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## Top News

# GOP lawmakers around the U.S. push for restrictions on voting

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Voters walk through a polling station in Dallas on Nov. 8.

CONCORD, N.H. >> As President Donald Trump hurls unfounded allegations of colossal fraud in last fall's election, lawmakers in at least 20 mostly Republican-led states are pushing to make it harder to register or to vote.

Efforts are underway in places such as Arkansas, Iowa, Maine, Nebraska and Indiana to adopt or tighten requirements that voters show photo ID at the polls. There is a move in Iowa and New Hampshire to eliminate Election Day registration. New Hampshire may also make it difficult for college students to vote. And Texas could shorten the early voting period by several days.

Supporters say the measures are necessary to combat voter fraud and increase public confidence in elections. But research has shown that in-person fraud at the polls is extremely rare, and critics of these restrictions warn that they will hurt mostly poor people, minorities and students — all of whom tend to vote Democratic — as well as the elderly.

They fear, too, that the U.S. Justice Department, under newly confirmed Attorney General Jeff Sessions, will do little to intervene to protect voters.

Some election watchers see voting rights under heavy attack.

“What is really happening here is an attempt to manipulate the system so that some people can participate and some people can’t,” said Myrna Perez, director of the Voting Rights and Elections project at New York University’s Brennan Center for Justice.

Even so, there are more bills around the country aimed at making it easier to vote, according to the Brennan Center. Starting or expanding early voting and creating automatic voter registration are two popular proposals.

Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York, for example, is backing a proposal to automatically register people to vote using their motor vehicle paperwork and to offer early voting for 12 days before Election Day.

Many of the restrictive laws became possible after the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 struck down a key provision of the federal Voting Rights Act that required certain states and counties, largely in the South, to get Justice Department approval before changing their election laws. The 2016 presidential election was the first without those protections, and voters in 14 states faced new restrictions on voting or registration.

Kevin Hall, spokesman for the Iowa Secretary of State, said the voter ID legislation proposed there would provide for photo identification cards to anyone who needs one and would also update voting system technology.

“This is a commonsense approach just to protect the integrity of our election,” he said. “We want to make sure it’s secure and boost voter confidence as well.”

In addition to eliminating same-day registration, New Hampshire Republicans want to add a residency requirement that critics say could prevent college students from voting. People can now vote in New Hampshire if they consider it their home.

Proponents say the new measure would ensure that only people who truly live in the state can take part in elections.

Many of these measures are certain to face court challenges.

Before the presidential election, federal courts rolled back some of the toughest restrictions in North Carolina and Texas. Those cases are still working their way through the legal system, and voting rights groups are worried the new attorney general will abandon efforts made under the Obama administration to fight the restrictions.

Over the past few years, “states and localities were emboldened unlike ever before in employing a wide range of tactics to deny voting rights to people of color and people with disabilities,” said Scott Simpson with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. “We expect that this will get much worse with a Justice Department that is hostile to voting rights.”

Trump has claimed without evidence that as many as 5 million people voted illegally in the presidential election, complaining that the voter rolls include dead people, non-citizens and people registered in multiple states. He has called for an investigation.

Election experts are more concerned about the age of the nation’s voting systems and their vulnerability to tampering.

A federal commission responsible for working with states on those very issues is facing an uncertain future, after a House committee this week voted to eliminate it. The Election Assistance Commission was created after the “hanging chad” debacle in Florida during the 2000 presidential election. Republicans say the agency is a prime example of government waste.

The commission is scheduled to make recommendations later this year on new standards for voting equipment.

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