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## Editorial: Touch screens' trial tenuous at best in Winnebago County

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The vote is in Winnebago County voters used touch-screen voting technology Democracy did not implode.

But not everything is hunky-dory. There are some new questions about touch-screen voting, despite a summer's-worth of assurances that Diebold Elections Systems' "TSX" machines would be secure, reliable and compatible with the county's current ballot-scanning boxes.

By first estimate, about 1,200 county voters used the touch-screen voting machines Tuesday, letting their fingers do the talking in the primary election. The County Board bought them to comply with federal law requiring the physically-disabled and sight-impaired population private, independent access to voting.

This summer, after getting an earful from officials, regular folks and groups ruffled by past snafus with electronic voting machines across the country, the county board went with Diebold's touch-screens — one machine for each county polling place. A chief selling point was "compatibility" with the existing Diebold equipment.

Tuesday was its first real test. Clerks said the touch-screens were popular for rookie technology. Voters young and old, not just the disabled, liked the format and the style. The relatively small sampling that used them seemed confident.

But now, after-the-fact concerns are shaking our confidence.

As our county clerks spent the day manually entering touch-screen vote totals into a catch-call county database, our State Elections Board explained a component that helps the new Diebold machines combine information with the old is, effectively, on order.

The Federal Elections Commission hasn't approved it yet. Might be next year. Also, a formatting issue between digital and paper versions of our ballots swamped quick results. So, our county clerks spent Tuesday night and all day Wednesday flowing the touch-screen's paper results into the county's main vote database.

This is not the scenario that we were sold. Would Diebold please explain to everyone what exactly wasn't explained before we signed our contract?

It's simple logic that we can all one day expect touch-screen voting machines to be as commonplace to democracy as microwaves are to kitchens. We will one day be greeted at polling places by glowing monitors, not magic markers and booths.

But Tuesday's was not the complete vote of confidence we expected in this age of election change. State Elections Board staff aren't even sure whether county clerks will again have to manually collate touch-screen and ballot-scanner results on Nov. 7 — an election day sure to generate thousands more votes.

The Final Thought: We all may be destined to vote via touch-screen technology some day. But new concerns over compatibility remind us: Let's not be quick to discredit legitimate questions and concerns about the transfer of voting technology as Election Day evolves.

