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# When Politics Is Not Pivotal: Supermajority Debate Rules in State Legislatures

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## ABSTRACT

The 60-vote end-debate threshold is a key institution in the United States Senate. Most winning coalitions require 60 votes, effectively giving veto power to a minority of senators. But do supermajority debate rules necessarily translate into minority veto power? We examine this in state legislatures, where there is far more variation in whether chamber rules require a majority or a supermajority of legislators to cut off debate. Across multiple analyses and data sources, we fail to find systematic evidence that supermajority debate rules are associated with several outcome variables, including the size of bill passage coalitions, news coverage of obstruction, and the success of major proposals. The lack of evidence indicates that, in many cases, debate rules do not translate into legislative “pivots” and that case-specific knowledge is necessary for understanding the influence of legislative rules.

In 2023, the political world was briefly transfixed by a filibuster in the South Carolina Senate. A small group of Republicans, mostly women, joined with Democrats to vote down various attempts to end debate on a series of anti-abortion bills. Similar to the U.S. Senate, the South Carolina Senate requires three-fifths of senators to agree to end debate on legislation. Although a six-week abortion ban eventually passed the legislature, the supermajority debate rule helped derail a near total ban on the procedure (Pollard 2023a, 2023b). In other words, the presence of supermajority rules resulted in the blocking of policy proposals opposed by a minority of legislators, and a policy change that was more moderate than that preferred by a majority of the chamber and which passed with the support of a supermajority coalition.

The South Carolina episode exemplifies the expectations of Krehbiel's (1998) pivotal politics model about the consequences of rules that enable minority obstruction and influence. A minority of senators will be able to demand changes, or else block policy proposals because their votes are needed to surpass a supermajority threshold needed to end debate. It also reflects

the expectations of a host of scholarship documenting the rise and expanded use of filibustering in the contemporary U.S. Senate (Binder and Smith 2001; Curry and Lee 2022; Howard and Roberts 2015; Mann and Ornstein 2016; Sinclair 2014; Smith 2014, 2022; Wirls 2021). The “60-vote Senate” contributes significantly to gridlock (Binder 2004), frustrating the legislative efforts of elected majorities (Curry and Lee 2020), and contributing to a tyranny of the minority (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023). Many Democrats and their allies called for the filibuster's elimination after the 2020 elections, as they feared it would make it impossible to advance their policy agenda.<sup>1</sup> During his first term in office, Donald Trump similarly called for an end to the Senate filibuster to hasten the enactment of his agenda (Becket 2017).

The idea that supermajority debate rules and filibustering can be just as consequential in state legislatures as in the U.S. Senate has been on the minds of journalists who have compared and contrasted the rules in the Senate and those in state legislatures, with article headlines such as, “In many state legislatures, it wouldn't take much to make Ted Cruz stop talking” (Chokshi 2013). Political organizations and advocacy groups

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have also weighed in. For example, a report from Represent US (Joseph 2021) asks “Is Your State as Gridlocked as the U.S. Senate?” Scholars have taken note of these trends, beginning to apply the logic of pivotal politics to estimate gridlock intervals in the states (Boehmke et al. 2015; Birkhead et al. 2025).

While it is tempting to assume that the logic of Senate filibustering will apply to state legislative politics, there are reasons to be cautious. For one, congressional scholarship is to some degree mixed on the effects of the Senate’s supermajority debate rule. Some expect that Krehbiel (1998) model is time-bound, as both the norms and the strategic calculus for filibustering have shifted throughout American history (David R. Mayhew 2003; Koger 2010; Wawro and Schickler 2007). Prior to the 1970s, majorities would prevail on most issues, despite similar filibustering rules. Since the mid-1970s, we have observed dramatic changes in the use of the filibuster, but the rules have not been substantially altered. Indeed, it is only recently that the filibuster has appeared to function as a de facto supermajority rule, and even then, the filibuster may not be the biggest impediment to majoritarian action in Washington, D.C. (Curry and Lee 2022).

Moreover, we can readily observe examples where supermajority debate rules in state legislatures do not translate into the kind of minority obstructionism we frequently see in the U.S. Senate. The New Jersey General Assembly requires three-fourths of members to agree to end debate—a threshold even higher than that found in the U.S. Senate—and yet we find no evidence of minority obstruction in that state.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the Utah Senate, there is no motion to end debate, creating a de facto consensus rule to end debate. And yet, over the past decade, there have been zero filibusters mounted by the minority Democrats in that legislature.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, we turn to the states to investigate the degree to which supermajority debate rules create supermajority pivots in legislative bodies. We leverage the fact that state legislatures vary in the thresholds required to end debate in their chambers. Some require only that a simple majority agree to end debate, while others require three-fifths, two-thirds, three-fourths, or even unanimous agreement. We assess if supermajority thresholds are associated with three outcomes: (1) larger legislative coalition sizes, (2) greater news coverage of supermajoritarian politics in a state legislature, and (3) more gridlock or larger final passage coalitions on major gubernatorial policy proposals. Consistent with existing scholarship, if supermajority rules consistently translate into supermajority pivots, then we should expect them to influence these outcomes systematically. Whenever possible, we use data from the U.S. Congress and from supermajority rules for tax increases in state legislatures to develop clear expectations about how supermajority debate rules should affect outcomes if they are acting as pivots (Rainey 2014).

We find that there is no consistent or predictable relationship between the debate rules in state legislatures and the patterns in these outcomes. While some states, such as South Carolina, have supermajority debate rules that sometimes translate into the kind of pivotal politics scholars expect, we do not observe any systematic relationship between these rules and legislative outcomes as we do in the U.S. Senate. Accordingly, we caution against empirical approaches that “stretch” our understanding

of the contemporary U.S. Senate supermajority debate rule to state legislatures or to legislative institutions elsewhere. Such generalization should only follow from developing appropriate case-specific knowledge about how institutions and politics in different places and time actually operate (Sartori 1970).

## 1 | Supermajority Rules and Legislative Obstruction

Revived after 50 years of dormancy (Burdette 1940), the contemporary scholarship on minority obstruction and influence has mostly considered the nature and persistence of the U.S. Senate filibuster (Binder and Smith 2001; Wawro and Schickler 2007) and its consequences for policymaking and representation (Wirls 2021). Krehbiel (1998) provides much of the theoretical heft underlying contemporary expectations about the effect of the filibuster. In this pivotal politics view, supermajority end of debate requirements—like that which enables the U.S. Senate filibuster—have two consequences for legislative policymaking. First, because such rules require a supermajority of legislators to prefer a proposal to the status quo, they typically increase the size of the gridlock interval—the policy space within which any proposal will be blocked by one or more veto players—relative to what it would be under majority rules.<sup>4</sup> In other words, supermajority requirements lead to more gridlock and obstruction because a minority of legislators can block the advancement of legislative proposals. Second, by the same logic, the legislative proposals that are able to pass will typically garner support from larger roll-call coalitions than would be the case under majority rules. Again, because the support of more legislators is needed to advance legislation to a vote, final passage coalitions are expected to be larger.

This logic underscores the now common view that the filibuster has become locked into the way of doing business in the U.S. Senate (Sinclair 2014; Smith 2014) to the point where 60 votes can be treated as an exogenous threshold for enacting legislation (Ryan 2020). Scholars have begun to apply this same logic to the states (Boehmke et al. 2015; Birkhead et al. 2025). While this is, more or less, an accurate characterization of how the filibuster works in the modern U.S. Senate, its functioning as an effective veto point was not inevitable, nor is it obvious that this logic should apply beyond this case. As Squire and Hamm (2005, 2) note, scholars should be careful to “... to identify organizational structures and rules that do and do not lend themselves to comparative analyses” between Congress and the state’s legislatures. Understanding the interaction between legislative rules and context is vital to making sense of the politics of any legislature. To these ends, there are several reasons to suspect the relationship between supermajority debate rules and legislative outcomes is not as straightforward as it seems.

One reason is the important consideration of time as a political resource as it relates to legislating and obstruction (Oppenheimer 1985). Koger’s (2010) analysis of why the filibuster has become an institutionalized part the legislative process in the U.S. Senate emphasizes time as a finite resource for both the majority and minority parties. Both sides face opportunity costs when there is a threat of a filibuster, because when obstruction occurs, time that could be spent on other things is

wasted. Ultimately, Koger claims that compared to the increased scarcity of time, the “formal cloture rule and the threshold for imposing cloture have relatively little effect” on patterns of obstruction (2010, 7). Scholars of state politics have recognized the importance of time as well, although not in the context of supermajority rules (Kousser and Phillips 2012). The ways time and supermajority rules interact in the various state legislatures may differ from how they do in the U.S. Senate. On one hand, most state legislatures have session lengths that are set by statute, or in state constitutions, after which they must agree to adjourn sine die. With often only a few months (or less) to accomplish all of their legislative business, the ability to block or slow the consideration of important legislation can be a powerful tool for legislative minorities. On the other hand, the short timeline state legislatures have to accomplish necessary and crucial business, like enacting the state’s budget, may create pressure on members of the majority and minority to find agreement, and avoid obstructionism. In either case, we should not assume the unconditional logic of the modern U.S. Senate filibuster applies.

Another reason we should look beyond rules is the role of norms in structuring the behavior of political actors (Azari and Smith 2012). While political scientists often present legislators as strategic, utility-maximizing actors (Krehbiel 1986), there are limits to a purely strategic perspective. Norms also matter in legislative settings, particularly regarding which behaviors are acceptable for members of a legislative body to engage in, and which are not (Matthews 1959; Alexander 2021; Fong 2023; Hanges et al. 2019). Few scholarly works have grappled with the relationship between obstruction and norms, likely because norms are difficult to conceptualize and do not lend themselves to tractable empirical studies. Still, scholars of the U.S. Senate have recognized that filibustering norms have changed over time and are a crucial part of the story of the rise of the 60-vote Senate (Mann and Ornstein 2016; Fu and Howell 2023; Wawro and Schickler 2007). From state to state, it may very well be the case that norms around filibustering and obstruction are radically different. In some states, legislators and parties may be expected to make maximum use of the procedures at their disposal to advance or block legislation, while in other states such aggressive behavior may be seen as beyond the pale. For example, the norm in Missouri is for the majority to negotiate with an obstructing minority rather than use available rules to cut off debate by a simple majority vote.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another reason end-of-debate rules, alone, may not explain patterns of legislative outcomes is that there are many other forces at play in legislative politics. Curry and Lee (2020, 2022), for instance, find that large final passage coalitions and the majority party’s failures to pass its agenda items in Washington, D.C. stem from various aspects of the policymaking structure beyond the filibuster—including the bicameral design of Congress and the separation of powers between the branches—as well as from persistent policy disagreement within both parties. Others find that congressional parties have political incentives to build bipartisan support for their policies irrespective of institutional structures, including individual legislators’ desires to pass policies and claim credit (Mayhew 2004, 2005; Harbridge-Yong et al. 2023), and both parties’ desire to distribute blame for unpopular actions across the parties (Balla et al. 2002). Minority parties, for their part, are not just single-minded seekers of

majority status, but also have policy goals that they seek to work with the majority to enact (Ballard and Curry 2021). All of these forces—both institutional and otherwise—exist in the states as well as in Washington, D.C. (Ballard et al. 2025; Clark 2015; Oldham 2024). They may generally outweigh the role of end-of-debate rules in structuring the legislative outcomes of interest.

Finally, rules may not explain patterns of obstruction or final passage coalitions because there is a great deal of variation in the particulars of debate rules and how they operate, both over time and from legislature to legislature. Simply put, we should not assume that debate rules in state legislatures operate similarly to those in the modern U.S. Senate. As Grossman (2014) notes, state filibustering is often misunderstood by national media observers and not comparable to the U.S. Senate filibuster. In many states, filibusters “pose a much lesser threat to efficient legislative decision-making than the Senate filibuster” because state filibusters “resemble the lauded Senate filibuster of the old—one cabined by time and human constraints and not ubiquitous in the legislative process” (416). In other states, the rules may be more similar to those in the contemporary U.S. Senate. In either case, a one-size-fits-all assumption is hardly warranted.

For all of these reasons, debate rules require more analysis. We simply cannot assume the logic of the modern 60-vote Senate applies to other legislatures or to other periods of time. Nor should we be so confident that the rules alone explain patterns of obstruction, even in the contemporary, hyper-partisan era. We need to take a closer look.

## 2 | Determining State Legislative Debate Rules

To take stock of any relationships between debate rules and legislative outcomes, we first need data on the relevant debate rules in each state legislative chamber. Specifically, we need to know if there are rules in each chamber that allow legislators to prolong floor debate—and thus could either block or delay the passage of legislation. In the U.S. Senate, these are the processes centered around Rule 22 that govern cloture. Since the 1970s, these rules have required that three-fifths of all elected senators agree to invoke cloture and place a limit on debate. In the absence of cloture, any senator may continue to speak on any debatable motion unless the body unanimously agrees to move forward. In the U.S. House, a majority of members can vote to order the previous question, which ends debate on the question before the body and brings it to a direct vote.

In state legislatures, debate rules include motions to call the previous question, end or limit debate, or invoke cloture, just like the U.S. Senate and U.S. House. As we show below, the details of these rules vary considerably both across and within the 50 state legislatures. However, in some state legislatures, formal motions aside from these, as well as unwritten rules and precedents, can also potentially give legislative minorities influence. These possibilities do not factor into our approach in this paper though as our goal is to conduct an analysis that assumes state legislative debate rules function like the U.S. Senate’s Rule 22 or the U.S. House’s previous question motion. We are consciously not accounting for every possible way that

a legislative minority could influence lawmaking in the state legislatures because we aim to show the limits of an approach that assumes debate rules work a certain way. A more comprehensive examination of the rules that does not make this assumption would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to implement for a 50 state legislature study given the immense knowledge and understanding scholars would need to develop for each state legislative chamber and the inherent difficulty of comparing complex institutions (Squire and Hamm 2005). Most notably, it would require a keen understanding of how legislature-specific norms affect the use of formal rules in each state (as they do with the U.S. Senate filibuster). Our results ultimately suggest that in-depth studies like these are necessary for scholars to develop systematic insights into the causes of legislative obstruction and minority influence (although conducting such studies is not our goal in this paper).

We determined the threshold for closing off debate in all 99 state legislative chambers by reading the official rules from legislative sessions. Most of the rules came from a 2017 to 2019 collection gathered by the political scientist Matthew Green; we gathered all remaining rules by searching state legislative websites and, if necessary, contacting the relevant offices in state capitols.<sup>6</sup> Most state legislative rules clearly state whether the chamber required a simple majority or a supermajority of members to either call the previous question or otherwise end debate. Altogether, 57 of the 99 chambers had rules that unambiguously noted that a simple majority could cut off debate. Another 15 chambers did not specify any means of ending debate. However, the rules for many of these chambers referenced Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure, which allows a simple majority to end debate. These chambers were coded as having majority debate rules. A small number of states did not have any information in their rules about ending debate. We determined these chambers also function under a majority rule. Altogether then, 72 of the 99 chambers end debate with a simple majority. The remaining 27 had a supermajority debate rule of some kind—14 state houses and 13 state senates. The debate thresholds in each state legislative chamber (along with the reference to the specific rule) are found in Tables A1 and A2. A summary of the rules is provided in Table 1.

Of the 27 chambers with supermajority debate rules, 14 come from legislatures where both chambers have supermajority rules, 12 come from legislatures where only one chamber has a supermajority rule, and one is a unicameral legislature (Nebraska). Five chambers use a 3/5 rule, 18 chambers use a 2/3 rule, two chambers use a 3/4 rule, and two chambers explicitly prohibit a previous question motion, which is effectively a consensus rule (on paper at least).

We take a broad view of what counts as a supermajority debate rule. In some chambers, the answer is not straightforward. A number of idiosyncrasies exist: (1) Sometimes there are different thresholds for previous question motions and motions to end debate;<sup>7</sup> (2) Sometimes a majority cannot end debate but can put time limits on it;<sup>8</sup> (3) Sometimes, supermajority thresholds only apply when a member holds the floor and is speaking;<sup>9</sup> (4) Sometimes, supermajority debate rules only apply in the Committee of the Whole.<sup>10</sup> If there is any supermajority threshold in the debate rules, then we use that threshold under the

assumption that minorities have some way to exploit these rules and make it more costly for the majorities to pass legislation, creating the possibility for influence.

### 3 | Supermajority Debate Rules and Coalition Sizes

To determine whether supermajority debate rules act as supermajority pivots in state legislative chambers, we first test for any relationship between the rules and final passage coalition sizes. If rules setting higher debate thresholds create supermajority pivots, they should be associated with larger coalitions for bill passage relative to chambers with simple majority debate rules, at least on average.

We examine coalition sizes on bill passage roll call votes for 46 states in the years 2017–2020.<sup>11</sup> We have nearly 130,000 bill passage votes in this period. From an original universe of more than 512,000 votes on a wide variety of motions (e.g., amendments, parliamentary rulings, previous questions, etc.), we first narrowed the data to all votes that passed (i.e., votes where yeas exceeded nays) and where at least 70% of members cast a vote. We then further narrowed the data to all votes on bill passage, concurrence with amendments proposed by the other chamber, and reports by conference committees. We excluded votes on resolutions and constitutional amendments, keeping our focus on bills only. We also excluded bill passage votes subject to other supermajority thresholds, for example, suspension of the rules votes (which often require 2/3rds votes to pass) and consent calendar votes (which often require unanimous consent), as we are interested in how supermajority rules to end debate affect the size of legislative coalitions that only require a simple majority for passage.<sup>12</sup> Nearly 38,000 of the votes in our dataset, or 29%, were in chambers with supermajority debate rules.

If supermajority debate rules create pivots in state legislatures, then the chambers with these rules should have larger coalitions on bill passage votes, on average. However, to develop tractable insights from our data, we need a point of comparison grounded in the literature (Rainey 2014). More precisely, to examine whether supermajority debate rules are associated with larger coalition sizes, we need to develop an ex ante sense of what constitutes a “substantively meaningful” change in coalition size using “particular, well-known cases” (Rainey 2014, 1087). To do this, we first compare our state bill passage data with similar roll call data from Congress as the U.S. Senate has a supermajority debate rule that undoubtedly functions as a supermajority pivot (Lewis et al. 2025). We then compare our data with a new dataset on coalition sizes for tax increase bills in state legislatures, some of which are subject to supermajority rules, and for which evidence already exists that coalitions are affected by these rules (Oldham 2024). Together, these analyses allow us to compare the effect of state legislative supermajority debate rules that potentially act as pivots with the effect of supermajority rules that we already know act as pivots.

In both analyses, we use OLS regression to test the relationship between state legislative supermajority debate rules and

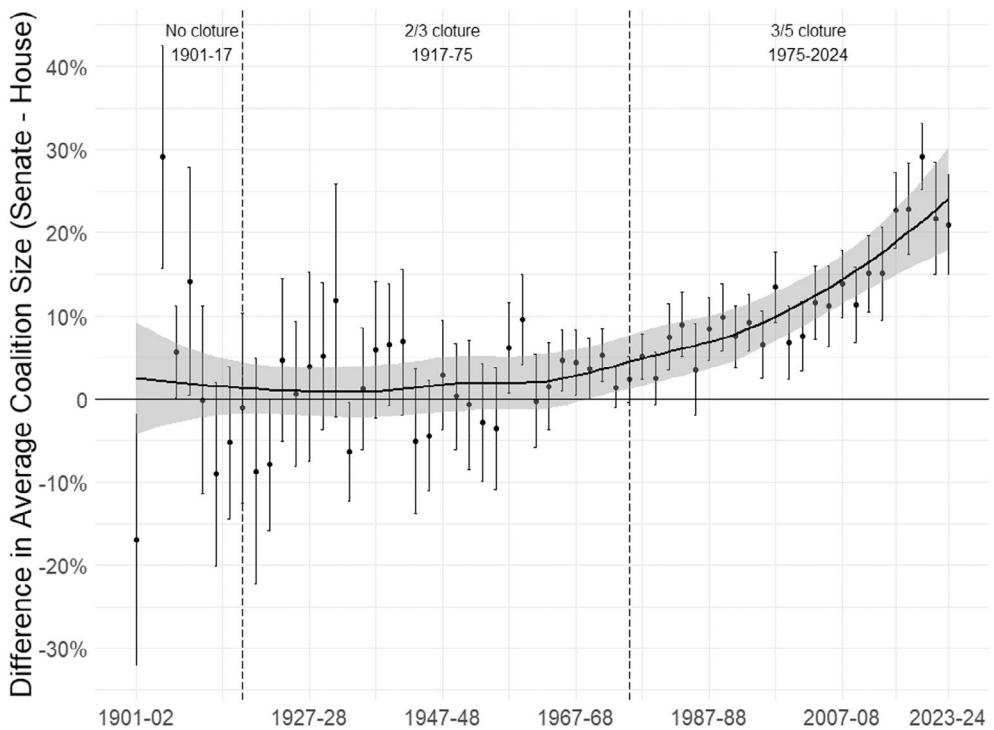
**TABLE 1** | Summary of end-of-debate thresholds across states.

State	House	Senate	State	House	Senate
Alabama	Three-fifth	Three-fifth	Montana	Two-third	Majority
Alaska	Two-third	Two-third	Nebraska	N/A	Two-third
Arizona	Majority	Majority	Nevada	Majority	Majority
Arkansas	Two-third	Two-third	New Hampshire	Majority	Majority
California	Majority	Majority	New Jersey	Three-fourth	Majority
Colorado	Majority	Majority	New Mexico	Two-third	Majority
Connecticut	Majority	Majority	New York	Majority	Majority
Delaware	Majority	Majority	North Carolina	Majority	Majority
Florida	Majority	Two-third	North Dakota	Majority	Majority
Georgia	Majority	Majority	Ohio	Majority	Majority
Hawaii	Majority	Three-fifth	Oklahoma	Majority	Majority
Idaho	Two-third	Two-third	Oregon	Majority	Majority
Illinois	Majority	Majority	Pennsylvania	Majority	Majority
Indiana	Majority	Majority	Rhode Island	Majority	Majority
Iowa	Majority	Majority	South Carolina	Majority	Three-fifth
Kansas	Majority	Majority	South Dakota	Majority	Majority
Kentucky	Majority	Majority	Tennessee	Two-third	Two-third
Louisiana	Majority	Two-third	Texas	Majority	Majority
Maine	Majority	Majority	Utah	Two-third	PQ not allowed
Maryland	Majority	Three-fifth	Vermont	Three-fourth	PQ not allowed
Massachusetts	Two-third	Majority	Virginia	Two-third	Majority
Michigan	Majority	Majority	Washington	Two-third	Majority
Minnesota	Majority	Majority	West Virginia	Majority	Majority
Mississippi	Majority	Majority	Wisconsin	Majority	Majority
Missouri	Majority	Majority	Wyoming	Two-third	Majority

coalition size. Again, our units of observation are all successful bill passage roll call votes where at least 70% of members cast a vote. Our dependent variable, *Coalition Size*, is measured as the percentage of “yea” votes out of all votes cast.<sup>13</sup> Our independent variable, *Supermajority Debate Rule*, is a binary variable for whether or not the legislative chamber where the vote occurred has a supermajority debate rule.<sup>14</sup> Controls include *Minority Party Size* measured as the minority party’s percentage of seats in the chamber (Shor and McCarty 2011), a binary variable for whether the state had *Unified Government* (Ballotpedia 2025), the level of *Polarization* in the chamber using Shor-McCarty scores (Shor and McCarty 2011), the *Professionalism* of the legislature using the 2021 Squire index (Squire 2024), a binary variable for whether the chamber a bill was considered in was a *State Senate*, and binary variables for the 2017–2018 and 2019–2020 *Legislative Periods*.<sup>15</sup> Standard errors are clustered at the state level in any model that includes data from multiple states.

### 3.1 | Comparison With the U.S. Congress

We first examine how state legislative supermajority debate rules compare to the U.S. Senate filibuster. We leverage the fact that 10 state legislatures for which we have roll call data are similar to Congress in that one chamber has a supermajority debate rule and the other does not.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there are two state legislatures—Utah and Vermont—where both chambers have supermajority debate rules, but one chamber’s supermajority threshold is higher than the other. With the data from these 12 states, we can conduct within-legislature analyses to examine whether, and by how much, coalition sizes change when moving from simple majority debate rule chambers to supermajority debate rule chambers (or from lower supermajority debate rule chambers to higher supermajority debate rule chambers in the cases of Utah and Vermont). Overall, there were more than 45,000 votes in these 12 legislatures, and roughly half of them (49.6%) were in chambers with supermajority debate rules.



**FIGURE 1** | Final passage coalition sizes in the U.S. senate versus U.S. house over time. The point estimate for each Congress and the LOESS trendline have 95% confidence intervals.

Following Rainey (2014), we establish our meaningful effects baseline for supermajority debate rules from Congress, estimating the change in average coalition size between the simple majority U.S. House and the supermajority U.S. Senate. From <http://voteview.com>, we obtained data on coalition sizes for U.S. House and U.S. Senate bill passage, concurrence, and conference report votes from 1901 to 2024 (Lewis et al. 2025). We calculated the average coalition size across these votes for both chambers in each Congress. From these data, displayed in Figure 1, we observe that average House and Senate coalition sizes on passage votes were similar from 1901 until the mid-1960s. At that point, the average Senate coalition size began to increase relative to the average House coalition size, consistent with the arguments by Koger (2010) and David R. Mayhew (2003) that the Senate filibuster did not become a de facto supermajority rule until the latter half of the 20th century. The estimates for each Congress and the LOESS line modeling the trend over time reveal that the difference in U.S. Senate and U.S. House coalition sizes became statistically distinct from zero around the 94th Congress (1975–76)<sup>17</sup> and has become larger in each Congress since. In the 2010s and 2020s, the Senate–House difference has regularly been greater than 20 percentage points.

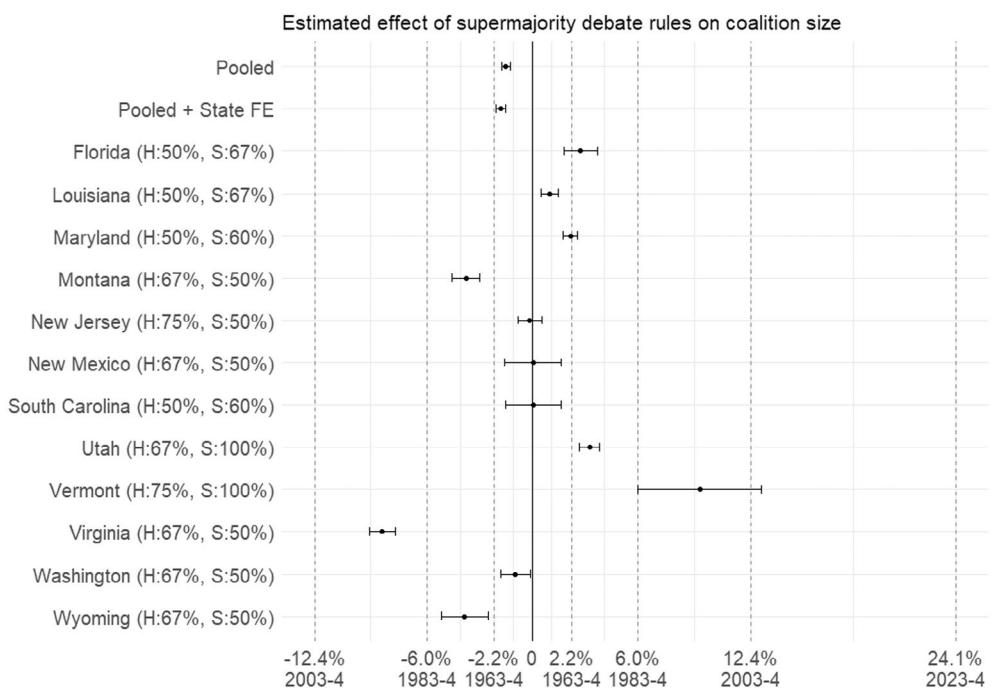
Figure 2 assesses how the differences between coalition sizes in the 12 state legislatures where chambers have varying debate thresholds compare to baselines from Congress. Specifically, Figure 2 shows the results of 14 OLS regression models, all of which estimate whether, and by how much, moving from a simple majority debate rule chamber to a supermajority debate rule chamber within a state (or from lower supermajority debate threshold chambers to higher supermajority debate threshold chambers for Utah and Vermont) affects coalition size.<sup>18</sup> It also

includes dashed lines that denote the difference between U.S. Senate and U.S. House average coalition sizes at several 20-year interval points in time: 1963–1964, 1983–1984, 2003–2004, and 2023–2024 from the LOESS trendline in Figure 1. These lines serve as benchmarks with which we can evaluate the results of the regression models. If the model estimates and their 95% confidence intervals match modern congressional baselines, we might conclude that supermajority debate rules have meaningful effects in the states. If those estimates are well below the congressional baselines, we might conclude their effects are negligible (see, Rainey 2014).

The two models at the top of Figure 2 include pooled data from the 12 state legislatures. The first model (Pooled) does not include state fixed effects, but the second model (Pooled + State FE) does. Both models include all of our control variables. The next 12 models are for individual states. Because the control variables frequently do not vary and are highly correlated with each other within state, we only include controls for *Legislative Period* in these models.

The results in Figure 2 tell a consistent story—state legislative supermajority debate rules have (at best) negligible effects on coalition sizes compared to the modern U.S. senate filibuster. The two pooled models show that when averaging across the 12 states, the estimated average effect is negative, which is the wrong direction, and minuscule. In fact, the magnitudes of the coefficients are lower than the U.S. Senate–U.S. House difference in 1963 to 644, before the filibuster began to function as a supermajority pivot (see, Figure 1).

The 12 state models reveal inter-state variation, but the same overall pattern of negligible results when compared to Congress.



**FIGURE 2** | The effect of supermajority debate rules on passage coalition size, relative to the U.S. congress. The dashed lines denote the average difference between U.S. Senate and U.S. House coalitions in select 2-year Congresses (see Figure 1). The point estimate for each model includes 95% confidence intervals. See Table A3 for the full model results.

Just five state models estimate positive and statistically significant effects (Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Utah, and Vermont), but only Vermont has an estimated effect that is greater than the U.S. Senate–U.S. House difference in the early 1980s, or plausibly as high as the difference in the early 2000s. Florida, Louisiana, and Maryland are all likely or plausibly below the difference in Congress in the early 1960s. Utah is likely above the difference in the early 1960s Congress but likely below the difference in the early 1980s Congress.

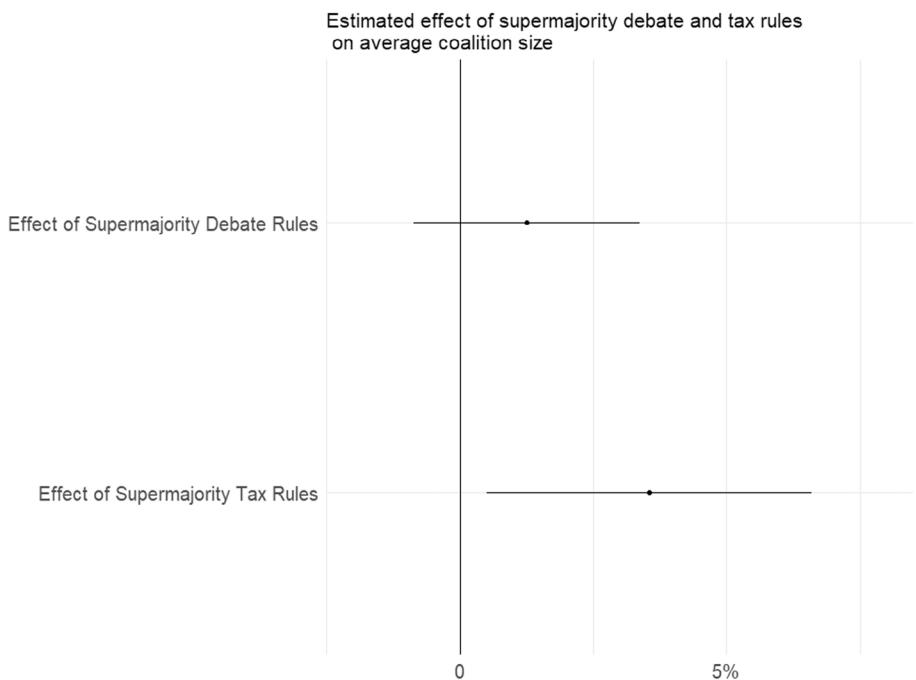
Altogether, looking within these 12 state legislatures that most closely resemble the Congress's debate rules, we do not observe the same kind of outcomes that we have become accustomed to in Washington, D.C. Simply put: the consistently larger final passage coalitions that have seemingly emerged in the U.S. Senate as a result of its supermajority requirements have not consistently emerged in the states. While there is some variation, we do not find any clear evidence that supermajority debate rules act consistently as pivots.

### 3.2 | Comparison With Supermajority Tax Rules

We next use roll call votes from all 46 states for which we have data to examine whether supermajority debate rules increase coalition sizes. For this analysis, the baseline for meaningful results comes from a similar analysis of supermajority tax rules. Tax increases are subject to supermajority rules in 15 state legislatures, meaning votes must reach a specific supermajority threshold to pass.<sup>19</sup> Unlike with end-of-debate rules, these supermajority tax rules do not require any norms or strategic conditions for members to treat them as pivots. They are pivots by design.

The data for roll call votes on tax increase legislation come from Oldham (2024). He identified 1051 relevant final passage votes across 48 states from 2001 to 2020. Of these, 235 votes, or 22%, were in states with supermajority rules. Using these data, we can compare across state legislative chambers to test whether coalition sizes are systematically larger in states with supermajority tax rules than in states without them. We can then compare the estimate from that analysis to a similar estimate for supermajority debate rules from the bill passage data across all 46 states for which we have roll call data. Similar to the models in the previous section, we regress *Coalition Size* on either *Supermajority Debate Rule* or *Supermajority Tax Rule*. We use the same controls but now add the *State Senate* variable to account for differences between lower and upper chambers.<sup>20</sup> Standard errors are clustered by state.

Figure 3 shows the results for the two analyses that suggest supermajority tax rules have a meaningful effect on coalition sizes, while supermajority debate rules do not.<sup>21</sup> According to the models, supermajority tax rules increase coalition sizes by 3.6 percentage points on average. This result is statistically significant as the 95% confidence interval is from 0.5 to 6.6 percentage points. The estimate for supermajority debate rules is 1.3 percentage points, which is not statistically significant as the 95% confidence interval is from -0.9 to 3.4 percentage points. While the supermajority tax rule estimate is statistically significant and the supermajority debate rule estimate is not, the confidence intervals overlap, and we cannot rule out the possibility that they are equivalent. We simulate 100,000 draws from normal distributions with the same means and standard errors as the model results. We find there is an 11.3% chance that the supermajority debate rule coefficient is larger than the supermajority tax rule coefficient. So,



**FIGURE 3** | Comparing the effects of supermajority tax rules and supermajority debate rules on coalition size. The point estimate for each model includes 95% confidence intervals. See Table A4 for the full model results.

while it is unlikely that supermajority debate rules have an equal or greater effect on coalition sizes than supermajority tax rules, it is not implausible.

The evidence presented in both this analysis and the Congress analysis does not support the contention that supermajority debate rules meaningfully increase roll call coalition sizes compared to the modern U.S. Senate filibuster and, potentially, supermajority rules for tax increases. These findings cast doubt on there being a predictable and consistent relationship between supermajority debate rules and coalition building. In the next sections, we conduct additional analyses to further test whether debate rules impact media coverage of supermajoritarian politics in legislatures and the passage of major legislative proposals.

#### 4 | News Coverage of Supermajoritarian Politics

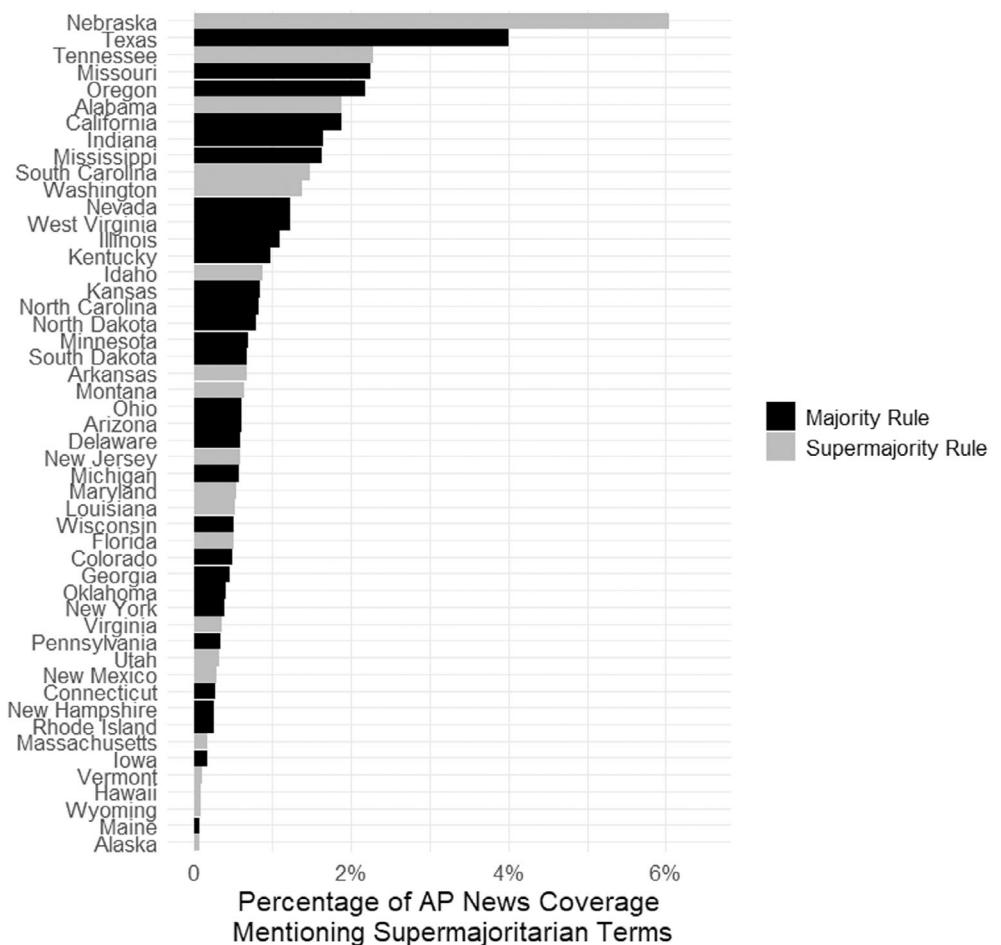
We next take stock of whether state legislatures with supermajority debate rules have greater levels of observable supermajoritarian politics similar to what we see in the U.S. Senate. We turn to news coverage as the best possible source to gain this insight. Like with the U.S. Senate, there is no definitive public record of when filibusters or other efforts to block legislation have occurred in the states. Congressional scholars have typically turned to either news coverage or *The Congressional Record* as they are often the best and most consistent data sources available (Beth 1994; Binder and Smith 2001; Koger 2010). Since state legislatures do not keep detailed records akin to *The Congressional Record*, news coverage is our best option.

This approach is far from perfect. Journalists are not going to be aware of every effort to filibuster or block action in a state

legislature, and even when they are, they are unlikely to always write about it. However, it is more plausible to expect that in states where filibustering is more common, it is more likely to be covered in the news compared to states where state legislative filibustering is rare or nonexistent. Moreover, while state legislatures receive less news coverage than the U.S. Congress, there remains ample news coverage of all 50 state capitals.

In order to rely on a consistent source of news across states, we examine *Associated Press* (AP) coverage of all 50 state legislatures from 2011 to 2024.<sup>22</sup> The AP is the only news source that has provided consistent coverage of every state legislature for multiple years, and, as a national organization, its reporters and editors are likely to use consistent language to describe supermajoritarian politics. Moreover, each state has its own AP wire, meaning there is consistent and dedicated coverage through the AP reporters focused on each state. Using News Bank, we searched each state's *Associated Press State Wire* database to find all articles that mentioned the state legislature generally, and all articles that mentioned the state house and the state senate specifically. We then ran the same searches again, but this time only queried for articles that included terms associated with supermajoritarian politics: "filibuster", "supermajority", "end debate", and "cloture".<sup>23</sup> These searches allowed us to measure the AP's coverage of supermajoritarian politics as a percentage of its overall coverage of each chamber (as well as the entire legislature) in each year. We call this measure *AP Supermajority Coverage*. The Data S1 includes more details on our news search methodology.

Figure 4 shows, for each state, the percentage of AP state legislative articles that mentioned at least one of the supermajoritarian terms across the time period. Unsurprisingly, Nebraska, a supermajoritarian state legislature well known for filibustering, had the most coverage, with 6% of AP articles about the legislature

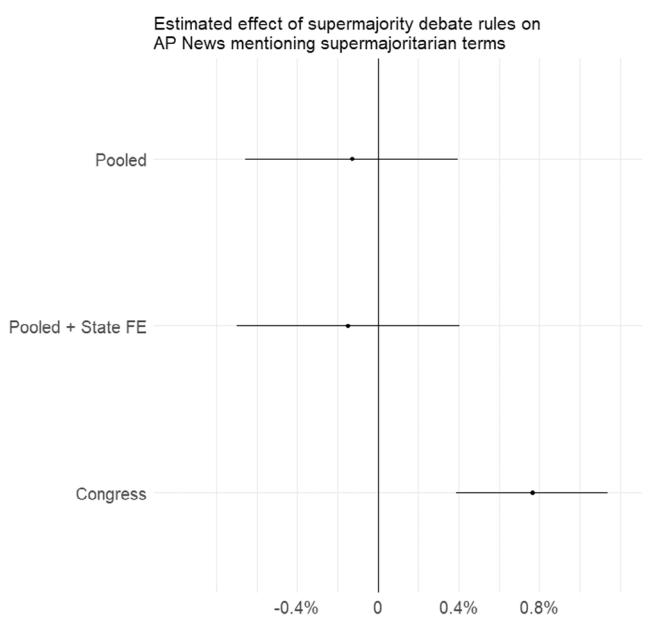


**FIGURE 4** | The percent of associated press coverage of state legislatures mentioning terms associated with supermajoritarian politics by state.

mentioning at least one of the terms.<sup>24</sup> However, three states with *majority* debate rules in both chambers—Texas, Missouri, and Oregon—also fall in the top five, alongside supermajoritarian Tennessee. Moreover, the supermajoritarian states Alaska, Hawaii, Vermont, and Wyoming comprise four of the five states with the lowest percentage of coverage mentioning supermajoritarian politics. These descriptive data suggest an inconsistent relationship between the presence of supermajority debate rules and coverage of supermajority politics.<sup>25</sup>

Using these data, we conduct similar statistical analyses as in the previous section. Specifically, we use OLS regression to examine whether there is a positive relationship between supermajority debate rules (*Supermajority Debate Rule*) and the percentage of articles mentioning supermajoritarian terms (*AP Supermajority Coverage*). We first make comparisons within state legislatures where one chamber has a supermajority debate rule and the other does not, again set against a baseline established by the U.S. Congress. We next examine differences across state legislative chambers by comparing news coverage for all chambers with supermajority debate rules against news coverage for all chambers with majority debate rules.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 5 shows the results of two models examining the difference in news coverage within the 14 state legislatures with different rules and one model examining the same difference for the U.S. Congress.<sup>27</sup> Each model is fit on chamber-year observations



**FIGURE 5** | The within-legislature effect of supermajority debate rules on AP news coverage of supermajoritarian politics. The point estimate for each model includes 95% confidence intervals. See Table A5 for the full model results.

and regresses *AP Supermajority Coverage* on *Supermajority Debate Rule* with year fixed effects. The data are pooled in both models, and the second model includes state fixed effects.<sup>28</sup>

The results provide no evidence that media coverage of supermajoritarian politics is more likely for state legislative chambers with supermajoritarian rules as the *Supermajority Debate Rule* coefficients are null in both models. Moreover, the third model, which is fit on similar data from Associated Press coverage of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House, returns a positive and statistically significant coefficient for *Supermajority Debate Rule*, and its 95% confidence interval has almost no overlap with those from the first two models.

We next compare AP news coverage of supermajoritarian terms across all 99 state legislative chambers, showing the results in Figure 6. Again, each model is fit on chamber-year observations and regresses *AP Supermajority Coverage* on *Supermajority Debate Rule* with year fixed effects and a *State Senate* control. Standard errors are clustered by state. And, again, we find no evidence that media coverage mentioning supermajoritarian terms is higher in chambers with supermajority debate rules. In fact, the data suggest the opposite as the *Supermajority Debate Rule* coefficient is negative and statistically significant.

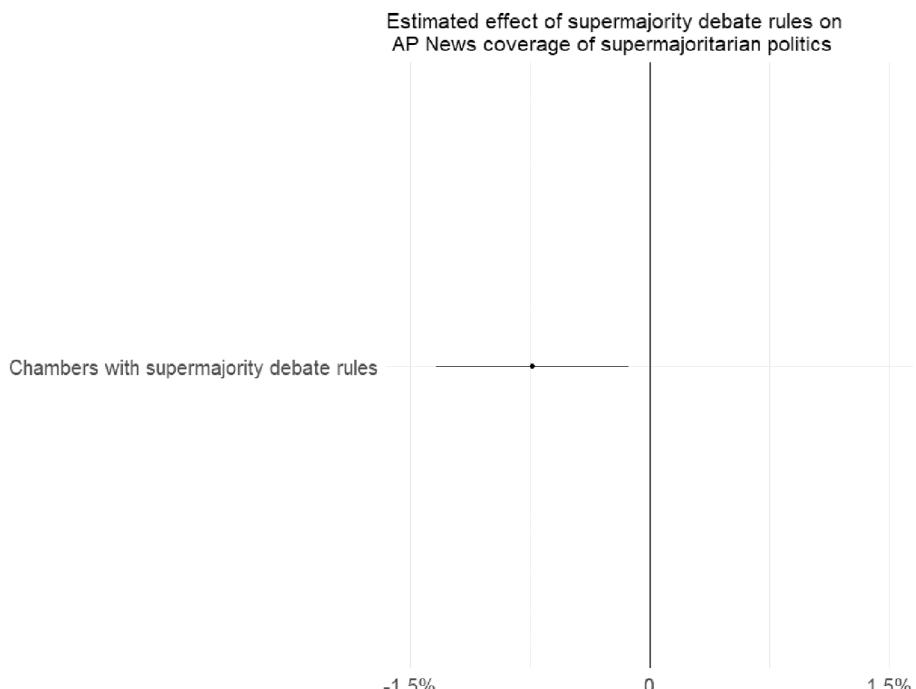
Overall, we do not find evidence that supermajority rules are associated with greater media coverage of supermajoritarian politics. But while these results give us a sense of the relationship between supermajority rules and one straightforward indicator of obstruction, they do not tell the full story. One might still question whether the expected relationship will manifest when we narrow our focus to a specific set of important legislative proposals. We take up this point in the next section.

## 5 | Gubernatorial Proposals

For our final analysis, we sought to identify a set of highly salient legislative proposals to assess whether or not there is a relationship between supermajority debate rules and legislative outcomes. Specifically, we want to know if these rules result in more gridlock (less legislative success) or larger than average roll call vote coalitions on final passage. If we cannot find evidence that supermajority debate rules affect the passage of prominent bills, then we are unlikely to find a systematic relationship anywhere.

Our list of salient bills comes from an analysis of all 50 gubernatorial state of the state addresses in 2019. We read through each address and identified all *policy proposals* that governors made for the state legislative sessions in that same year. Following Kousser and Phillips (2012), we are careful to distinguish between policy proposals and budget proposals. Budget proposals are usually included in must-pass budget legislation. Permanent stalemate on these bills is very unlikely, and roll-call coalitions on these bills tend to be very large. Moreover, in most states, governors have some line-item veto power on budget bills, adding a unique dynamic to legislative action and bargaining on these bills.

Policy proposals, in contrast, are standalone efforts that do not have to pass. The success or failure of these bills does not affect the ability of a state government to function or meet its fiduciary responsibilities. As such, a legislative minority can more credibly threaten to filibuster a policy proposal compared to a budget proposal. Moreover, without line-item veto power on policy bills, the governor cannot simply let the legislature act and then strike out the parts of the bill she dislikes. Instead, on these proposals, the governor and members of the legislature must bargain effectively toward building a sufficient coalition to clear procedural hurdles and obtain passage.



**FIGURE 6** | The across-legislature effect of supermajority debate rules on AP news coverage of supermajoritarian politics. The point estimate for each model includes 95% confidence intervals. See Table A6 for the full model results.

We uncovered 336 unique policy proposals in 2019—about 6.7 per governor. Nearly 45% of these proposals were in states with supermajority debate rules. About 66% were enacted to law in some form, while the rest failed to be enacted. This 66% success rate is in line with the 60% success rate that David Mayhew (2011) found for U.S. presidential proposals from 1949 to 2006 and the 62% success rate that Cheibub (2007) found for chief executive initiatives across presidential democracies.

Our key question is whether the fate of these proposals is affected by the presence or absence of supermajority debate rules. If the rules matter, then we should expect to see two outcomes: (1) more gridlock, as a higher share of proposals fail in the face of a higher threshold for ending debate; (2) larger enacting coalitions, as the proposals that succeed will need to accrue more support from members of the legislature in order to overcome the elevated debate-ending thresholds.

We first examine whether gubernatorial proposals are more likely to fail in the presence of supermajority debate rules (denoted by the binary variable *Proposal Success*). Scholars investigating federal lawmaking have found that the U.S. Senate filibuster is an obstacle to passing the majority party's agenda (Curry and Lee 2020, 2022) and to passing popular proposals cleared by the U.S. House (Ansolabehere and Kuriwaki 2025). To see if these rules present similar obstacles in state legislatures, we compare the proposal success rates for states with supermajority debate rules to states without them.

Our data shows that the proposal success rate is more than 12 percentage points lower in states with supermajority debate rules (59.3% success in supermajority debate rule states vs. 72.0% in majority debate rule states). However, this difference is mostly due to the fact that 46% of the 150 proposals that faced supermajority debate rules were in divided state governments compared to just 18% of the 186 proposals that did not face supermajority debate rules. Divided government has a strong influence on a proposal's chance of success (46% success rate in divided governments vs. 75.2% in unified governments).

To account for the influence of multiple variables, we use OLS regression to model the likelihood that a proposal becomes law, as presented in Table 2. The first model only includes the *Supermajority Debate Rule* variable and shows the 12.7 percentage point difference (significant at  $p < 0.10$ ). In the second model, we add a control for *Unified Government*, which shrinks the *Supermajority Debate Rule* coefficient and causes it to lose its statistical significance. In the third model, we control for *Unified Government*, the average level of *Polarization* across the two chambers in a state, the average percentage of seats controlled by the governor's party (*Size of Governor's Party*), and *Professionalism*. The *Supermajority Debate Rule* coefficient also fails to attain statistical significance in this model.<sup>29</sup>

It could be the case that supermajority debate rules are not systematically thwarting gubernatorial proposals because governors are anticipating the possibility and introducing more broadly palatable proposals in the first place. If this is true, then the 223 successful gubernatorial proposals should, on average, have larger coalitions on final passage votes in supermajority

**TABLE 2 |** Supermajority debate rules and the success of gubernatorial proposals.

<b>Dependent variable: proposal success</b>			
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Intercept	0.720*** (0.048)	0.494*** (0.076)	0.285 (0.184)
Supermajority debate rule	-0.127 <sup>+</sup> (0.076)	-0.049 (0.067)	-0.067 (0.060)
Unified Government		0.275*** (0.075)	0.211* (0.104)
Polarization			0.121* (0.047)
Size of Governor's Party			0.215 (0.302)
Professionalism			-0.280* (0.129)
Num. Obs.	336	336	336
R <sup>2</sup> Adj.	0.015	0.077	0.104
RMSE	0.47	0.45	0.44
Std. Errors	By: State	By: State	By: State

<sup>+</sup> $p < 0.1.$

\* $p < 0.05.$

\*\* $p < 0.01.$

\*\*\* $p < 0.001.$

debate rule states (denoted by the variable *Coalition Size on Successful Proposals*). However, Table 3 returns no evidence that gubernatorial proposals that pass in state legislatures with higher debate rules have larger enacting coalitions. The coefficient for *Supermajority Debate Rule* is insignificant in six models—three for coalition sizes in state houses and three for coalition sizes in state senates<sup>30</sup>—that use the same variables as Table 2.<sup>31</sup>

The state of the state proposal analyses point to the same conclusion as the previous analyses—supermajority debate rules are not systematically associated with different legislative outcomes in the states. On average, they are not operating as U.S. Senate-esque supermajority pivots.

## 6 | Conclusion

In this paper, we turn to the states to investigate the degree to which supermajority debate rules translate into pivots and affect legislative action. Leveraging the fact that state legislatures vary in the thresholds required to end debate in their chambers, we assess if different thresholds are associated with: (1) larger roll call coalition sizes, (2) greater news coverage of supermajoritarian politics, or (3) more gridlock or larger final passage coalitions on major gubernatorial policy proposals. Contrary to how the U.S. Senate's debate cut-off rule is

**TABLE 3** | Supermajority debate rules and passage coalition size on gubernatorial proposals.

Dependent variable: coalition size on successful proposals						
	House 1	House 2	House 3	Senate 1	Senate 2	Senate 3
Intercept	0.830*** (0.016)	0.888*** (0.032)	0.824*** (0.077)	0.857*** (0.017)	0.925*** (0.026)	0.972*** (0.084)
Supermajority Debate Rule	0.028 (0.029)	0.013 (0.028)	-0.000 (0.025)	0.023 (0.030)	0.007 (0.029)	-0.012 (0.029)
Unified Government		-0.066* (0.032)	-0.124* (0.054)		-0.078* (0.026)	-0.096+ (0.055)
Polarization			-0.004 (0.020)			-0.010 (0.018)
Size of Governor's Party			0.207 (0.135)			0.059 (0.159)
Professionalism			-0.026 (0.055)			-0.174** (0.056)
Num. Obs.	219	219	219	223	223	223
R <sup>2</sup> Adj.	0.003	0.026	0.029	0.001	0.034	0.069
RMSE	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.16	0.15	0.15
Std. Errors	By: State					

+*p*<0.1.\**p*<0.05.\*\**p*<0.01.\*\*\**p*<0.001.

understood to have a meaningful impact on legislative action, we find no observable relationship between the rules in different state legislatures and the patterns in these outcomes. There are no consistent patterns across states with different debate rules. There are no consistent patterns within states between legislative chambers with different rules. The effects of supermajority debate rules in the states do not match or come close to the effects found in the U.S. Senate, or the effects of supermajority rules for tax increase legislation. Simply put, we find no evidence that supermajority debate rules consistently function as pivots.

Accordingly, we have three takeaways with implications for a broad range of legislative scholars. First, we caution against empirical approaches that “stretch” our understanding of the contemporary usage of the legislative rules or processes from Congress to state legislatures or to legislative institutions elsewhere. Our (non) findings join those of others in suggesting that the pivotal politics model of filibustering in the contemporary Senate may be specific to that institution in its current moment (David R. Mayhew 2003; Koger 2010; Wawro and Schickler 2007). Assuming we can readily generalize from those patterns may be a mistake and lead to poor inferences. Any attempt at generalization about what we know about debate rules and obstruction should only follow from developing appropriate case-specific knowledge about how institutions and politics in different places and times actually operate (Sartori 1970).

Second, the important factor for filibustering and other types of minority obstruction is not necessarily the rules themselves, but the understanding legislative actors have for how those rules should (and should not) be used. Certainly there are some cases, including Nebraska and South Carolina, where supermajority debate rules can act as pivots. However, we also see cases, such as Missouri, where majorities often restrain themselves from using majoritarian rules to cut off debate or advance legislation because it is understood to be unusual, or against political norms, to do so. Moreover, there are examples, including New Jersey and Utah, where supermajority debate rules exist but minority obstruction and filibustering are rare, if not nonexistent. A fuller examination of both the use and the non-use of rules could inform debates about the respective roles of hard formal institutions and structures versus soft expectations, norms, and informal institutions for explaining legislative behavior (Azari and Smith 2012; Tsebelis 2002). Again, to develop the appropriate contextual knowledge for understanding these institutions, scholars may need to focus on a smaller number of states and gather qualitative data (Squire and Hamm 2005; Curry 2025).

Third, we believe our findings should prod legislative scholars to revisit what we think we know about the U.S. Senate, its rules, and the filibuster. One long-known empirical fact about the U.S. Senate’s debate and cloture rules is that its effects on congressional politics have not been constant over time. As neatly summarized in Figure 1, for most of the 20th century,

the original two-thirds cloture requirement did not result in final passage coalition sizes that were any larger in the Senate than in the highly majoritarian House of Representatives. Only after the cloture threshold was reduced to three-fifths (and the “two-track” system was adopted) did we begin to observe a difference. And yet, since then, the effect of Rule 22 has not been consistent. The gap in Senate–House final passage coalition sizes has increased almost every year to the present day. Beyond “polarization” as a catch-all answer for this increasing effect, we do not have a strong understanding of why the effect of the Senate’s debate and cloture rules on coalition sizes would be so inconsistent.

Regardless of the specific institutional setting, legislative scholars should begin to pursue in-depth studies to investigate how rules, including end-of-debate rules, actually affect outcomes. In concert with our findings here, we think the answer goes beyond preferences and pivots and may encompass other forces that contemporary scholars have spent less time investigating with respect to legislative politics, including culture, norms, and unwritten rules about what kinds of behavior are acceptable or unacceptable within a particular legislative institution, as well as how these non-structural factors can evolve over time and in response to external politics. Altogether, our findings indicate that the relationship between legislative rules, obstruction, and other downstream consequences requires far more study. Political scientists should carefully consider that there are multiple forces at play in obstructionism, including the various drivers of legislative behavior, hard institutional rules, and soft factors that influence legislative outcomes.

## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Brown (2021); Brownstein (2021); Dejardins (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Our search for news coverage of obstruction, described in more detail below, produced no evidence of any procedural obstruction on the part of minority party Republicans, who held more than one-quarter of seats in the New Jersey General Assembly from 2010 to 2024. The closest thing we found was Republicans drawing out consideration of a Covid-19 related bill in 2021 by “making long-winded comments” as they cast their votes. Even this minor action was criticized as inappropriate and desperate by Democrats in the state capital (Nieto-Munoz and DiFilippo 2021).

<sup>3</sup> The only even quasi-filibuster in recent years was when State Senator Jim Dabakis (D-Salt Lake) “sneezed” into a microphone on the floor for over a minute to run out the last minute of the annual legislative session to block the passage of a bill. Even this minor tactic earned him condemnation from his Republican colleagues (Rolly 2016).

<sup>4</sup> This will not always be true, of course. It depends on the distribution of legislators’ preferences and the nature of the status quo. But, on average, supermajority pivots result in larger gridlock intervals.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in 2023, Senate Democrats filibustered a bill that would have made it harder to put state constitutional changes on the ballot. Republicans pulled the bill in order to bring the filibuster to the end. A month later, after negotiations with the Democrats,

Republicans brought forward a retooled measure that was less hard-edged, lowering the necessary threshold for the states’ voters to approve such a ballot measure. With these concessions (and others) made, the minority Democrats backed off their filibuster (Keller 2023).

<sup>6</sup> In a search of news articles, we did not find evidence that any state changed its rules to end debate between 2010 and 2024, although there were changes to other rules (e.g., Batheja 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Arkansas House.

<sup>8</sup> New Mexico House; Tennessee House and Senate.

<sup>9</sup> Louisiana Senate.

<sup>10</sup> Montana House.

<sup>11</sup> The data comes from Plural (2025) and covers every state except Hawaii, Kentucky, Missouri, and Massachusetts.

<sup>12</sup> This is also the case in the U.S. Senate. Although cloture votes require 60 votes, only a simple majority is technically required for passage.

<sup>13</sup> We only observe the overall number of yeas and nays on each vote and cannot determine how individual members voted or the partisan margins.

<sup>14</sup> In analyses included in the supplemental appendix we also conduct analyses that include variables separately indicating whether a chamber rule had a 60% debate rule, 67% debate rule, or a 75% debate rule. The two chambers that explicitly do not permit previous question motions—the Utah and Vermont Senates—are coded as having 100% debate rules.

<sup>15</sup> For the four states with odd-year elections—Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Virginia—we keep the coding consistent.

<sup>16</sup> Hawaii and Massachusetts also have chambers with different debate thresholds, but we do not have roll call data for them.

<sup>17</sup> Ironically, this was the same congress in which the Senate cloture threshold was *decreased* from 67% to 60%.

<sup>18</sup> The results for all models are included in appendix Table A3.

<sup>19</sup> Four of the 15 states with supermajority tax rules also have supermajority debate rules: Arizona, Arkansas\*, California, Delaware, Florida\*, Kentucky, Louisiana\*, Mississippi, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Washington\*, and Wisconsin.

<sup>20</sup> Supermajority tax rules always apply to both legislative chambers.

<sup>21</sup> While Figure 3 summarizes the key results of the models, the full results can be found in appendix Table A4. Table A4 and Figure A1 also includes the results of separate models for votes with different supermajority thresholds (60%, 67%, and 75%).

<sup>22</sup> Each search covered January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2024.

<sup>23</sup> We chose these terms because they are closely associated with supermajoritarian politics where legislative minorities are exercising leverage. In contrast, words such as “delay” and “obstruct” could be referring to many things beyond the legislative process (e.g., a bill to “delay” implementation of a regulation or a bill to “obstruct” a woman’s ability to obtain an abortion). In additional analyses in the supplemental appendix Tables A5 and A6, we also show that restricting our terms to just “filibuster” yields nearly identical results for the key models.

<sup>24</sup> Nebraska has experienced several high profile filibusters in recent years, including ones to support transgender rights (Wood 2023) and to preserve its unique method of awarding Electoral College votes (Salinas II 2025).

<sup>25</sup> News coverage of state legislative chambers has steadily fallen over time, something noted in (Rogers 2017) and confirmed with respect to the *Associated Press* in Appendix Figure A2. However, we do not believe this affects our analyses because (1) Figure A3 shows that the percentage of *Associated Press* coverage about filibustering was more

- or less consistent from 2011 to 2024 (between 0–6% of all articles) and (2) we account for time trends in our models with year fixed effects.
- <sup>26</sup> This second analysis is analogous to the tax supermajority rule analysis. We do not have similar data to establish a baseline for this analysis.
- <sup>27</sup> We utilize data from all 14 states with different house and senate debate rules in this analysis rather than only 12 states (as in Figure 2) because news coverage data was available for Hawaii and Massachusetts while roll call data was not.
- <sup>28</sup> Unlike Figure 2, we do not report state-specific models because the small number of observations for each state ( $n=30$ ) makes the estimates particularly imprecise.
- <sup>29</sup> In appendix Table A7, we fit additional models to determine whether specific supermajority debate thresholds (60%, 67%, and 75%) are negatively associated with gubernatorial proposal success. While we find negative and statistically significant results for the 60% model, the 67% and 75% models have similar null results to the overall analysis.
- <sup>30</sup> There are 219 House votes and 223 Senate votes because the Senate model includes Nebraska, the only unicameral state legislature.
- <sup>31</sup> In appendix Tables A8 and A9, we fit models to examine specific supermajority debate thresholds and once again find negative and statistically significant results for the 60% threshold model and null results for the 67% and 75% models.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Data S1:** lsq70035-sup-0001-DataS1.pdf.