

SUPERMAJORITY SOLUTIONS FOR TEXAS TAXPAYERS

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KEY POINTS

- Even though tax relief has been funded at the state level, increased debt at the local level has led to higher property tax bills for Texans.
- With 79% of bonds passing in May of 2025, local governments have increased debt across Texas by \$13.7 billion in principal alone.
- Under the current simple majority threshold, bond passage rates ranged from 52% to 79%, with costs exceeding \$106 billion between May 2023 and May 2025.
- At a 66% threshold, passage rates fell to 13–35%, and costs were approximately \$34 billion.
- At a 75% threshold, passage rates were between 2% and 12%, with total costs under \$8 billion.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Texans pay some of the highest property taxes in the nation ([Yushkov, 2025](#)). This is due in part to the amount of debt that local governments have taken on through bond issuance ([Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2026](#)). This research explores how much debt could be avoided if the voting threshold for approving bonds were raised from a simple majority.

Using bond election data from May 2023 to May 2025, this paper illustrates how many bonds would have been approved by voters under a simple majority and supermajority thresholds of 60%, 66%, and 75%. The results show that as the threshold increases, fewer bonds are approved, especially once it reaches 66% or higher.

Applying these results to policy, one way to curb the debt that local governments take on would be to raise the threshold for bond approval from a simple majority to two-thirds or higher for voter approval. This extra scrutiny still allows bonds to be approved, but only if voters show overwhelming support for them.

INTRODUCTION

Texas, with its robust economy and 2024 GDP of \$2.77 trillion, ranks among the largest economic entities globally ([Office of the Governor, n.d.](#)). However, even in this time of plenty, Texans are feeling the sting of unaffordability due in part to burdensome taxation from their cities, counties, and school districts ([Tax Foundation, n.d.](#)). This has prompted ongoing discussions about the mechanisms available to reduce the amount of debt that local governments can incur.

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When a municipality or ISD wishes to embark on a construction project, it must propose the bond required to pay for the project in an election. If the bond issuance passes in the election, the body that issued the bond may sell it to outside investors to raise the capital required for the project. This impacts the Interest and Sinking (I&S) tax rate. These taxes are used for the sole purpose of paying off bond debt and should not be confused with Maintenance and Operations (M&O) ([Dripping Springs ISD, n.d.](#)), which are approved through Voter-Approved Tax Rate Elections (VATREs).

To determine the I&S tax rate, the issuing body determines the principal that must be repaid and the amount of taxable value within its district. M&O funds cannot be used to pay off government debt. Simply, when outstanding debt is higher, governing bodies need more money to pay it off, which can raise the I&S tax rate.

These elections, often held in off-cycle months like May, tend to have lower voter turnout ([Anzia, 2015](#)). Low turnout has had a huge impact on the passage rates of City, ISD, and County bonds. In FY 2024, 65%, 84%, and 100% of proposed City, ISD, and County bonds were passed, respectively ([Texas Bond Review Board, n.d.](#)).

Currently, in Texas, for a proposed bond to pass, 50% plus 1 additional voter must vote yes. This is a simple majority. On the other hand, a supermajority requires a specific percentage of votes to be yes for the proposition to pass.

In the 89th Legislative Session, two proposed bills, HB 2736 ([2025](#)) and HB 96 ([2025](#)), were introduced to impose a supermajority requirement for voter-approved debt. While 13 states have adopted legislative supermajority requirements to raise taxes ([Appleby, 2021](#)), very little has been debated in Texas about an individual-voter supermajority.

This paper examines a hypothetical policy scenario in which voter supermajority thresholds are applied to local bond elections across Texas. The goal is to explore how such thresholds might influence bond passage rates and the associated financial implications for taxpayers.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on publicly available data from the Bond Review Board's May 2025 bond election database, which provided detailed information on the number of bond propositions, passage rates, and associated financial costs. Population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau allowed for the calculation of per capita fiscal impact. The study applies hypothetical supermajority thresholds as suggested in the legislation to historical election outcomes to assess how varying levels of voter approval might influence bond passage rates and fiscal outcomes. HB 2736 proposed a threshold of 2/3 (roughly 66%), and HB 96 proposed a threshold of exactly 60%. No legislation proposed a 75% threshold, but it has been selected as an upper bound to observe the bond passage rate at a 3/4s threshold. The approach assumes uniform distribution of costs across the population and does not account for regional variations or changes in voter behavior that could occur under different policy conditions.

DATA

May 2023 Bond Election

Table 1

May 2023 Bond Election

Supermajority Requirement	# of Bonds Proposed	# of Whole Election Passed	% of Whole Election	Principal Amount Approved	New Principal Debt Approved Per Texan
None	245	194	79%	\$22,926,208,721	\$761.33
60%	245	123	51%	\$17,292,342,268	\$574.24
66%	245	59	24%	\$6,375,574,677	\$211.72
75%	245	17	7%	\$1,131,997,645	\$37.59

Note. Data from Bond Review Board Database Search Texas Local Government Bond Elections, by Texas Bond Review Board (https://debtsearch.brb.texas.gov/bond_elections_search.aspx) and author's calculations.

In May 2023, voters across Texas considered 245 bond proposals from cities, ISDs, and counties. Under the standard simple majority rule, 79% of these bonds were approved, authorizing \$22.9 billion in principal debt, translating to an average of \$761.33 per capita. With a 60% supermajority requirement, only 51% of the bonds would have passed, reducing the total approved debt to \$17.2 billion and the per capita burden to \$574.24. A 66% threshold would have allowed just 24% of the bonds to succeed, cutting the debt to \$6.4 billion and the average cost to \$211.72. At the strictest 75% level, only 7% of proposals would have cleared, resulting in \$1.1 billion in debt and \$37.59 per capita.

Increasing the bond approval threshold from a simple majority to 60% led to 71 additional bonds being defeated and a \$5 billion decrease in approved debt. When increased further from 60% to 66%, the elections would have resulted in 64 additional bonds struck down and \$11 billion less in voter-approved debt.

November 2023 Bond Election

Table 2

November 2023 Bond Election

Supermajority Requirement	# of Bonds Proposed	# of Whole Election Passed	% of Whole Election	Principal Amount Approved	New Principal Debt Approved Per Texan
None	199	128	64%	\$19,511,276,699.00	\$634.97
60%	199	57	29%	\$11,678,309,287.00	\$380.06
66%	199	28	14%	\$3,694,921,787.00	\$120.25
75%	199	7	4%	\$597,400,000.00	\$19.44

Note. Data from Bond Review Board Database Search Texas Local Government Bond Elections, by Texas Bond Review Board (https://debtsearch.brb.texas.gov/bond_elections_search.aspx) and author's calculations.

During the November 2023 cycle, 199 bond packages were proposed across the state. With a simple majority, 64% were approved, amounting to \$19.5 billion in new debt and an average taxpayer impact of \$634.97. A 60% supermajority would have reduced approvals to 29%, lowering the debt to \$11.6 billion and the per-person cost to \$380.06. Raising the bar to 66% would have allowed only 14% of bonds to pass, cutting the debt to \$3.6 billion and the average burden to \$120.25. Under a 75% requirement, just 4% of proposals would

have succeeded, resulting in \$597 million in debt and a modest \$19.44 per Texan. The 60% supermajority threshold cut the number of approved propositions in half compared to the simple majority. Furthermore, it also eliminated over \$250 from the per capita debt burden.

May 2024 Bond Election

Table 3

May 2024 Bond Election

Supermajority Requirement	# Bonds Proposed	# of Whole Election Passed	% of Whole Election	Principal Amount Approved	New Principal Debt Approved Per Texan
None	251	186	74%	\$9,751,541,784.00	\$317.35
60%	251	117	47%	\$7,010,641,900.00	\$228.15
66%	251	78	31%	\$5,170,479,160.00	\$168.27
75%	251	28	12%	\$2,482,320,628.00	\$80.78

Note. Data from Bond Review Board Database Search Texas Local Government Bond Elections, by Texas Bond Review Board (https://debtsearch.brb.texas.gov/bond_elections_search.aspx) and author's calculations.

In May 2024, Texas voters reviewed 251 bond measures. Under the existing simple majority rule, 74% were approved, generating \$9.7 billion in debt and a per capita cost of \$317.35. A 60% supermajority would have reduced approvals to 47%, with \$7 billion in debt and an average impact of \$228.15. At 66%, only 31% of bonds would have passed, totaling \$5.1 billion and \$168.27 per person. With a 75% threshold, just 12% of proposals would have cleared, resulting in \$2.48 billion in debt and \$80.78 per Texan. This election had the highest number of bonds passing the 75% supermajority threshold of any of the five election cycles, indicating that a more uniform voting bloc emerged, unique to this election.

November 2024 Bond Election

Table 4

November 2024 Bond Election

Supermajority Requirement	# of Bonds Proposed	# of Whole Election Passed	% of Whole Election	Principal Amount Approved	New Principal Debt Approved Per Texan
None	92	51	55%	\$4,607,165,344.00	\$147.24
60%	92	32	35%	\$2,182,731,298.00	\$69.76
66%	92	18	20%	\$690,731,000.00	\$22.07
75%	92	2	2%	\$3,032,118.00	\$0.10

Note. Data from Bond Review Board Database Search Texas Local Government Bond Elections, by Texas Bond Review Board (https://debtsearch.brb.texas.gov/bond_elections_search.aspx) and author's calculations.

The November 2024 election featured 92 bond proposals. Under a simple majority, 55% were approved, adding \$4.6 billion in debt and costing each Texan an average of \$147.24. A 60% supermajority would have dropped the approval rate to 35%, with \$2.1 billion in debt and a \$69.76 per capita impact. At 66%, only 20% of bonds would have passed, totaling \$690 million and \$22.07 per person. With a 75% requirement, just 2% of proposals would have succeeded, resulting in a mere \$3 million in debt and a negligible \$0.10 per Texan. This example highlights how a high voter supermajority requirement can bring local borrowing to a grinding halt and limit the amount of tax burden placed on the average Texan.

May 2025 Bond Election

Table 5

May 2025 Bond Election

Supermajority Requirement	# of Bonds Proposed	# of Whole Election Passed	% of Whole Election	Principal Amount Approved	New Principal Debt Approved Per Texan
None	203	161	79%	\$13,737,913,313.00	\$439.04
60%	203	108	53%	\$9,790,320,445.00	\$312.88
66%	203	71	35%	\$6,495,331,579.00	\$207.58
75%	203	24	12%	\$921,581,000.00	\$29.45

Note. Data from Bond Review Board Database Search Texas Local Government Bond Elections, by Texas Bond Review Board (https://debtsearch.brb.texas.gov/bond_elections_search.aspx) and author's calculations.

In May 2025, 203 bond propositions were put forward across Texas. Under the simple majority framework, 79% passed, leading to \$13.7 billion in approved debt and an average cost of \$439.04 per resident. A 60% supermajority would have reduced approvals to 53%, with \$9.8 billion in debt and a per capita impact of \$312.88. At 66%, only 35% of bonds would have passed, totaling \$6.4 billion and \$207.58 per Texan. With a 75% threshold, just 12% of proposals would have cleared, resulting in \$921 million in debt and an average burden of \$29.45. Even with a 60% voter threshold, the majority of the bonds passed this election, indicating that a voter supermajority can allow some local bonds to pass.

RESULTS

The data from five election cycles between May 2023 and May 2025 shows a consistent pattern: as the required voter approval threshold increases, the number of bonds passed decreases, along with the total cost to the state and the per capita fiscal impact.

1. Under no supermajority requirement, bond passage rates ranged from 52% to 79%, with costs reaching over \$106 billion.
2. At a 60% threshold, passage rates dropped to 24–53%, with costs around \$66 billion.
3. At 66%, passage rates fell to 13–35%, and costs were approximately \$34 billion.
4. At 75%, passage rates were between 2–12%, with total costs under \$8 billion.

Increased approval thresholds also affected Texans' per capita debt. For instance, in May 2023, the debt per resident would hypothetically decrease from \$761.33, with current simple majority approval, to \$37.59 under a 75% requirement. Similar trends appeared across all other election cycles.

However, it is important to note that this analysis is based on a hypothetical application of supermajority thresholds to past election data. The actual outcomes of implementing such policies could vary due to factors such as changes in voter behavior, campaign dynamics, legal challenges, and economic conditions. Additionally, the financial estimates assume uniform cost distribution, which may not reflect the complexities of real-world fiscal policy. Therefore, while the data provides a useful framework for exploring potential impacts, it is neither predictive nor definitive.

Furthermore, this analysis only pertains to bond issuances. It does not pertain to Voter Approval Tax Rate Elections (VATREs). VATREs affect the M&O Tax rate, while bond issuances affect I&S tax rates. VATREs are used to determine the tax rates that fund teacher salaries, student programs, security upgrades, or a funding deficit.

RECOMMENDATION

The application of a 60% supermajority threshold in local bond elections presents a potential middle ground between fiscal restraint and democratic representation. As shown in the data, this threshold consistently reduced the number of bonds passed and lowered the overall budgetary impact on Texans compared to elections with no supermajority requirement. At the same time, the 60% threshold allowed a reasonable portion of bond propositions to succeed. Additional research is needed to estimate the impact of a supermajority on VATRE elections.

CONCLUSION

While stricter thresholds (such as 66% or 75%) further reduced debt, they also significantly limited the number of approved bonds, potentially with broader implications for infrastructure and public services. Therefore, based on the observed trends, a 60% supermajority may offer a balanced approach, ensuring that fiscal decisions reflect a stronger consensus among voters while maintaining the functionality of local governance. ■

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Prior to joining TPPF John served in the University system as a Graduate Assistant until he was given the opportunity to teach Principles of American Government. John holds a Master of Arts in Political Science from Texas State University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Sam Houston State University.

As a proud Eagle Scout John is an avid camper and enjoys spending time in the outdoors as well as at home with his wife.



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