

Texas attorney general opens investigation of Twitter bots

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Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said he opened an investigation of Twitter, claiming the social media platform may be misleading people with false reporting of its bot accounts, violating the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act.

The Republican attorney general announced the probe the same day

Twitter would-be buyer, billionaire Elon Musk, threatened to pull out of his deal to purchase the [company](#), saying it wasn't meeting his demands for more information about spam and fake accounts.

In regulatory filings Twitter reported fewer than 5% of all users are [bots](#), while they may make up as much as 20%, Paxton said in a press release.

Twitter declined to comment on the probe.

Paxton's investigation requires Twitter to turn over documents related to how the company calculates and manages its [user data](#) and how the data relates to its advertising businesses. The company has until June 27 to respond.

Musk's bot demands are raising suspicions among analysts that he is using it as a negotiation tactic to lower the price or to walk away from the deal altogether. "We believe the announcement could lead to negotiations on price to avoid a big court fight," Mandeep Singh, a Bloomberg Intelligence analyst, wrote in a note.

Paxton's move follows a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that blocked enforcement of a Texas law restricting [social media platforms](#) with more than 50 million users from moderating their content. Critics said the law would require companies such as Twitter and Facebook to allow [hate speech](#) and extremism.

Musk moved to Texas in 2020, followed by Tesla, SpaceX and The Boring Company. Since his move, he has been cozying up to the Republican party. In May, he tweeted he'd vote Republican.

Lone Star state Republicans have been expressing their support of Musk buying Twitter on the platform.

Governor Gregg Abbot wrote "@elonmusk. Bring Twitter to Texas to join Tesla, SpaceX & the Boring company."

Since Musk announced he was interested in buying Twitter he has spoken out about how he would focus on increasing [free speech](#) on the platform, including restoring former president Donald Trump's access. Twitter banned Trump following the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, saying it was doing so "due to the risk of further incitement of violence."

But Musk has also complained the number of bots on Twitter is likely higher than the company states in its regulatory filings and has pressed for more information.

Bots are automated accounts that can send out tweets, follow other users and like and retweet postings. Spam bots can be used to engage in potentially deceptive, harmful or annoying activity. They could also be used to drive traffic to a website for a product or service or to spread misinformation and promote political messages.

According to Twitter's policy, bots are allowed as long as the accounts indicate that they're automated. Spam bots are not permitted and users are encouraged to report policy violations.

There are bots on Twitter that, for example, automatically post when an earthquake occurs. But one bot, created by a 19-year-old in Florida has irked Musk in particular, by automatically tracking the movements of Musk's private plane.

The teenager, Jack Sweeney, rose to online fame for turning down \$5,000 from the Tesla CEO to shut down the bot, with Musk citing privacy concerns.

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