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## Preventing Problems at the Polls

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Maryland election officials need to do some fast work to get better results from the new touch-screen voting machines in the upcoming election.

The machines, used by roughly 270,000 voters in Allegany, Dorchester, Montgomery and Prince George's counties, debuted with decent results in the Sept. 10 primary.

But even a slightly flawed performance affects the sanctity of the vote, which is the underpinning of our democracy.

Last spring, we tested the new machines using the most objective, scientific approach available. We found them to be fundamentally sound but recommended some programming and hardware changes, as well as an intensive education campaign for poll workers and voters.

With a mixture of pride and dismay, we saw almost all of our predictions come to pass on primary day. Many voters took a long time to familiarize themselves with the machines and in some cases struggled with the unfamiliar format. The card that activates the system occasionally malfunctioned, just as it did in our test. Some elderly voters had difficulties mastering the technology. Poll workers occasionally gave Republican primary voters a voting card containing a Democratic ballot and vice versa.

The heavier turnout expected in November could exacerbate all these flaws and inconveniences. General election voters tend to be less well educated and less interested in politics than those who show up for the primary. Twice as many voters can be expected to turn out on Nov. 5, and many will be seeing the new machines for the first time.

To avert problems on Election Day, Maryland election officials should put a realistic sample ballot on their Web site and get more sample machines into shopping malls and other high-traffic places where voters can practice. Setting aside a machine for demonstration purposes at each poll site on Election Day also might result in fewer mistakes and delays.

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The Sept. 14 news story "Fla. Vote Uncovers a Problem: Overwhelmed Poll Workers" leaves me bewildered that we do not take elections seriously enough to guarantee that our polling stations are manned by qualified and dependable workers.

Why not institute a "poll duty" similar to the jury duty requirement? This would ensure that poll workers are properly trained in this age of sophisticated voting machines and would give proper recognition to the importance of public elections, one of the pillars of our great democracy.

JENNIFER MAZZUCHI

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A Sept. 14 news story discussed the problems with recruiting and retaining volunteers to administer elections.

A simple solution would be to hold elections on Saturday or Sunday. Many other countries hold elections on Sunday, and it seems to work fine for them.

Weekend elections also would solve other problems, such as having to close schools used as polling places and long waits because of the large number of people voting after work.

I would be happy to volunteer to help if elections were on Saturday or Sunday.

BOB KLEIN

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