

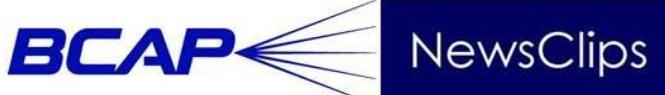
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June 16, 2020

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T-MobileUS Inc. users in several states reported problems making and receiving phone calls Monday, a widespread service disruption for the newly enlarged wireless provider. The network issues began in the afternoon at T-Mobile, which is taking early steps to integrate its April purchase of Sprint Corp. The transaction left the combined company with more than 100 million customers, including those running atop its infrastructure under other carriers' brands.

T-Mobile technology chief Neville Ray said in a tweet Monday afternoon that the carrier's engineers were "working to resolve a voice and data issue that has been affecting customers around the country," and apologized for the inconvenience. He didn't elaborate on the cause of the failure, which affected customers for several hours Monday. A company spokeswoman blamed the problem on a routing issue. Representatives of T-Mobile competitors AT&T Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc. reported no apparent problems with their networks, though some customers were unable to reach T-Mobile lines.

Separately on Monday, major T-Mobile shareholder SoftBank Group Corp. confirmed it is in talks to potentially sell most of its stake in the U.S. wireless company and give up board seats. The Wall Street Journal

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Philadelphia Inquirer
[Progressives notched some big wins in the Pennsylvania primary election](#)

Harrisburg Patriot-News
[Harrisburg may hire social workers, violence ‘interrupters’ with money from police budget: mayor](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer
[What Black Lives Matter protests in Pennsylvania’s ‘Trump Country’ mean for 2020](#)

reported in May that the [Japanese investor was in talks](#) to transfer some of its stake to controlling shareholder Deutsche Telekom AG. The Journal also reported [SoftBank was seeking buyers](#) for another \$20 billion of its T-Mobile shares. T-Mobile executives over the past two years touted their engineers' technical know-how as they sought regulators' approval to take over Sprint, arguing that their smooth [integration of MetroPCS was a model](#) for how to join two dissimilar networks.

Combining cellphone networks is a technically complex process that often saddles telecommunications companies with higher costs. Sprint's growth stumbled after it acquired rival Nextel Communications Inc. in 2005 and took nearly eight years to meld the two businesses. T-Mobile is planning a swifter timeline this summer for the shift of Sprint subscribers onto its network, clearing the way for the eventual decommissioning of older infrastructure. The company is also performing a nationwide upgrade to ultrafast fifth-generation, or 5G, standards using its own assets and some airwave licenses it acquired from Sprint.

T-Mobile's nationwide network also supports service from its Metro prepaid brand and customers at resellers such as TracFone, Mint and Consumer Cellular. On Monday, social-media users reported more problems with the T-Mobile brand's roughly 40 million phone lines than with service from Sprint or Metro. T-Mobile is planning to sell about nine million prepaid customers, mostly on Boost Mobile, to a new wireless network under construction by Dish Network Corp., though neither company had announced an agreement as of Monday evening.

Network improvements sometimes lead to widespread failures. Internet provider Time Warner Cable suffered a protracted blackout in 2014 after a routine maintenance procedure accidentally cut off more than 11 million customers. – [Wall Street Journal; in USA Today, Verizon and AT&T are OK](#)

By most conventional indicators, Donald Trump is in danger of becoming a one-term president. The economy is a wreck, the coronavirus persists, and his poll numbers have deteriorated.

But throughout the Republican Party's vast organization in the states, the operational approach to Trump's re-election campaign is hardening around a fundamentally different view. Interviews with more than 50 state, district and county Republican Party chairs depict a version of the electoral landscape that is no worse for Trump than six months ago — and possibly even slightly better. According to this view, the coronavirus is on its way out and the economy is coming back. Polls are unreliable, Joe Biden is too frail to last, and the media still doesn't get it.

"The more bad things happen in the country, it just solidifies support for Trump," said Phillip Stephens, GOP chairman in Robeson County, N.C., one of several rural counties in that swing state that shifted from supporting Barack Obama in 2012 to Trump in 2016. "We're calling him 'Teflon Trump.' Nothing's going to stick, because if anything, it's getting more exciting than it was in 2016." This year, Stephens said, "We're thinking landslide."

Five months before the election, many state and county Republican Party chairs predict a close election. Yet from the Eastern seaboard to the West Coast and the battlegrounds in between, there is an overriding belief that, just as Trump defied political gravity four years ago, there's no reason he won't do it again. Andrew Hitt, the state party chairman in Wisconsin, said that during the height of public attention on the coronavirus, in late March and early April, internal polling suggested "some sagging off where we wanted to be."

But now, he said, "Things are coming right back where we want them ... That focus on the economy and on re-opening and bringing America back is resonating with people." In Ohio, Jane Timken, the state party chair, said she

sees no evidence of support for Trump slipping. Jennifer Carnahan, the chairwoman of the Minnesota Republican Party, said the same. And Lawrence Tabas, the chairman of the Pennsylvania Republican Party, went so far as to predict that Trump would not only carry his state, but beat Biden by more than 100,000 votes — more than twice the margin he mustered in 2016. “Contrary to what may be portrayed in the media, there’s still a high level of support out there,” said Kyle Hupfer, chairman of the Indiana Republican Party. He described himself as “way more” optimistic than he was at this point in 2016.

The Republican Party apparatus that Trump heads in 2020 is considerably different than the one that looked at him warily in 2016. At the state level, many chairs who were considered insufficiently committed to the president were ousted and replaced with loyalists. But their assessments would be easier to dismiss as spin if the perception of Trump’s durability did not reach so far beyond GOP officialdom. When pollsters ask Americans who they think will win the election — not who they are voting for themselves — Trump performs relatively well. And if anything, Trump’s field officers appear more bullish than Trump and some of his advisers. Even the president, while lamenting what he views as unfair treatment by his adversaries, has privately expressed concerns about his poll numbers and publicly seemed to acknowledge he is down. “If I wasn’t constantly harassed for three years by fake and illegal investigations, Russia, Russia, Russia, and the Impeachment Hoax, I’d be up by 25 points on Sleepy Joe and the Do Nothing Democrats,” he said on Twitter last week. “Very unfair, but it is what it is!!!”

Yet in the states, the Republican Party’s rank-and-file are largely unconvinced that the president is precariously positioned in his reelection bid. “The narrative from the Beltway is not accurate,” said Joe Bush, chairman of the Republican Party in Muskegon County, Mich., which Trump lost narrowly in 2016. “Here in the heartland, everybody is still very confident, more than ever.”

At the center of the disconnect between Trump loyalists’ assessment of the state of the race and the one based on public opinion polls is a distrust of polling itself. Republicans see an industry that maliciously oversamples Democrats or under-samples the white, non-college educated voters who are most likely to support Trump. They say it is hard to know who likely voters are this far from the election. And like many Democrats, they suspect Trump supporters disproportionately hang up on pollsters, under-counting his level of support.

Ted Lovdahl, chairman of the Republican Party in Minnesota’s 8th Congressional District, said he has friends who will tell pollsters “just exactly the opposite of what they feel.” When he asked one of them why, his friend told him, “I don’t like some of their questions. It’s none of their business what I do.” Recalling that polls four years ago failed to predict the outcome, Jack Brill, acting chairman of the local Republican Party in Sarasota County, Fla., said, “I used to be an avid poll watcher until 2016 ... Guess what? I’m not watching polls.”

Instead, as they prepare for a post-lockdown summer of party picnics and parades, Republican Party organizers sense the beginnings of an economic recovery that, if sustained, is likely to power Trump to a second term. They also see a more immediate opening in the civil unrest surrounding the death of George Floyd. When pollsters ask Americans who they think will win the election — not who they are voting for themselves — Trump performs relatively well.

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Instead, as they prepare for a post-lockdown summer of party picnics and parades, Republican Party organizers sense the beginnings of an economic recovery that, if sustained, is likely to power Trump to a second term. They also see a more immediate opening in the civil unrest surrounding the death of George Floyd. Biden has rejected a national movement to defund police departments. But elections are often painted in broad strokes, and local party officials expect Trump — with his law and order rhetoric — will be the beneficiary of what they see as Democratic overreach. "The other side is overplaying its hand, going down roads like defunding the police and nonsense like that," said Michael Burke, chairman of the Republican Party in Pinal County, Arizona, a Trump stronghold in 2016. "Most of the American people are looking like that saying, 'Really?'"

By most objective measures, Trump will need something to drag Biden down. He has fallen behind Biden in most swing state polls, and he lags the former vice president nationally by more than 8 percentage points, according to the RealClearPolitics polling average. A Gallup poll last week put Trump's approval rating at just 39 percent, down 10 percentage points from a month ago. Democrats appear competitive not only in expected swing states, but in places such as Iowa and Ohio, which Trump won easily in 2016. Little of that data is registering, however. State and local officials point to Trump's financial and organizational advantages and see Biden as a weak opponent. They're eager for Trump to eviscerate him in debates. "While the Democrats have been spending their time playing Paper Rock Scissors on who their nominee is going to be, we've been building an army," said Terry Lathan, chair of the Alabama Republican Party.

James Dickey, chairman of the Texas Republican Party, said it took Biden "days to figure out how to even successfully operate, or communicate out of a bunker" and that he "has clearly not been able to deal with any real challenging interview." Local officials brush off criticism of Trump by Republican fixtures such as former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who said last week that Trump "lies all the time." They dismiss press accounts of the race. Dennis Coxwell, the chairman of Georgia's Warren County Republican Party, said: "It's gotten to a point where I cannot believe anything that the news media says."

Many admire Trump's bluntest instincts — the same ones that have cost him among women and independent voters, according to polls. "The left called George Bush all kinds of names and just savaged him all the time ... and Bush

never said a word," said Burke, who worked for Trump in the late 1980s and early 1990s overseeing his fleet of helicopters. "It was frustrating for those of us on the right. Now a guy comes along, you attack him, you're getting it back double barrel. And everybody's sitting around saying, 'Yeah, that's right, give it to 'em.'"

And most of all, they put their confidence in an expectation that the economy will improve by fall. Doyle Webb, chairman of the Arkansas Republican Party and general counsel to the Republican National Committee, said the only concern that he would have about Trump's reelection prospects is "if the economy had another downturn." "But I don't see that happening," Webb said. Instead, he predicted an improving job outlook and a return to "the old Clinton mantra: 'It's the economy, stupid.'" "I think that people will be happy," Webb said, "and [Trump] will be re-elected."

It's a widely-held view. In Pennsylvania last week, Veral Salmon, the Republican Party chairman of the state's bellwether Erie County, measured enthusiasm for Trump by the large number of requests he has received for Trump yard signs. In Maine, Melvin Williams, chairman of the Lincoln County Republican Committee, saw it in a population he said is "getting sick of this bullshit," blaming coronavirus-related shutdowns on Democrats. And across the country, in heavily Democratic San Francisco, John Dennis, the chairman of the local GOP, was encouraged by the decreasing number of emails from the "Never Trump" crowd. Not in his city, but nationally, Dennis said, "I'm pretty confident that [Trump] is going to pull it off." -- *Politico*



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