E-voting woes reported in the US
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VOTERS nationwide in the US reported some 1,100 problems with electronic voting machines on Tuesday, including trouble choosing their intended candidates. The e-voting glitches reported to the Election Protection Coalition, an umbrella group of volunteer poll monitors that set up a telephone hotline, included malfunctions blamed on everything from power outages to incompetent poll workers.

But there were also several dozen voters in six states — particularly Democrats in Florida — who said the wrong candidates appeared on their touch-screen machine's checkout screen, the coalition said.

In many cases, voters said they intended to select John Kerry but when the computer asked them to verify the choice it showed them instead opting for President Bush, the group said.

Ralph G Neas, president of People for the American Way Foundation, which helped form the coalition, called the summary screen problem "troubling but anecdotal".

He and other voting rights advocates said the disproportionate number of Democrats reporting such problems was probably due to higher awareness of voter protection coalitions.

"Overall, the problems of outright voter intimidation and suppression have not been as great as in the past," Mr Neas said.

But the reports did highlight computer scientists' concerns about touch screens, which they say are prone to tampering and unreliable unless they produce paper records for recounts.

Roberta Harvey, 57, of Clearwater, Florida, said she had tried at least a half dozen times to select Kerry-Edwards when she voted Tuesday at Northwood Presbyterian Church.

After 10 minutes trying to change her selection, the Pinellas County resident said she called a poll worker and got a wet-wipe napkin to clean the touch screen as well as a pencil so she could use its eraser-end instead of her finger. Ms Harvey said it took about 10 attempts to select Kerry before and a summary screen confirmed her intended selection.

Election officials in several Florida counties where voters complained about such problems did not return calls Tuesday night.

A spokesman for the company that makes the touch-screen machines used in Pinellas, Palm Beach and two other Florida counties, Alfie Charles of Sequoia Voting Systems, said the machines' monitors may need to be recalibrated periodically.

The most likely reason the summary screen showed wrong candidates was because voters pushed the wrong part of the touch screen in the first place, Mr Charles said.
He said poll workers are trained to perform the recalibration whenever a voter says the touch screen isn't sensitive enough.

"Voters will vote quickly and they'll notice that they made an error when they get to the review screen. The review screen is doing exactly what it needs to do — notifying voters what selections are about to be recorded," Mr Charles said. "On a paper ballot, you don't get a second chance to make sure you voted for whom you intended, and it's a strong point in favor of these machines."

The Election Protection Coalition received a total of 32 reports of touch-screen voters who selected one candidate only to have another show up on the summary screen, Cindy Cohn, legal director of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a coalition member.

David Dill, a Stanford University computer scientist whose Verified Voting Foundation also belongs to the coalition, said he wouldn't "prejudge and say the election is going smoothly just because we have a small number of incident reports out of the total population".

"It's not going to be until the dust clears probably tomorrow that we have even an approximate idea of what happened," Mr Dill added.

*The Associated Press*

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