

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given the state's balanced budget requirement, contemporary economic recessions inevitably impact state legislative sessions in Texas. But how do such sessions compare to fiscally stable sessions? To help answer this question, we examine the contexts, legislative priorities, and committee behaviors of state legislative sessions before and after two contemporary economic recessions: the 2008 Great Recession and the COVID-19 Recession.

State legislators in Texas face a key constitutional ceiling; state legislative sessions in Texas only occur in odd-number years for a total of 140 days. By summarizing the major legislation passed in the 80th (2007), 81st (2009), 82nd (2011), 86th (2019), and 87th (2021) legislative sessions, we find that legislative sessions are indeed unique regarding bills passed related to economic development, criminal justice, education, families, government affairs, health, transportation, and tax revenues. However, the sessions in 2009 and 2021 bear similar approaches nested in spending cutbacks, economic incentives, and providing tax exemptions. We also found that agriculture and natural resource committees were the most effective during recession-related sessions. Moreover, we find that in such sessions, Texas state legislators file an above-average total number of bills, adding to the challenge of the 140-day session limit.

By virtue of population growth and exhibiting an energy-heavy economy, the state needed modest support from the Texas Legislature throughout the Great Recession. The state legislatures of California and Nevada, which meet annually and biennially, respectively, responded to the COVID-19 recession swiftly. The first U.S. state legislature to act, the California Legislature appropriated over \$1 billion towards preventing the transmission of and deaths from COVID-19. In Nevada, Governor Sisolak called two special sessions in 2020 where legislators focused on adapting revenue/spending and aiding state employees and school districts. Texas Governor Abbott has the power to call a special session during an even-numbered year, yet relied on administrative procedures allowed by existing Texas statute.

In our empirical analysis, we examine the effectiveness of legislative committees in recent Texas Legislatures. Controlling for appropriate variables, we find strong support for our hypothesis: committees in sessions related to a recession bear less legislative effectiveness. Given that more bills are typically filed in a session associated with an economic recession, this finding provides the impetus for the closer study of the influence of the 140-day constitutional limit of regular sessions, as well as the quality of bills filed in recession-related sessions.