classification of lobbying clients as either taxpayer-funded or privately funded. Because Texas does not maintain a comprehensive or standardized designation of taxpayer-funded lobbying clients, this study developed a two-stage classification process.

First, a total of 47,613 lobbyist-client observations were manually coded using a rule-based naming convention methodology. Clients were classified as taxpayer-funded if their names contained clear political subdivision identifiers, including markers such as “City of,” “County,” “Independent School District,” “ISD,” “Community College District,” or “Authority.” Under Texas law, political subdivisions derive their operating revenues primarily from taxation and other public sources; accordingly, lobbying expenditures made on their behalf were classified as taxpayer-funded.

Second, where data ambiguities existed, client records were matched against Transparency USA’s taxpayer-funded lobbying database. This external dataset was used both to confirm initial classifications and to identify additional taxpayer-funded entities, such as intergovernmental organizations or quasi-governmental entities, whose status may not be apparent from naming conventions alone.

Discrepancies between sources were resolved conservatively. When classification uncertainty persisted, clients were coded as privately funded to avoid overstating TFL activity. This conservative bias toward under-inclusion strengthens the study’s internal validity.

## Quantification and Analysis

Once classified, lobbying activity was quantified across sessions using multiple complementary measures. These include:

1. counts of registered lobbying engagements,

2. reported compensation ranges and midpoint estimates derived from TEC disclosures,
3. subject-matter distributions based on bill and lobbyist classifications, and
4. bill-level participation via witness testimony indicating support or opposition.

By linking lobbying registrations to bill outcomes, fiscal impact, and subject areas, the study evaluates the scale of TFL and its legislative positioning, policy focus, and alignment with bills carrying budgetary consequences.

All data cleaning, normalization, matching, and aggregation procedures were applied uniformly across legislative sessions to ensure comparability.

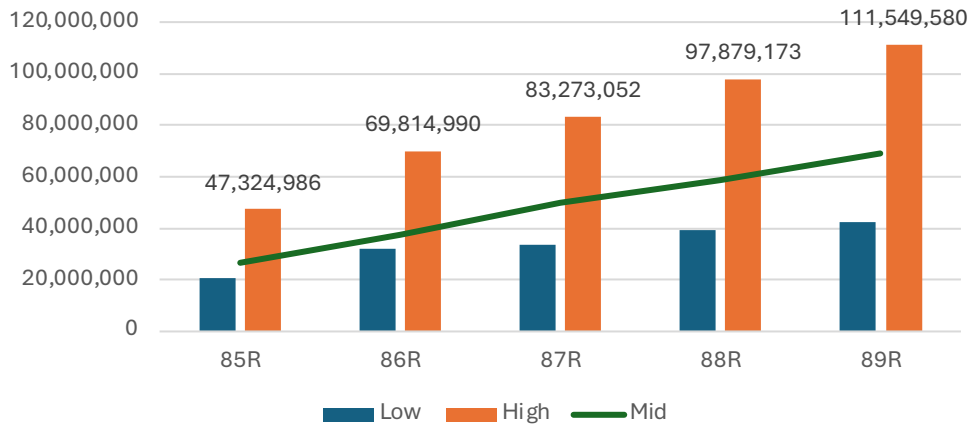
## Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations inherent in the underlying data. Lobbying registrations are filed under a lobbyist’s legal name, whereas witnesses registering positions for or against specific bills may manually enter names and frequently use nicknames (e.g., “Ben” for “Benjamin” or “Chuck” for “Charles”). These inconsistencies complicate name matching across datasets and may result in undercounting certain lobbying engagements.

There is also a knowledge asymmetry in the data. While lobbyists themselves would likely know which client or clients they are representing in any given moment, public information is less detailed. Therefore, rather than honing in on specific taxpayer-funded lobbyists, this analysis seeks to uncover general trends about their activity rather than serve as a definitive guide on discrete legislative events, unless otherwise noted.

Additionally, limitations in TLO’s data were identified during the data collection process. There exists an undetermined number of missing witness list entries for hearings for which it is otherwise documented that testimony occurred. It is suspected that this is

**Figure 1**  
*Growth in Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying Expenditures Across Sessions*



**Note.** Data taken from [Texas Ethics Commission, 2025](#); [Texas Ethics Commission, 2020](#); [Transparency USA, n.d.](#), and the author's own calculations.

limited to bills that were recommitted. As an example, see the bill history for HB 2127 (2023) from the 88th Legislature. Moreover, minor inconsistencies in witness list formatting indicate that some names were likely omitted during data extraction due to delimiter-based parsing rules. General subjects vary slightly from session to session, but this minor variation is unlikely to materially impact this analysis, because of the expected specialization of lobbyists on consistently labeled general subjects.

Furthermore, data was not gathered for non-legislative session years, and a lobbyist's testimony at a hearing may or may not be on behalf of any particular client; in the same way, some lobbyists rarely testify or do not testify at all.

## RESULTS

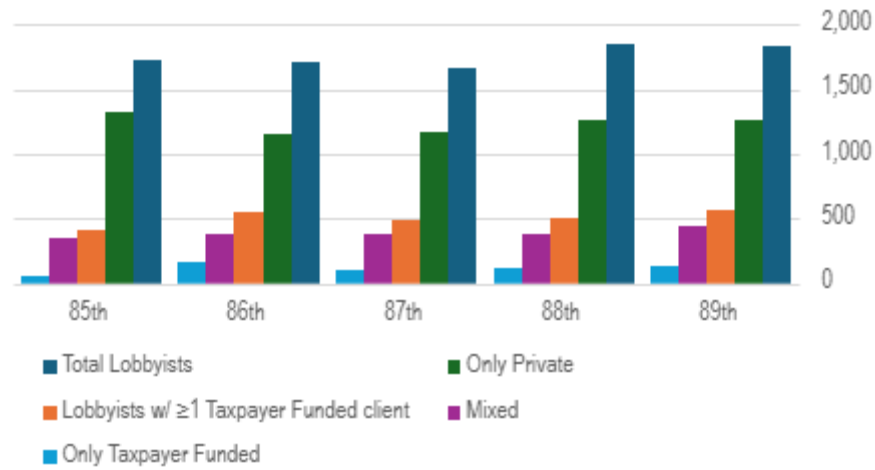
**Figure 1** displays the growth in taxpayer-funded lobbying expenditures across the 85th through the 89th legislative sessions, reported as low-high compensation ranges derived from TEC disclosures. The data show a clear and sustained increase in TFL over time. In the 85th Legislature, estimated taxpayer-funded

lobbying ranged from approximately \$20.7 million to \$47.3 million. By the 89th Legislature, that range had expanded to \$42.3 million to \$111.5 million, representing more than a doubling at both the lower and upper bounds.

It needs to be noted that **Figure 1** excludes interim years, meaning that the true amount of taxpayer funds spent on lobbying is likely to be higher than what this legislative session-specific analysis finds.

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the upward trajectory is largely monotonic, with each successive session exhibiting higher reported spending than the preceding one. The widening gap between the low and high estimates in later sessions further suggests increasing dispersion in lobbying compensation, consistent with the growing scale and institutionalization of taxpayer-funded advocacy. The larger range may indicate an increased number of lobbyists or more clients reporting at the lowest pay scale range. If this shift is a result of an increased number of lobbyists, then it should be answerable by evaluating if lobbyists by client type shows a similar shift in lobbyists with at least one taxpayer-funded client.

**Figure 2**  
*Lobbyist Participation and Client Composition*



**Note.** Data taken from [Texas Ethics Commission, 2025](#); [Texas Ethics Commission, 2020](#); [Transparency USA, n.d.](#), and the author’s own calculations.

**Figure 2** presents the distribution of registered lobbyists by client type for each legislative session. Across the five sessions, 3,345 unique lobbyists were identified, of whom 1,080 represented at least one taxpayer-funded client during the study period. While the majority of lobbyists represented only private clients, a substantial and growing share participated in taxpayer-funded lobbying.

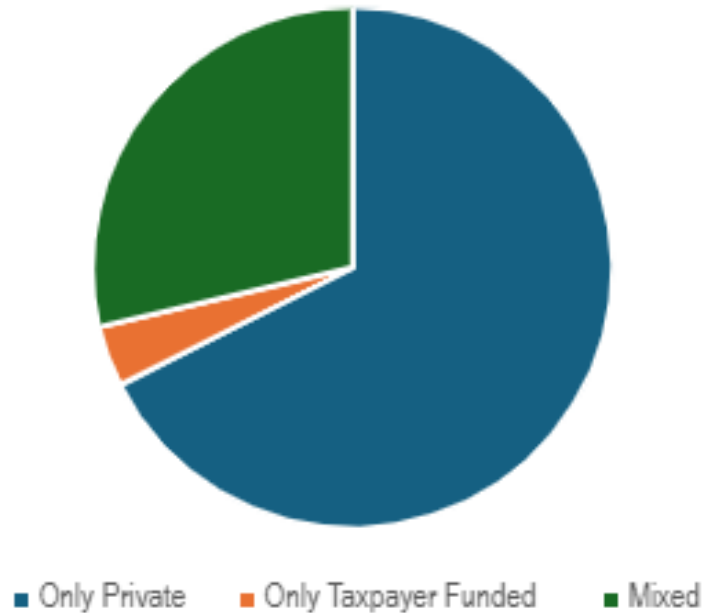
Session-level variation is evident. As shown in **Figure 2**, the proportion of lobbyists with at least one taxpayer-funded client increased from 24% in the 85th Legislature (409 of 1,732) to 31% in the 89th Legislature (570 of 1,841). This increase reflects not only higher spending, but broader participation by the lobbying profession in taxpayer-funded advocacy.

**Figure 3** further disaggregates lobbyists into three categories: 1) only private, 2) only taxpayer-funded, and 3) mixed-client lobbyists. In every session, mixed-client lobbyists substantially outnumber those representing only taxpayer-funded clients. This pattern indicates that TFL is primarily conducted by lobbyists simultaneously representing private interests, rather than by a distinct or isolated cohort.

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Mixed-client lobbying has the potential to create conflicts of interest that may be damaging to both clients and the taxpayer. For instance, consider a lobbyist employed by a school district and a K-12 builder lobbying on a hypothetical bill to reduce high school stadium costs by setting statewide design standards. This scenario presents a trilemma—represent the school district and undermine the builder *or* represent the builder and undermine the school district *or* represent them both and undermine the taxpaying public. In any case, the

**Figure 3**  
*Lobbyist by Client Type, 85th to 89th Legislative Sessions*



**Note.** Data taken from [Texas Ethics Commission, 2025](#); [Texas Ethics Commission, 2020](#); [Transparency USA, n.d.](#), and the author's own calculations.

taxpayer bears the weight and cost of the decision, at least to some degree. Furthermore, mixed client lobbying may obscure the accuracy to some extent of the following analysis, which links lobbyists to witness lists and bill subject areas.

**Table 1** summarizes the top subject-matter categories in which taxpayer-funded lobbyists opposed legislation, by session. The data reveal consistent concentrations of opposition in a limited number of policy domains. Across sessions, the most frequently opposed categories include city government, political subdivisions, education (particularly school districts and charter schools), civil remedies and liabilities, criminal procedure, and law enforcement.

In the 89th Legislature, for example, taxpayer-funded lobbyists opposed 62 bills in the Civil Remedies and Liabilities category, generating 169 opposition

mentions by 77 distinct lobbyists, as shown in **Table 1**. Education-related subjects similarly appear across all five sessions, indicating persistent engagement in policy areas directly affecting the governance, fiscal exposure, and regulatory authority of public entities.

The recurrence of these subject areas across sessions suggests stable categories of advocacy rather than episodic or session-specific responses. While informative, a more granular approach through looking at the bills can reveal the types of issues, be they fiscal, social, organizational or otherwise, that taxpayer-funded lobbyists work on.

**Table 2** presents the five bills in each session that attracted the greatest number of taxpayer-funded lobbyists in opposition. In each legislative session, opposition tends to be highly concentrated on a small number of salient bills.

**Table 1***Policy Domains of Opposition by Taxpayer-Funded Lobbyists*

Session	Subject	Bills	Mentions	Lobbyists
85R	Political Subdivisions	23	118	58
85R	Education--School Districts	21	71	34
85R	Electronic Information Systems	20	73	47
85R	City Government--General	18	85	48
85R	Civil Remedies & Liabilities	17	31	24
86R	Education--School Districts	41	99	24
86R	Special Districts & Authorities--Water & Utility	32	43	15
86R	Education--Primary & Secondary--Charter Schools	31	65	20
86R	Electronic Information Systems	30	105	63
86R	City Government--General	28	67	33
87R	City Government--General	23	54	15
87R	Law Enforcement	22	39	13
87R	Criminal Procedure--General	22	32	16
87R	Civil Remedies & Liabilities	20	48	27
87R	Weapons	20	35	18
88R	Criminal Procedure--General	38	53	17
88R	City Government--General	26	110	51
88R	Crimes--Miscellaneous	26	77	32
88R	Civil Remedies & Liabilities	25	70	47
88R	Law Enforcement	24	47	20
89R	Civil Remedies & Liabilities	62	169	77
89R	Education--School Districts	35	109	44
89R	State Finances--Management & Control	32	129	70
89R	Electronic Information Systems	31	79	43
89R	Education--Primary & Secondary--Charter Schools	30	92	44

**Note.** Data taken from [Texas Ethics Commission, 2025](#); [Texas Ethics Commission, 2020](#); [Texas Legislature Online, n.d.-a](#); [Texas Legislature Online, n.d.-b](#); [Transparency USA, n.d.](#), and the author's own calculations.

In the 85th Legislature, SB 2 (ad valorem tax administration) faced opposition from 27 taxpayer-funded lobbyists, while SB 4 (immigration enforcement) and SB 6 (bathroom regulations) each drew opposition from more than 20 taxpayer-funded lobbyists. Similar clustering is evident in subsequent sessions. During the 86th Legislature, a series of bills restricting local regulation of employment practices (SB 2485–2487) each drew opposition from 17 taxpayer-funded lobbyists, while eminent domain legislation (SB 421) drew opposition from 28.

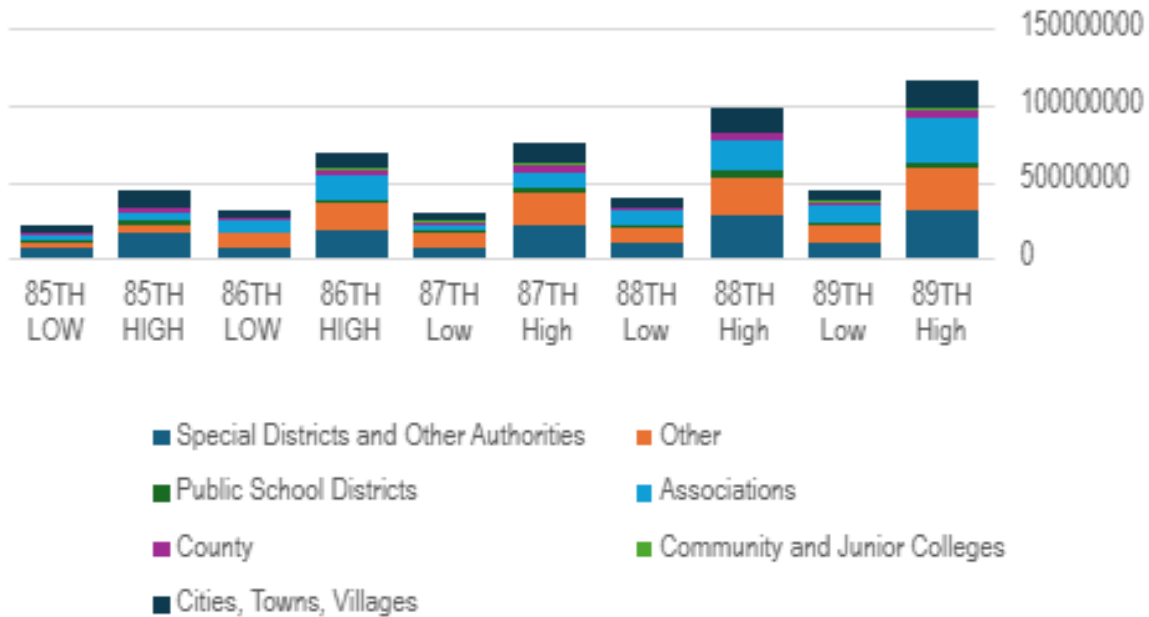
**Table 2** also highlights instances in which taxpayer-funded lobbyists opposed legislation directly regulating their own activity. Notably, SB 175 (88th Legislature), which addressed restrictions on the use of public funds for lobbying, was opposed by 15 taxpayer-funded lobbyists—which is to say, taxpayer-funded lobbyists generally support taxpayer-funded lobbying and tend to oppose efforts to ban the practice. In comparison, survey data demonstrates that taxpayers do not. According to a WPA Intelligence poll, more than four out of five registered voters oppose the practice ([Phillips, 2025](#)).

**Table 2***Bill-Level Opposition Patterns*

Session	Bills	Caption	Lobbyists	Mentions
85R	SB 2	Relating to the administration of the ad valorem tax system.	27	27
85R	SB 4	Relating to the enforcement by campus police departments and certain local governmental entities of state and federal laws governing immigration and to related duties and liability of certain persons in the criminal justice system; providing a civil penalty; creating a criminal offense.	21	39
85R	SB 6	Relating to regulations and policies for entering or using a bathroom or changing facility; authorizing a civil penalty.	21	26
85R	SB 740	Relating to the acquisition of property by an entity with eminent domain authority.	14	17
85R	SB 3	Relating to the establishment of an education savings account program and a tax credit scholarship and educational expense assistance program.	12	12
86R	SB 421	Relating to the acquisition of real property by an entity with eminent domain authority.	28	51
86R	SB 2	Relating to ad valorem taxation; authorizing fees.	23	27
86R	SB 2485	Relating to a prohibition against certain local regulation of certain employment benefits provided by private employers.	17	21
86R	SB 2486	Relating to a prohibition against certain local regulation of the scheduling and overtime compensation practices of private employers.	17	21
86R	SB 2487	Relating to a prohibition against certain local regulation of employment leave provided by private employers.	17	21
87R	SB 10	Relating to certain requirements applicable to political subdivisions and other entities that engage in lobbying and to the applicability of lobbyist registration requirements to a person who provides legal services to a political subdivision.	11	11
87R	HB 1869	Relating to the definition of debt for the purposes of calculating certain ad valorem tax rates of a taxing unit.	10	11
87R	HB 4545	Relating to the assessment of public school students, the establishment of a strong foundations grant program, and providing accelerated instruction for students who fail to achieve satisfactory performance on certain assessment instruments.	8	14
87R	HB 610	Relating to judicial review of certain local laws applicable to state license holders.	8	9
87R	HB 6	Relating to election integrity and security, including by preventing fraud in the conduct of elections in this state; increasing criminal penalties; creating criminal offenses.	8	8
88R	SB 12	Relating to the authority to regulate sexually oriented performances and to restricting those performances on the premises of a commercial enterprise, on public property, or in the presence of an individual younger than 18 years of age; authorizing a civil penalty; creating a criminal offense.	21	29
88R	SB 8	Relating to public education, including parental rights and public school responsibilities regarding instructional materials and the establishment of an education savings account program.	19	20
88R	SB 175	Relating to the use by a political subdivision of public funds for lobbying and certain other activities.	15	17
88R	HB 100	Relating to public education and public school finance, including the rights, certification, and compensation of public school educators, contributions by a public school to the Teacher Retirement System of Texas, and an education savings account program for certain children.	11	11
88R	SB 15	Relating to requiring public institution of higher education students who compete in intercollegiate athletic competitions to compete based on biological sex.	10	12
89R	SB 2	Relating to the establishment of an education savings account program.	15	15
89R	HB 3225	Relating to the restriction of access by minors to sexually explicit materials in municipal public library collections; providing a civil penalty.	12	13
89R	HB 229	Relating to general definitions for and collection of governmental information regarding biological sex.	11	13
89R	SB 12	Relating to parental rights in public education, to certain public school requirements and prohibitions regarding instruction, diversity, equity, and inclusion duties, and social transitioning, and to student clubs at public schools.	11	13
89R	SB 3	Relating to the regulation of products derived from hemp, including consumable hemp products and the hemp-derived cannabinoids contained in those products; requiring occupational licenses and permits; imposing fees; creating criminal offenses; authorizing an administrative penalty.	10	13

**Note.** Data taken from [Texas Ethics Commission, 2025](#); [Texas Ethics Commission, 2020](#); [Texas Legislature Online, n.d.-a](#); [Texas Legislature Online, n.d.-b](#); [Transparency USA, n.d.](#), and the author's own calculations.

**Figure 4**  
*Composition of Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying by Entity Type*



**Note.** Data taken from [Texas Ethics Commission, 2025](#); [Texas Ethics Commission, 2020](#); [Transparency USA, n.d.](#), and the author’s own calculations.

In addition to what bills taxpayer-funded lobbyists testified against, it is also important to examine the client side: which political subdivisions are paying for lobbyists. **Figure 4** disaggregates TFL expenditures by entity category and legislative session. Across all sessions, special districts and other authorities, cities, and associations account for the largest shares of taxpayer-funded lobbying expenditures.

In the 89th Legislature, special districts and authorities reported lobbying expenditures ranging from approximately \$10.7 million to \$31.2 million, while associations ranged from \$12.1 million to \$28.5 million, as shown in **Figure 4**. Cities and towns also represent a substantial and growing share, with reported expenditures ranging from \$6.6 million to \$17.3 million in the same session. Counties and community and junior colleges consistently appear at lower expenditure levels, though their participation remains nontrivial across sessions. However, this is unsurprising given the relatively reduced number of counties compared to other political subdivisions.

Taken together, **Figures 1-4** and **Tables 1-2** demonstrate that TFL in Texas is materially significant, increasingly prevalent among registered lobbyists, concentrated in recurring policy domains, and dominated by specific categories of public entities.

## LEGISLATIVE AGENDAS AS QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF TAXPAYER-FUNDED LOBBYING

In addition to quantitative measures of TFL activity, local government legislative agendas provide direct qualitative evidence of the substantive policy positions local governments pursue using public resources. These documents, typically adopted by city councils, school districts, and counties and used to guide intergovernmental relations staff and contract lobbyists, function as formal statements of legislative intent. They therefore offer a rare window into the policy preferences advanced through taxpayer-funded advocacy, independent of registration or disclosure data.

A review of legislative agendas adopted by major Texas local governments demonstrates that TFL routinely extends to highly salient and ideologically contested policy domains. For example, multiple cities explicitly endorse firearm regulations exceeding existing state law. In the 88th legislative session, the City of Houston has stated its support for “universal background checks, red flag laws, and raising the age to purchase semi-automatic rifles” ([City of Houston Government Relations, 2022, p. 2](#)), while the City of Austin’s legislative agenda calls for authorizing local regulation of firearm sales and public carry, magazine capacity limits, and age-based purchase restrictions ([City of Austin Intergovernmental Relations Office, n.d.-a](#)). Similar language appears in the legislative priorities of the Cities of San Antonio, Dallas, and Fort Worth, each framing gun control as a matter of public safety.

School districts and counties have also staked out positions on social issues. As noted in the Legislative Priorities of the San Antonio Independent School District, they “oppose[d] any bathroom bills” ([San Antonio Independent School District, 2019](#)). School districts commonly oppose ballot transparency measures, property tax reform, and any legislation that reduces local control ([Fort Bend Independent School District, n.d.](#)). Beyond bathrooms, counties are engaged in advocacy on gun control, abortion, and climate change as well. For instance, Bexar County “Support[s] legislation that raises the minimum age to purchase a semi-automatic weapon from 18 to 21” ([Bexar County, 2025](#)). Additionally, Travis County, “Support[s] legislation that allows counties to achieve emission reduction goals” ([Travis County, 2025](#)). Not to be outdone, El Paso County, “Oppose[s] legislation that seeks to criminalize or penalize a person seeking medical care that may include an abortion” ([El Paso County, 2023, p. 22](#)).

Local government legislative agendas also reveal extensive advocacy on issues commonly described as equity-, identity-, or values-based policy. Cities including Dallas, Austin, El Paso, and Fort Worth have

adopted legislative priorities endorsing diversity, equity, and inclusion frameworks; protections based on gender identity or expression; renewable energy subsidies; and opposition to immigration and border security measures. For instance, the City of Dallas has pledged support for legislation grounded in “diversity, equity, and human rights” and protections for LGBTQIA+ communities ([City of Dallas Government Affairs, 2022](#); [City of Dallas, 2024](#)), while the City of Austin has called for legislative action to “dismantle systemic racism” and advance equity across housing, education, and public health ([City of Austin Intergovernmental Relations Office, n.d.-a](#); [City of Austin Intergovernmental Relations Office, n.d.-b](#)). San Antonio Independent School District supported “allowing transgender students to work with their campus administration to determine which bathroom the students should use” ([San Antonio Independent School District, 2019, p. 6](#)).

These positions align closely with the subject-matter categories and bill-level opposition patterns identified in the quantitative results, in which taxpayer-funded lobbyists frequently testified on bills implicating political subdivisions, education, and weapons. This helps to demonstrate that TFL is frequently deployed in pursuit of normative and progressive policy objectives, not merely the operational concerns traditionally associated with intergovernmental affairs.

That being said, city, county, and school district agendas also consistently emphasize resistance to fiscal and regulatory constraints imposed by the state. The Cities of Houston, Austin, and San Antonio explicitly oppose legislation limiting municipal revenue authority, expenditure growth, or regulatory discretion, while the City of Dallas expanded local control over land-use, zoning, and election administration ([Quintero & Welton, 2023](#); [Quintero & Xu, 2024](#)). Taken together, these agendas suggest that TFL operates as a coordinated strategy through which local governments seek to preserve or expand their taxing authority, regulatory scope, and local control.

Viewed alongside the empirical findings, legislative agendas reinforce a central claim of this study: taxpayer-funded lobbying in Texas is neither incidental nor ideologically neutral. Rather, it represents a systematic effort by local governments to use public funds to advocate for a progressive policy agenda across fiscal and social domains.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis reveals a pervasive and growing presence of TFL in Texas politics. Publicly funded advocates now account for roughly 1 in 6 lobbying dollars<sup>1</sup> and engage consistently on issues that implicate the powers and prerogatives of local governments, often in direct opposition to legislative proposals aimed at limiting taxes, expenditures, or local regulatory authority. The evidence shows that taxpayer-funded lobbying efforts have been especially concentrated against bills dealing with property tax reform, local regulatory preemption, education finance and parental choice, and even legislation intended to restrict the practice of taxpayer-funded lobbying itself. In these respects, the empirical patterns align closely with critiques raised by opponents of the practice: government entities have utilized tax dollars to protect and expand their own authority, frequently at odds with policies championed as taxpayer interests.

This study's findings carry several implications for ongoing policy debates. First, the magnitude of taxpayer-funded lobbying expenditures, potentially exceeding \$100 million in the most recent legislative session, underscores the stake that government entities have in the legislative process and the potential budgetary savings that would result if such practices were curtailed. Second, the alignment of lobbying opposition with certain policy domains (e.g., revenue caps, spending limits, and governance reforms) suggests that taxpayer-funded lobbying

may indeed serve as a vehicle for local officials to resist state-level fiscal and administrative constraints. These insights bolster the case made by reform advocates that taxpayer-funded lobbying can distort policy outcomes and warrant legislative intervention.

Not surprisingly, momentum for reform in Texas has grown. Numerous bills to ban or limit taxpayer-funded lobbying have been introduced in recent sessions, some advancing far in the legislative process—none ultimately pass—while garnering broad support. Although to date, these measures have fallen short of enactment, public sentiment appears to strongly favor change: in a recent statewide survey, more than four out of five voters expressed opposition to the use of tax dollars for lobbying (Phillips, 2025). In light of such consensus, proposals to prohibit political subdivisions from hiring lobbyists or paying associations that lobby on their behalf continue to gain traction. Policymakers have emphasized that banning taxpayer-funded lobbying would not bar local officials from petitioning the state on their own behalf, but would simply stem the flow of public money to professional influence-peddlers. As Thomas Jefferson once wrote, “to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of ideas which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical” (1779).

To that end, legislators in the 90th legislative session should consider adopting policies that seek to end the practice of taxpayer-funded lobbying and restore the principle of citizen-driven government, rather than a government-driven citizenry. Future research could expand on these findings by comparing public opinion to taxpayer-funded lobbying. This could be done through district-specific polling on the most actively lobbied issues by political subdivisions. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Total lobbying: minimum total lobbying: \$312,397,055 (\$42,272,740 taxpayer + \$270,124,315 private); maximum total lobbying: \$735,202,127 (\$111,549,580 taxpayer + \$623,652,547 private). Range width: \$422,805,072. Share of Total Lobbying, at the minimum estimate: Taxpayer-funded: \$42,272,740 ⇒ 13.5% of total. Privately funded: \$270,124,315 ⇒ 86.5% of total; at the maximum estimate: Taxpayer-funded: \$111,549,580 ⇒ 15.2% of total. Privately funded: \$623,652,547 ⇒ 84.8% of total.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ben Crockett** is a Policy Scholar at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, where he combines data-driven research with accessible commentary to advance liberty, opportunity, and free enterprise.

Crockett's commitment to civic life began early through his involvement in Junior Statesmen of America and Texas Boys State. A proud member of the Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 2025, he earned a B.A. in Political Science from Texas A&M University. During his time at A&M, he served as a Bush School Ambassador and on the Executive Council of the American Enterprise Institute's collegiate chapter. His team earned top honors for Best Policy Paper at the Student Conference on National Affairs. Within the Student Government Association, Crockett rose from Vice President for Municipal Affairs to Chief of Policy, where he led policy analyses that contributed to four bills filed in the 89th Texas Legislature.

In 2024, the City of College Station recognized Crockett for his outstanding service and commitment to respectful civic discourse. In that same spirit, he founded 451 Now, a public-affairs book review podcast, where he has interviewed leading thinkers and public figures including former U.S. Senator Phil Gramm, George Will, and Dennis Prager.

His writing and commentary have appeared in regional and national publications, including *The Dallas Morning News* and *The Federalist*, and his work has been cited by outlets such as *Chron.com* and *The Bryan-College Station Eagle*. He has also served as a member of the Bush School Youth Leadership Program Advisory Board and as a contributor with Young Voices.

