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**LightReading**  
T-Mobile touts rural deployment

AT&T Inc.'s big media bets dragged down results in the latest quarter as closed movie theaters and pay-television customer losses offset the growth at its core wireless and broadband businesses.

**Vox**  
The police want your phone data. Here's what they can get — and what they can't.

The telecom and media giant said Thursday that 8.6 million customers had activated HBO Max, its Netflix-like streaming video service, by the end of September, up from 4.1 million shortly after its May launch. The total still trails rivals Disney+ and Hulu. The wireless business, which remains the heart of AT&T's profit engine, added 645,000 postpaid phone subscribers. That is more than double the phone connections gain reported by Verizon Communications Inc. during the same period.

**New York Times**  
TV Ratings for Many Sports Are Down. Don't Read Too Much Into It Yet.

AT&T's pay-TV division continued trending in the other direction, shedding 627,000 video customers. That result was still an improvement over the roughly one million video customers lost in each of the previous two quarters. The unit, which includes DirecTV, has suffered the lion's share of cord-cutting in recent years, prompting the company to explore a sale of the satellite business.

**CBS Sports**  
NFL could move Super Bowl LV all the way into March if games keep getting postponed

Overall, AT&T's quarterly revenue dropped 5% to \$42.3 billion. The company attributed a roughly \$2.5 billion revenue loss to Covid-19 as theater closures shrank box-office receipts from Warner Bros. movies and wireless roaming fees dried up. AT&T and media rivals Walt

Disney Co. and Comcast Corp. have started cutting thousands of jobs to offset business lost to the coronavirus pandemic. The virus has sapped the advertising market and delayed the release of major movies.

**Allentown Morning Call**  
Anti-corruption group condemns Pa. lawmakers, calls for immediate legislation on preparing ballots

That market pressure prompted WarnerMedia to start a broad corporate shake-up to trim overhead costs and turn the movie-and-film producer into a more unified company. Executives seek to cut the division's expenses by as much as 20%, according to people familiar with the plans. AT&T's overall quarterly profit fell to about \$2.8 billion, or 39 cents a share, compared with about \$3.7 billion, or 50 cents, a year earlier. The result included about 21 cents of per-share costs tied to the pandemic.

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**  
Allegheny County stands by its hiring of company that sent incorrect ballots

The result prompted AT&T to tweak its full-year cash flow projections. The company said it expects free cash flow to reach \$26 billion or higher with its dividend payout ratio in the high 50% range. That rate would support the nearly \$15 billion in annual dividend payments projected earlier this year, before the coronavirus pandemic forced the company to withdraw its earlier forecasts.

**Spotlight PA**  
A year ago, voting machines malfunctioned in a pivotal Pa. county. Have the problems been fixed?

The latest quarter included 151,000 paying wireless subscribers retained under Keep Americans Connected, a program launched as a federal coronavirus forbearance initiative. The company also reported a net gain of 158,000 broadband subscribers, a figure that included 104,000 accounts on a Keep Americans Connected plan. AT&T is counting on HBO Max to offset its declining entertainment assets with new income from a growing direct-to-consumer model. HBO's cable-TV and online distribution channels have complicated that pivot. In the September quarter, the overall number of customers watching HBO in any form rose to 38 million in the U.S. and 57 million world-wide, exceeding the company's target for the year.

**Harrisburg Patriot-News**  
Iran sent intimidating emails to Democrats in Pa., other battleground states: U.S. intelligence

Some HBO viewers remain unaware that their subscriptions entitle them to the new content-heavy app, while others are unable to upgrade because of business disputes that have kept the service off Amazon.com Inc. and Roku Inc. devices. AT&T shares rose 1.5% to \$27.13 premarket after release of news of growth in the wireless unit, the company's largest in terms of revenue and profit. The stock has dropped more than 30% so far this year. — **Wall Street Journal**

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Pennsylvania has eclipsed 9 million registered voters for the first time and is expecting record turnout as voters cast ballots by mail or drop box and in person at county elections offices before the election and at the polls on Nov. 3.

As of Wednesday, the state had processed 9,050,870 voter registrations, said Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar. That number is expected to increase as paper registrations are processed. Monday was the deadline to register to vote in next month's election. "It's really heartening to see that so many Pennsylvanians want to participate," Boockvar said. She said the new totals included 4,220,397 Democrats, 3,526,857 Republicans, 904,440 Independents and 399,176 who had registered under other banners.

Locally, registration numbers included 937,100 in Allegheny County, 44,558 in Armstrong, 141,470 in Butler, 81,712 in Fayette, 153,187 in Washington and 251,645 in Westmoreland. Nearly half of all voters may participate through mail-in balloting for the first general election under the state's new election law. The state as of Wednesday had approved applications for 2,861,900 mail-in ballots, including 1,825,587 for Democrats, 714,079 for Republicans and 322,234 for unaffiliated voters and others, Boockvar said. She said that number is expected to top 3 million as officials continue to process mail-in ballot applications received at the deadline.

Boockvar said 1,179,808 mail-in ballots, or about 41% of those thus far requested, have been returned. "Nearly 70% of the counties have received one-third of their mail-in ballots, and 40% of them have received 50% of their ballots," she said. Responding to complaints that some voters are awaiting electronic notification that their ballots have been processed, Boockvar said many counties are rushing to keep up with the volume of returns on the 18-year-old system that will only allow returns to be processed in groups of 1,000. She said those notifications have been lagging, but are now catching up. Boockvar said returns of mail-in ballots are running much higher than they were at this point during the June primary. That is a good sign, she added.

— **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**

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Just in time to grab the remote, to channel-change or hit mute, here comes a study of political ads with findings average TV viewers likely won't much like. But for consultants and broadcasters, the study sows seeds of fiscal joy: seems their paydays remain secure.

"The Effect of Television Advertising in United States Elections," focuses on election outcomes from 2000 through 2016, presidential and others. Findings range from what seems obvious (TV ads matter) to small subtleties (they matter more in down-ballot races) to noting some ads don't matter at all. But findings raise questions, which I'll get to in a bit.

The work was just released. It's from political scientists John Sides of Vanderbilt, Lynn Vavreck of UCLA and Christopher Warshaw of George Washington University. Billions are spent on millions of ads. Judging from the current flow, they're not slowing down. They air over and over, back to back, so much so you'd think the public would just tune them out.

Not so. The study says TV ads affect elections at all levels, top to bottom. But more so toward the bottom since down-ballot candidates are lesser known, and any repeated visual message with a candidate's name is a plus. And, in presidential races, TV ads can determine the *outcome* of a close contest — which, I'd note, might be upon us. "The larger a candidate's advantage in advertising compared to their opponent, the larger their share of the vote," the study says. (Joe Biden certainly hopes this is so. [The New York Times](#) reports Biden's TV spending is triple President Trump's in three states key to winning the Electoral College: Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.)

Also, ads aired prior to Labor Day don't appear to have any affect on election results. Ads generally don't influence overall voter turnout. Despite increasing partisanship, "there continues to be a segment of persuadable voters that responds to television advertising." And my favorite (and most depressing finding), there's little evidence of "diminishing returns or rapidly decaying effects." This is academe-speak meaning voters are not turned off by repetition

or total volume of ads (if you can believe it), and campaigns get bangs for their bucks when running longer, larger TV buys.

Sigh. The study concludes TV ads can determine “both the ideological composition of Congress and state legislatures, as well as the policies governments actually enact.” So, where we are as a nation, with 85% of Americans telling Gallup pollsters they’re dissatisfied with the way things are going, is all TV’s fault?

No doubt some social scientists would say, “Throw in social media and, yeah, that’s about right.” Of course, there’s more to it. George Washington University’s associate political science professor Warshaw, one of the study’s authors, says TV ads matter a lot but probably less than “candidates’ characters, the economy or, this year, COVID.” Plus, he says, bigger ad buys in a presidential election probably provide only an advantage of about 1% of the vote. Not much, you say? So what, you say? Trump won Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin in 2016, each by less than 1%.

But wait. Hillary Clinton far outspent Trump on TV. At this point in that campaign, Trump’s TV spending totaled \$40 million, Clinton’s \$140 million. Ah, but the data firm mediaQuant, which tracks media coverage, reported Trump’s outsized personality and unconventional political style earned him free media coverage, especially from cable news, worth \$5 billion that year, more than twice the value of the coverage of Clinton. When I ask Warshaw if his metrics didn’t apply in 2016, he says, “I think they did. Clinton won the popular vote (by 2.8 million-plus votes, or 2% of the total). If she hadn’t spent so much on TV maybe she would have lost (the Electoral College) by more than she did.”

Finally, who’s watching traditional TV when ratings for everything from pro sports to award shows to talk shows are down? Well, data from Nielsen says not younger people. TV viewing by folks aged 18 to 34 dropped again this year, down to 97 minutes a day. Those aged 50-64 watch more than 5 hours a day; those 65 and older, more than 6 hours a day. Historically, older folks, a.k.a. TV watchers, vote in higher, often much higher, rates than younger folks. Says Warshaw, “If your ads are seen by older people, that’s not a bad group to reach.” – **John Baer’s column in *Harrisburg Patriot-News***



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