

Anti-vaccine efforts in Texas Legislature—successful or not—set dangerous tone, says expert

October 5 2022, by Avery Ruxer Franklin



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Anti-vaccine legislation in Texas—even when it doesn't become law—poses a threat to public health, according to a [report](#) from Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

"One of the goals of the anti-vaccine movement is to marginalize discussions about the benefits of vaccination," wrote Kristin Matthews, a fellow in science and technology [policy](#) and lead author of the report, and co-author Rekha Lakshmanan, a contributing expert at the Baker Institute's Center for Health and Biosciences and chief strategic officer at The Immunization Partnership.

"Their view is that any discussion about vaccines—whether it's about creating new access points to get vaccinated or the advantages of immunization—is coercive and therefore should be curtailed, penalized or even outlawed," they continued.

Texas lawmakers introduced more than 100 vaccine-related bills in 2021, over 60% of which proposed diluting or eliminating pro-vaccine policies—more anti-vaccine legislation than was introduced combined in the years since nonmedical exemptions became available in the state in 2003. Legislators' aims included limiting the scope of policies set by [health care professionals](#) and employers and removing school vaccine requirements.

Simply the act of introducing an anti-vaccination [bill](#) increases skepticism and hesitancy and erodes trust in science, scientists and [government institutions](#), the report argues. Such resistance can lead to vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, creating ripple effects throughout the [public health](#) ecosystem.

"Bills that move through the legislative process, regardless of whether they are passed into law, legitimize anti-vaccination beliefs and rhetoric and undermine science," the authors wrote. "Even more concerning is the fact that legislators, in attempts to be perceived as balanced, have given anti-vaccine bills a platform through committee hearings. Lawmakers have felt compelled to give 'both sides' a say, which leaves a false impression that both sides are equal and legitimizes anti-science

policies. This also allows testimony that uses questionable, misleading or factually incorrect data to be presented as fact."

Texas' 2023 legislative session is expected to be similar to 2021 because anti-vaccination bills that did not pass last time are likely to be refiled, according to the [report](#).

"How vaccine policies are handled here could have spillover effects into other states," the authors wrote.

Provided by Rice University

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