Senate Gridlock – the Filibuster Factor

Americans of all political persuasions are more and more frustrated with the gridlock that has almost brought Washington to a standstill. Republicans' use of filibuster has reached unprecedented levels with no signs of abating. But it was not always so.

The Senate posts filibuster data back to 1919. Records track three items. First, *cloture motions* to end debate which occur when a minority of senators threaten or actually filibuster. That sometimes ends the filibuster. Second, there is a *vote on cloture*. Third is recording if *cloture succeeds*, if the filibuster is overridden or not.

As the graphs show, only 56 cloture motions were filed over 52 years from 1919 through 1970. At **just over one per year**, filibusters were rarely used. 420 cloture motions were filed over the next 22 years, from 1971 to 1992, a sharp increase to **19 per year**.
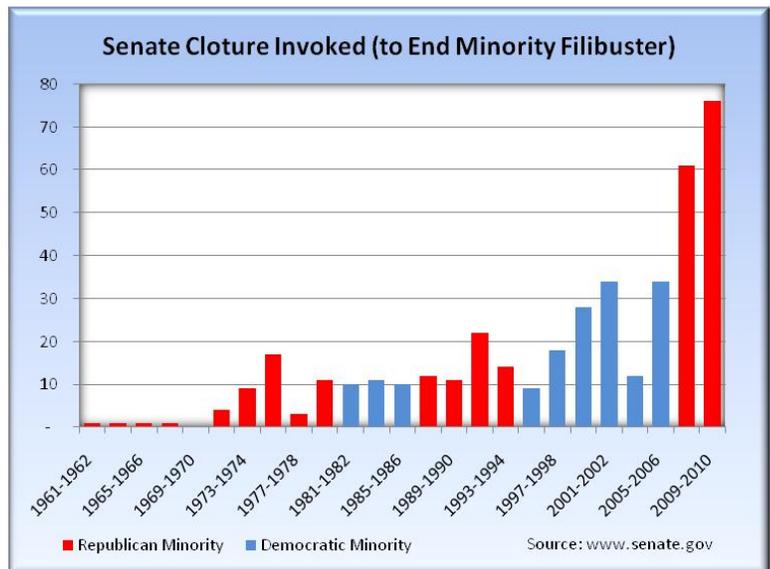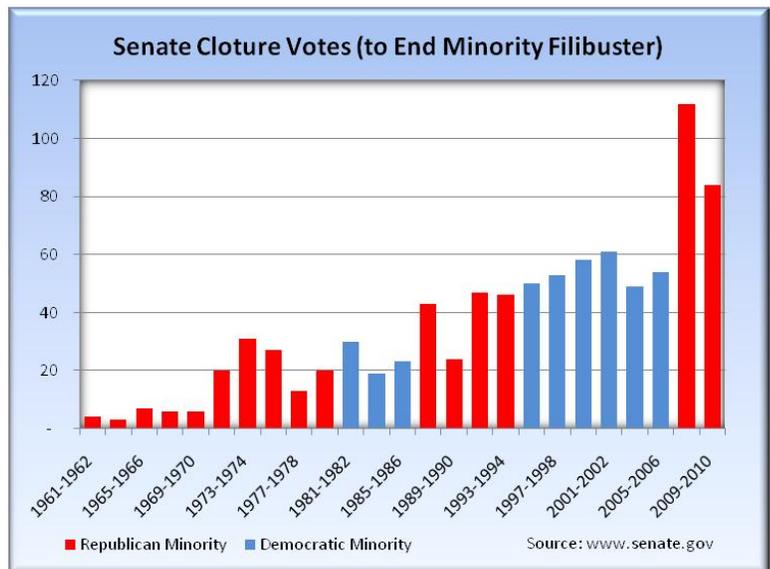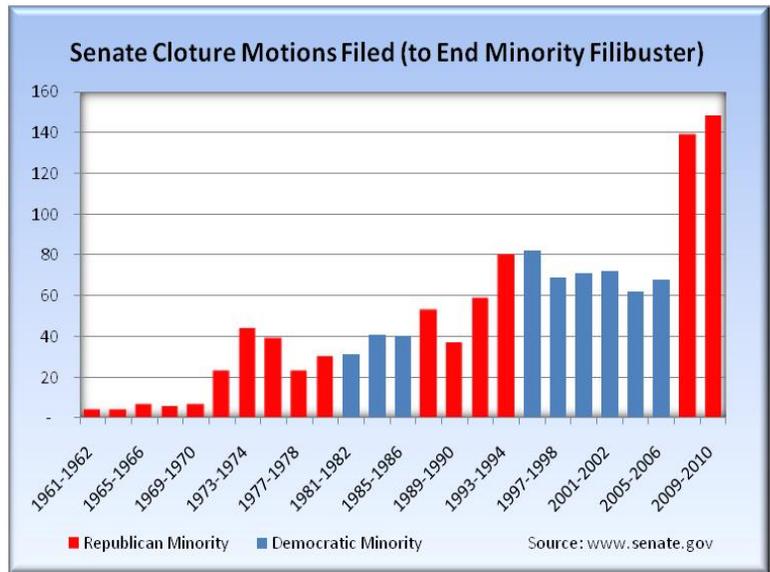
1993-1994 saw Republicans' "*Contract with America*" that escalated partisanship to higher levels. From 1993-2006, motions nearly **doubled to 36 per year**. Cloture motions took an even more dramatic upturn in 2007 when Republicans lost control of the Senate. Cloture motions nearly **doubled again to almost 70 per year**, and **rose further to 74 in 2009**. Clearly, filibuster became the weapon of choice for Republicans**.**

Republicans accuse Democrats of filibustering, and there is some truth to that. But as the graphs show, Republicans initiated each spike and have now taken filibustering to an absurd new level.

Americans hold Congress in low esteem because of gridlock. Neither party is blameless. Americans want achievement, but that requires both parties to act in good faith. The frequency of filibuster threats does not reflect well on Republicans' acting in good faith.

Credit Republicans with discipline. They threaten any of their own party who don't tow the party line. While that increases the effect of their filibuster threats, it is essentially a negative strategy. They're short on their own ideas. They just say "NO" to Democratic ideas.

For decades, filibusters served Congress well as a method for the minority to put some checks on the majority. But the nation's founders never envisioned this turn of events. The constitution requires the VP to break Senate vote ties clearly indicating that 51 % is a majority. Republicans lost majority through the ballot. Their reliance on filibuster to wrestle power back is not a recipe to reduce people's frustration with gridlock.

* 2009-2010 data (12 months) doubled to equalize with prior 24 month periods