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Study predicts voting laws will change political landscape

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By [Krissah Thompson](#), Monday, October 3, 1:23 PM

More than 5 million voters could be affected by recent [changes to state voting laws](#) as the nation prepares for next year's presidential election, according to a study released Monday.

The [report by the New York University School of Law's Brennan Center for Justice](#) analyzed 19 laws and two executive orders that were issued in 14 states this year in an attempt to measure their impact on individuals.

“In two out of the last three presidential elections, 5 million voters is considerably more than the margin in two out of the last three presidential elections,” said Michael Waldman, executive director of the Brennan Center. “These kinds of rules matter enormously. If this is a close election, as it may well be, these voting rules can turn out to be quite significant.”

The center opposes the new laws and one of the researchers involved with the report called them “wholly unnecessary.”

Researchers found 3.2 million people in Kansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin do not have the state-issued identification that will now be required to vote. In addition, more than a million people cast ballots in 2008 during the early voting time periods that have been eliminated in Florida, Georgia and Ohio. Others voters will be impacted by tougher voting restrictions for convicted felons and laws requiring additional proof of citizenship.

This year, more than 30 states debated changes to their voting laws. A dozen passed more restrictive rules requiring voters to present state-issued photo IDs, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, although Democratic governors in four states vetoed them. Florida and Ohio will cut nearly in half the number of days for early voting, and Florida lawmakers reversed rules that had made it easier for convicted felons to vote.

The report, which points to emboldened Republican control in state legislatures as a cause for the wave of new laws, found that the new restrictions “fall most heavily on young, minority, and low-income voters, as well as on voters with disabilities.” The laws could change the “political terrain,” the report warns.

Conservative groups and politicians have argued that the laws will ensure the fairness of the electoral process. Kansas Secretary of State Kris W. Kobach(R) said Kansas's new law, which requires state-issued photo IDs, makes his state's elections among the safest in the nation.

“When I was running for secretary of state, I said, ‘I think we could pass a law to make most forms of voter fraud nearly impossible,’ ” said Kobach, who also noted that the state received 221 reports of voter fraud in 1997 and 2010, a relatively small number amid the tens of thousands of votes cast. “I ran on that and I won.”

John Samples, director of Center for Representative Government with the Cato Institute, said — as Kobach's election shows — the laws are politically popular. He also argued that it might be too soon to know the full impact of the changes and suggested the Brennan Center's figure might be overstated.

“The 5 million number might be true in a general sense under the law, but the real question here is whether the imposition of the requirement would cause the person to do something different than they would have done without it,” he said. “It is implausible to me that 5 million people would be deterred from voting short of physical force.”