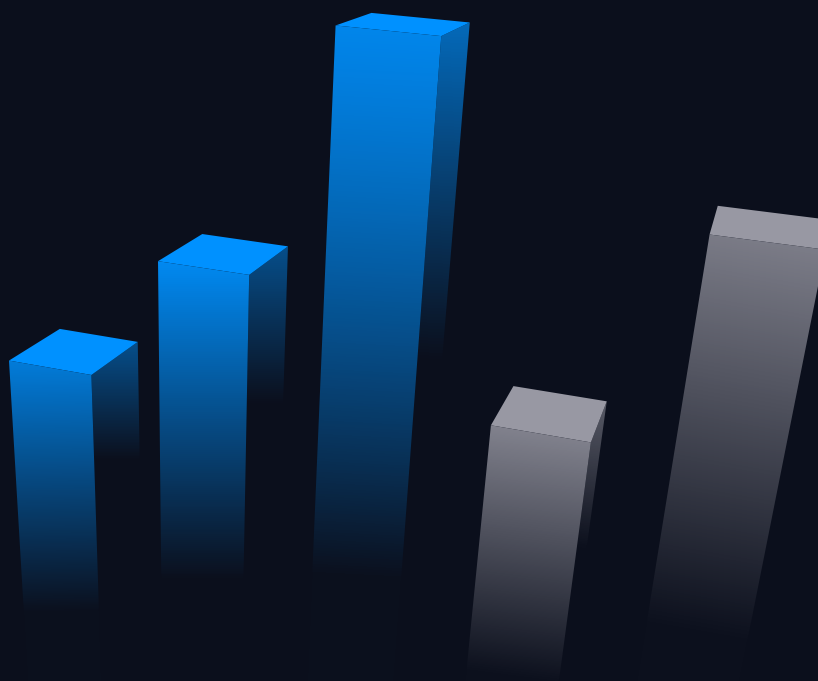RoboKiller

Spam call and text protection service

The Political Message Report
2021 MID-YEAR REVIEW

RoboKiller

THE STATE OF THE POLITICAL ROBOCALL

TOTAL

852,000,000
Total political robocalls in 2020

427,000,000
Total year to date political robocalls in 2021

ROBOCALLS BY PARTY

661,000,000
Total Republican robocalls in 2020

247,000,000
Total year to date Republican robocalls in 2021

190,000,000
Total Democratic robocalls in 2020

150,000,000
Total year to date Democratic robocalls in 2021

2020 POLITICAL ROBOCALLS IN REVIEW

2020 was a record-breaking year in many areas of American politics, and political messaging was no exception. RoboKiller's Political Message Insights, the first-ever political robocall and text trend monitoring system, observed all-time highs of political robocalls in the months leading up to the 2020 presidential election. In fact, Americans received more than 520 million political robocalls from June to December 2020—an estimated average of 75 million per month.

Campaign dialing has long been a political campaign strategy. However, robocalling has become a key means of generating voter support, particularly in the midst of a global pandemic. Both political parties and other associated political organizations took to the phones in droves and expanded their robocall strategies beyond landline robocalls (which are less regulated by the FTC) to smartphones in attempts to widen their reach. This resulted in 852 million political robocalls being placed to American smartphones in 2020.

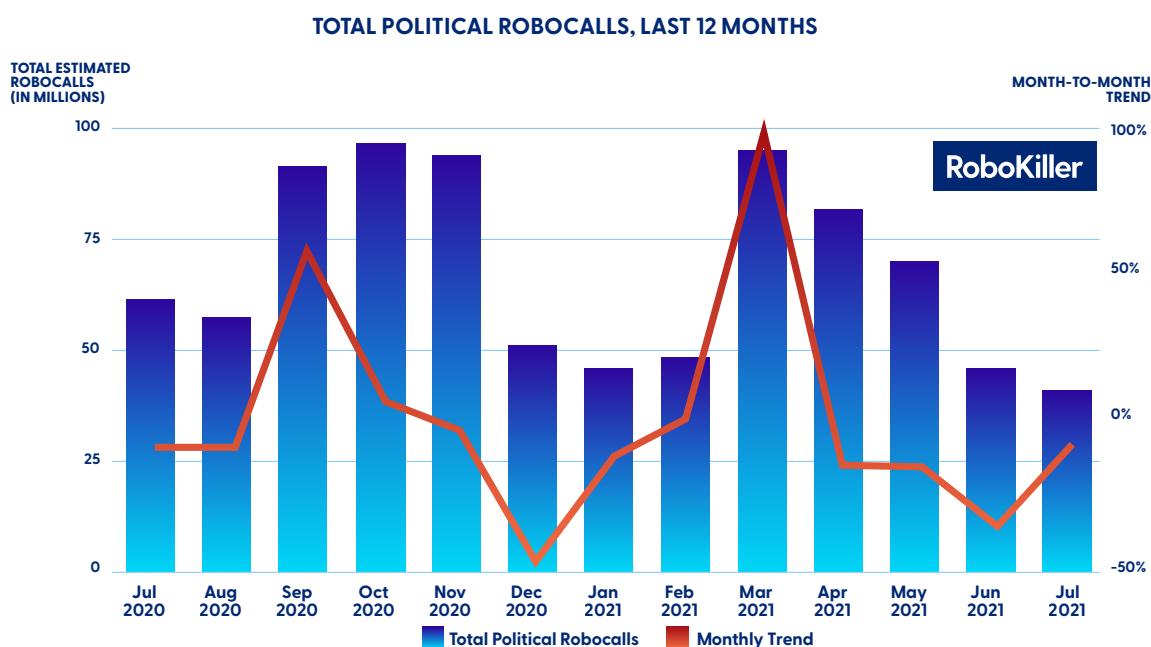> ▶ LISTEN TO A REPUBLICAN ROBOCALL RECORDING

> ▶ LISTEN TO A DEMOCRATIC ROBOCALL RECORDING

THE FRONT LINES OF THE ROBOCALL CAMPAIGN TRAIL

TOTAL POLITICAL ROBOCALLS, LAST 12 MONTHS

Total Political Robocalling Efforts Picked Up in June 2020 and Remained Elevated Post-Election

Political robocalls began making their biggest waves in June 2020 as Election Day came into sight. Unsurprisingly, total political robocalls reached their peak of 110 million total estimated robocalls in October 2020. With mail-in voting delays, recounts, and other factors

that extended the public's attention to the presidential election results, political robocall traffic remained elevated in the months following Election Day. November 2020's political robocall totals fell just 10% shy of meeting October's peak levels, indicating robocalling was used to perpetuate voter support after the polls had closed.

2021's Political Robocalls Continue at Lower, But More Steady Monthly Levels

So far in 2021, Americans have received an estimated 427 million political robocalls—about 50% of last year's 852 million estimated total. If these trends hold for the remainder of the year, Americans are likely to receive 625 million total political robocalls in 2021—a 26% decrease from 2020.

Steadfast Republican Robocall Efforts Attempted to Boost Early Poll Ratings in 2020

In the 6 months leading up to the election, Republicans more consistently utilized robocalls than Democrats. We suspect the timing of this trend may have been an effort to help boost the Republican party's poll ratings and projections in late summer of 2020.

**TOTAL REPUBLICAN POLITICAL ROBOCALLS, LAST 12 MONTHS**
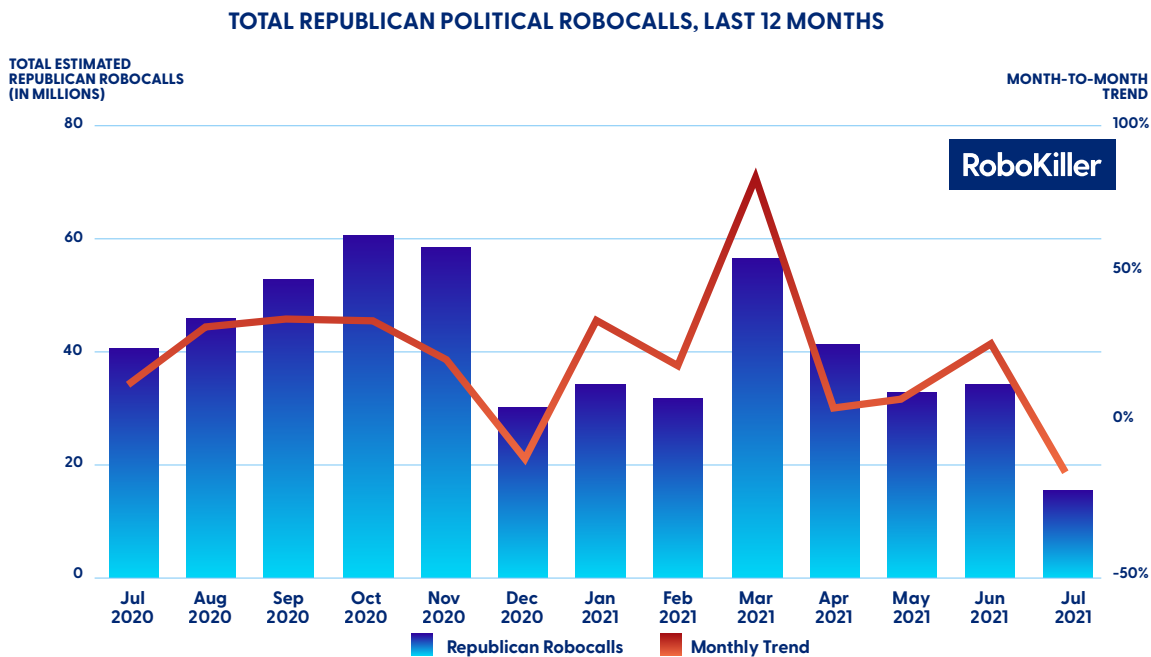
As expected, estimated Republican robocall totals reached their peak in October 2020 leading up to Election Day. They remained at similar but slightly lower levels in November 2020, as the party's focus shifted to election results.

2021 Looks a Bit More Volatile

Republican robocall trends in early 2021 have reflected a more inconsistent focus on robocalling as a voter support and donation channel than in 2020. This could be because political texts have proved to be a more successful approach in driving desired voter action.

Democrats Late But Quick to Catch Up in 2020

Although estimated Democratic robocall efforts never reached the same levels as Republicans in 2020, Democrats increased their focus on political robocalling as Election Day neared. Democratic robocalls peaked at 37 million in September 2020, up from their lowest point in August 2020 of just 11 million. However, even at their highest levels, 2020 Democratic political robocall efforts remained approximately 40% below Republicans.

TOTAL DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL ROBOCALLS, LAST 12 MONTHS
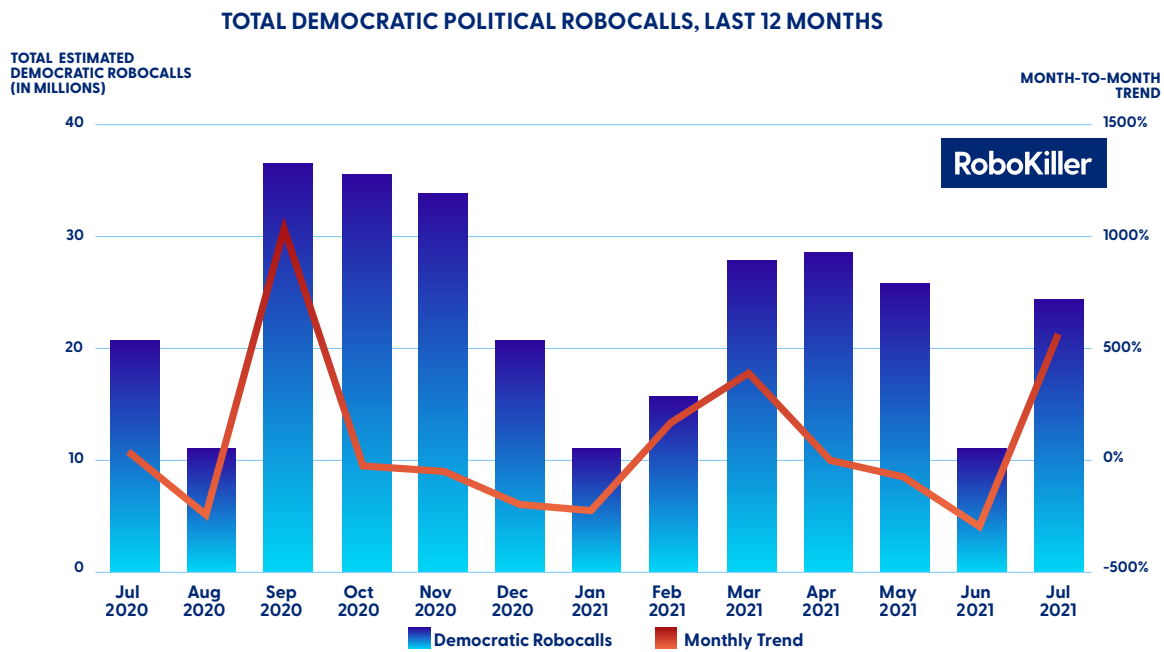
Democrats Are More Focused in 2021

Steadier monthly Democratic robocall trends in 2021 indicate political robocalling will continue to expand as a core campaign strategy for Democratic organizations.
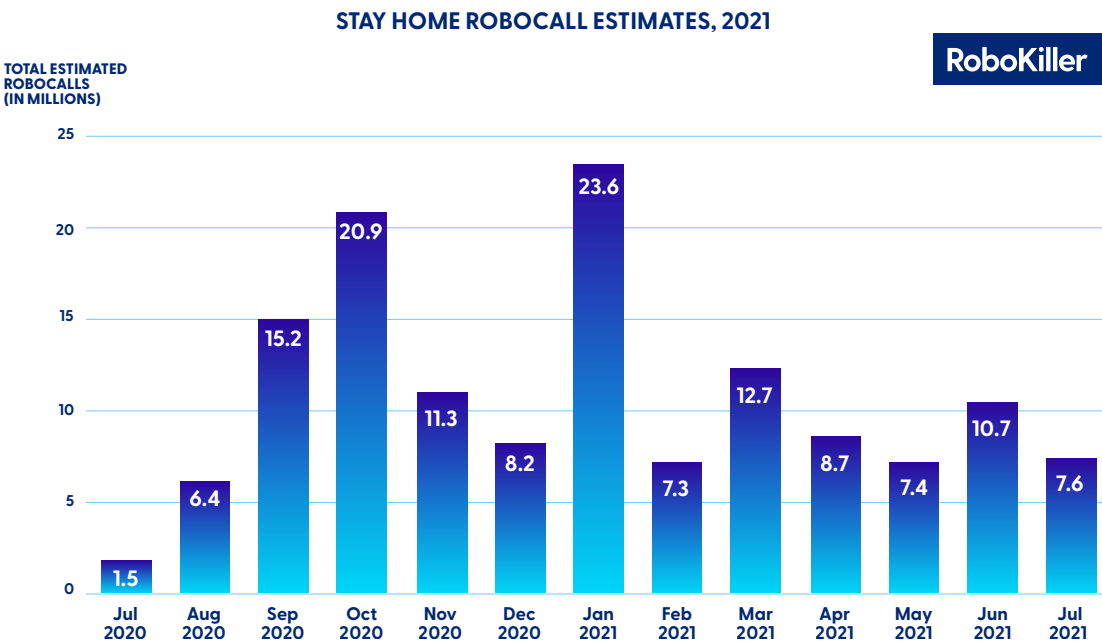
POLITICAL ROBOCALLING AND MISINFORMATION

In any large-scale communication platform, misinformation is a concern. It may come as no surprise then that misinformation made its way into political robocalling during the 2020 presidential election. Most of the robocall misinformation trends observed by or blocked by RoboKiller demonstrated a highly targeted strategy by those placing the robocalls, such as the misinformation robocalls reported in Detroit. (A pair of conservative operatives were charged in connection to false robocalls designed to dissuade residents in the majority-Black and Democratic-leaning city from voting by mail.) This limited and small-scale approach demonstrated progress in the industry's ability to report, trace, and reprimand bad actors who use political robocalls for harm.

However, there was one widespread robocall that made its way to international headlines on Election Day and the days leading up to it: The "Stay Home" robocall. First blocked by RoboKiller in December 2019, the 13-second robocall recording urged recipients to "stay safe, stay home" in a computer-generated voice. As the robocall received more national media attention in the days leading up to the election, RoboKiller observed a large increase in the number of these calls placed. On Election Day, RoboKiller estimated the "Stay Home" robocall was made over 3.7 million times.
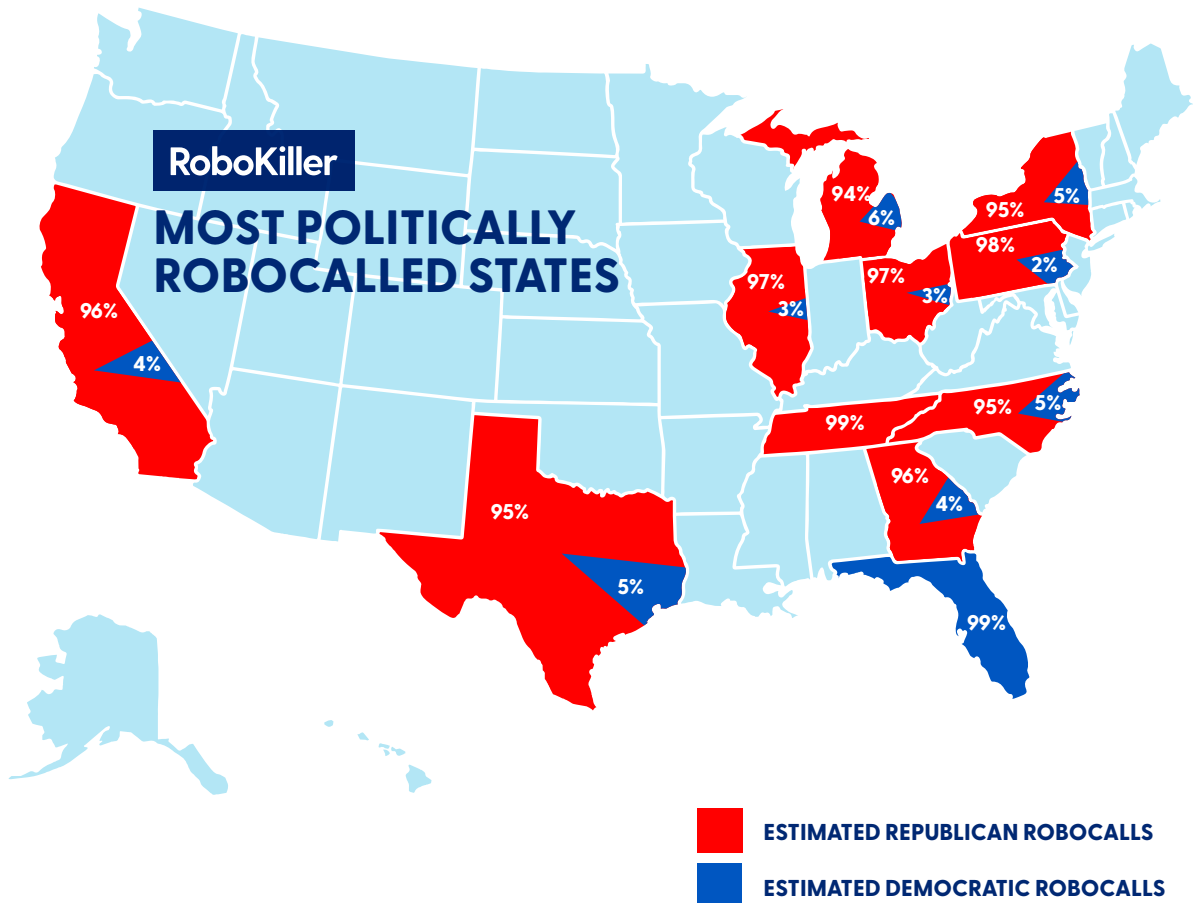
▶ LISTEN TO THE "STAY HOME" ROBOCALL BLOCKED BY ROBOKILLER

Because this robocall was recorded in RoboKiller's database starting in 2019, we expect its original intent was not to intimidate voters. Short robocalls of this nature are often used for "prospecting" by scammers aiming to identify active phone numbers to target again with real phone scams. The robocall likely took on a life of its own following widespread media attention. In 2021 to date, we've observed a much higher volume of this robocall when compared to the same timeframe last year (January - July). These trends confirm the most likely intention of this robocall is to continue to prospect for active phone numbers that scammers can target at a later time.

STAY HOME ROBOCALL ESTIMATES, 2021

RoboKiller

TOTAL ESTIMATED
ROBOCALLS
(IN MILLIONS)

Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021	May 2021	Jun 2021	Jul 2021
1.5	6.4	15.2	20.9	11.3	8.2	23.6	7.3	12.7	8.7	7.4	10.7	7.6

THE 10 MOST POLITICALLY ROBOCALLED STATES

Year to date, Texas, California, Florida, and Georgia are estimated to be the most politically robocalled states. This is largely driven by post-election political events such as the Georgia runoff elections in January 2021, campaign efforts to generate awareness on certain policies such as Georgia and Texas voting rights laws, and an increased effort by the Democratic party to generate voter support in regions such as Texas and Florida that showed some increases in voter turnout during the 2020 election.

RoboKiller
MOST POLITICALLY ROBOCALLED STATES

■ ESTIMATED REPUBLICAN ROBOCALLS
■ ESTIMATED DEMOCRATIC ROBOCALLS

2021 Year To Date Estimated Totals

STATE	ESTIMATED REPUBLICAN	STATE	ESTIMATED DEMOCRATIC
TX	22,798,914	TX	1,020,736
CA	23,798,295	CA	859,726
GA	14,189,865	FL	631,270
OH	10,362,962	NY	520,672
NY	9,962,113	GA	476,922
IL	9,052,771	OH	429,599
NC	8,492,941	NC	371,575
PA	8,084,382	MI	358,884
TN	7,114,713	PA	355,901
MI	6,666,201	IL	349,384

THE STATE OF POLITICAL TEXTS

TOTAL

18,500,000,000
Total political texts in 2020

5,400,000,000
Year to date political texts in 2021

13,000,000,000
Total Republican texts in 2020

3,700,000,000
Total year to date Republican texts in 2021

5,500,000,000
Total Democratic texts in 2020

1,700,000,000
Total year to date Democratic texts in 2021

TEXTS BY PARTY

WAS THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE WON VIA TEXT MESSAGE?

Though political text messaging likely was not the deciding factor for most voters, the use of political texting as a core campaign and fundraising strategy took off in the 2020 election cycle. RoboKiller estimates that Americans received more than 18.5 billion political text messages between January and December 2020. COVID-19's impacts on traditional in-person campaign tactics drove a much larger emphasis on digital communication and touchpoints for both political parties (even if it meant working around some loopholes in the FCC's regulations).
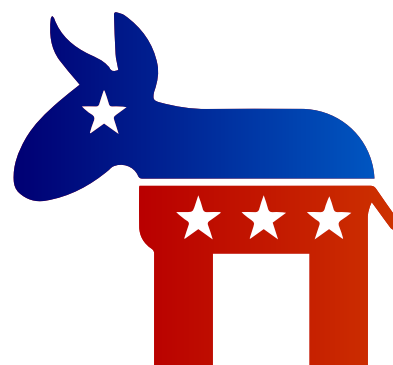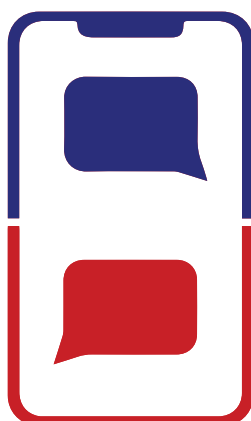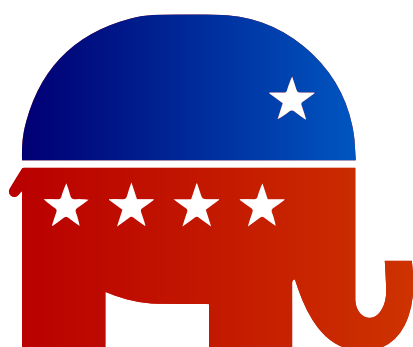
2020

Pres. Trump: I need YOU to defend America! We can't let Dems undermine our election....

Joe Biden Campaign Update: We set a HUGE goal to hit before tomorrow night and every dollar of it will be raised online...

The Radical Left tried to STEAL the Election for BIDEN! Pres Trump needs you to keep fighting for every LEGAL ballot to be counted.

This election will determine our country's future. You've already made your voice heard. Now, reply GOTV to find the best way to help...

2021

Pres Trump: I need you, friend. We have a CRITICAL fundraising deadline coming up...

Joe Biden here! Kamala launched the DNC's I Will Vote initiative to protect the vote. Can you chip in your first $10 to the DNC?

[The use of peer-to-peer text messaging](#) has accelerated this paradigm shift and served as a way for parties to reach voters on a more personal level—whether they like it or not. Peer-to-peer texting is defined as when a volunteer (as opposed to an autodialer) initiates a conversation with a potential voter or supporter via text. Because the FCC regulates the ability to send text messages from an autodialer to a smartphone without prior consent under the [Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA)](#), peer-to-peer texting is a legal loophole to reach voters who may not have consented to receiving text messages from that organization. New peer-to-peer texting technology has made it easier for campaigners to send individual text messages in large quantities without needing to obtain prior consent, essentially creating a new autodialing system without breaking the current TCPA laws around autodialers. By October 2020, peer-to-peer texting accounted for 1.9 billion of the 4.4 billion political text total—roughly 40% of all political text messages.

THE FRONT LINES OF THE TEXT CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Political Texts Reached Unprecedented Levels In Late 2020; Rivaling Spam Text Levels

[Between June to November 2020](#), Americans received an estimated 14.9 billion political text messages, growing by an average monthly rate of nearly 45%. In September 2020, estimated political texts equaled the amount of all other types of spam texts combined in the United States, with both reaching approximately 5 billion total.

TOTAL POLITICAL TEXTS, LAST 12 MONTHS
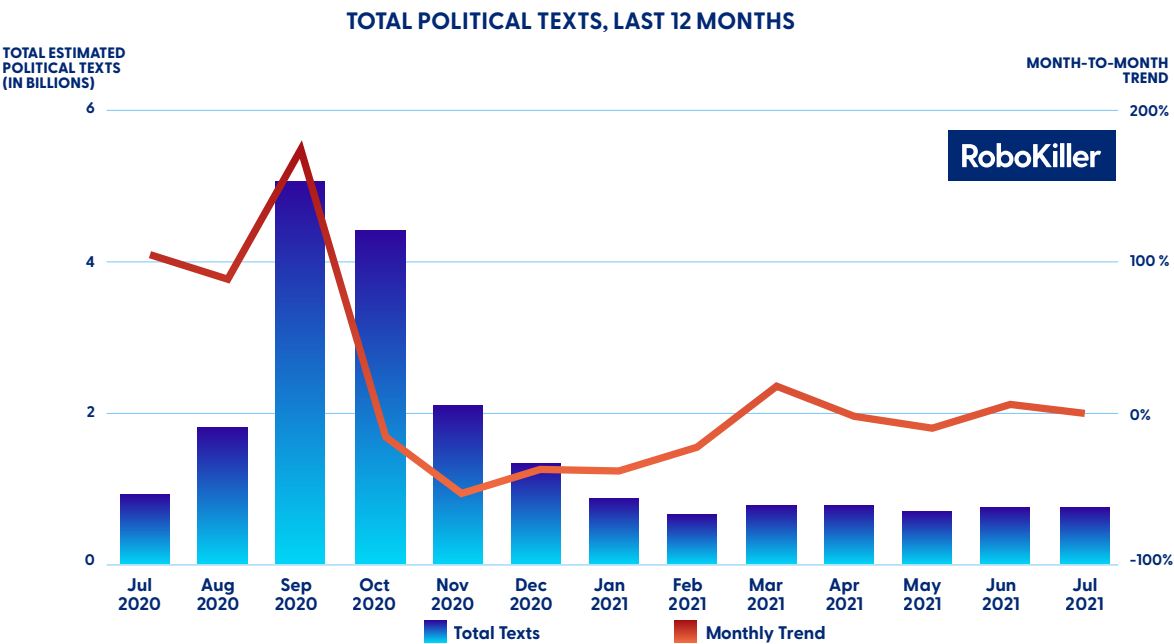
Political Texts Have Remained at Late 2020 Levels Year to Date
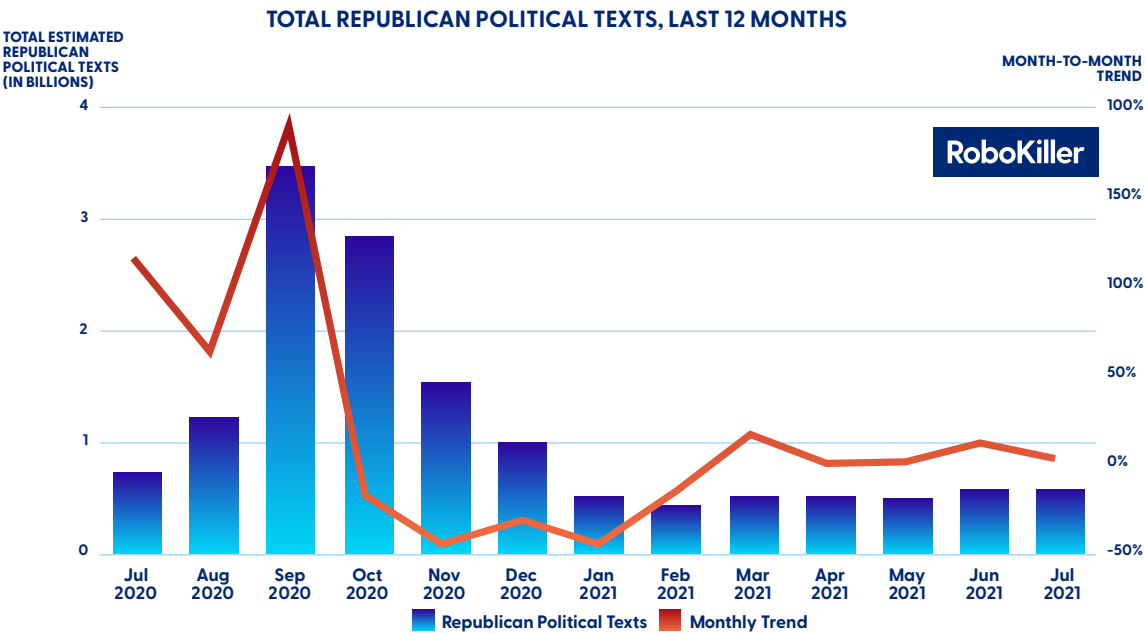
From December 2020 to May 2021, political text messages slowed by an average of 11% per month. Our estimates for July 2021 project Americans received 780 million total political texts, a 20% decrease from the same time last year. These trends indicate that political messages are still being used to influence state and local elections, maintain and progress voter support for political parties or policies, and generate campaign donations on an ongoing basis — but on a smaller scale.

Republicans Consistently Exceeded Democratic Political Text Efforts

Throughout 2020, Republican political message monthly totals exceeded Democratic text message efforts by an average of 2 to 1. Total estimated Republican political texts reached their highest levels in September 2020 at 3.5 billion estimated political texts.

Something to Show For It

These efforts paid off. In October 2020, WinRed, a large Republican fundraising organization and platform that accounted for a large portion of political message traffic observed by RoboKiller, announced that it had generated $1B in donations since its launch just 15 months prior. Though WinRed and similar organizations across the aisle use multiple channels to source voter donations, the sheer volume of estimated political texts indicates that political texting plays a critical role in achieving donor milestones.

TOTAL ESTIMATED REPUBLICAN POLITICAL TEXTS (IN BILLIONS)

TOTAL REPUBLICAN POLITICAL TEXTS, LAST 12 MONTHS

MONTH-TO-MONTH TREND

RoboKiller

■ **Republican Political Texts** ■ **Monthly Trend**

## Republicans Will Maintain a Steady Pace For The Rest Of The Year

If year to date trends continue, Republican political text messages are projected to reach 6.5 billion by the end of 2021—a significant decrease from 2020. Republicans continue to be active in campaign efforts surrounding new presidential cabinet policies, as well as ongoing campaign efforts to maintain and expand voter support and donations.

Democratic Text Trends Reflect a Late But Quick Recovery

By summer 2020, Democrats trailed Republicans' political texting efforts to the tune of 500 million texts per month. However, by September 2020, Democrats narrowed their 65% gap to less than 50%, reaching political text totals in the billions in just two short months.

Proving a Smaller, But Mighty Political Text Strategy

Similar to WinRed, ActBlue—a large Democratic fundraising organization also observed by RoboKiller to be a large contributor to political text totals—announced remarkable donation milestones in October 2020, having generated $1.5 billion in donations in just three months. Based on fundraising and political text trends, we continue to believe political text messaging will play a critical role in campaign fundraising strategy in the United States moving forward.

TOTAL DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL TEXTS, LAST 12 MONTHS
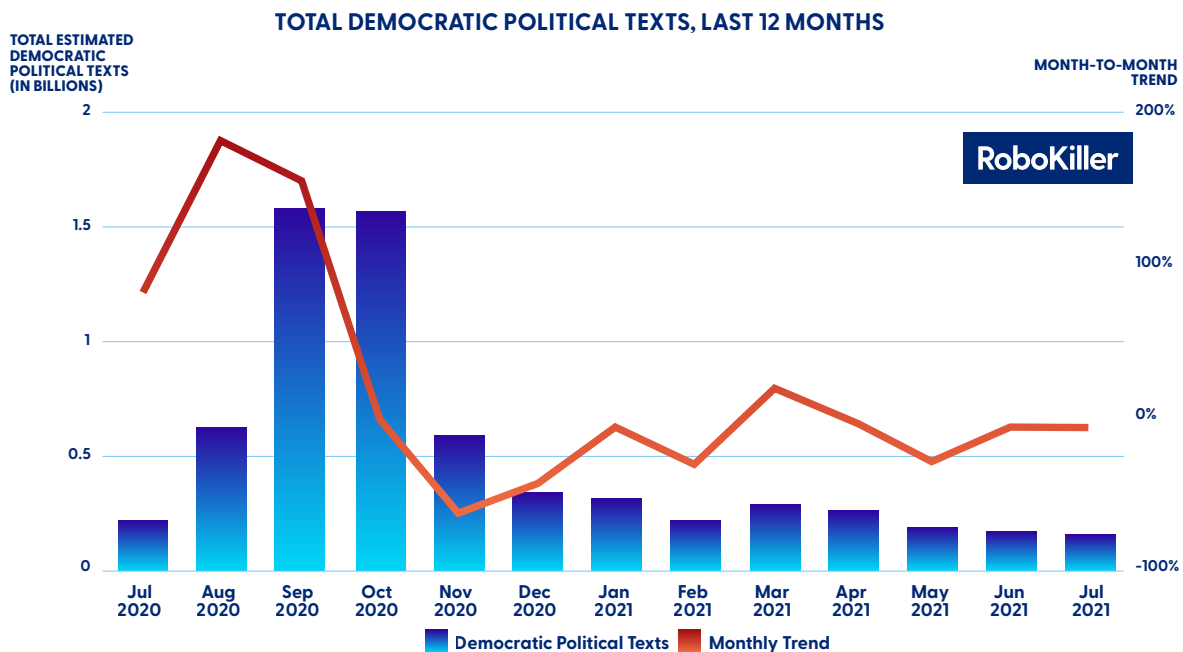
Democrats Will Continue to Favor a More Burst-Based Approach

If similar trends continue for the rest of the year, Democratic political text messages are projected to reach 2.3 billion by the end of 2021, a significant decrease from 2020. This year-over-year decrease is unsurprising given the Democratic party presently holds the majority.

POLITICAL TEXTING AND MISINFORMATION

RoboKiller observed that texting was used more often than robocalling to spread misinformation in the most recent presidential election cycle. Similar to robocalls, most of the misinformation texts RoboKiller identified were highly targeted to specific areas or voter demographics—and in some cases both. Many voters, media outlets, and third parties such as RoboKiller worked diligently to prevent misinformation from becoming widespread.

In 2021 to date, RoboKiller has identified very few reports of misinformation political texts (including texts about the COVID-19 vaccine). However, this doesn't mean misinformation on this platform is gone for good. To ensure political text misinformation does not become commonplace in future elections, a continued collective effort is needed from the media, carriers and networks, and third-party apps like RoboKiller. Together, we can help prevent misinformation from becoming a larger problem within political messaging.

THE 10 MOST POLITICALLY TEXTED STATES

California, New York, Texas, and Florida are projected to be the most politically texted states in the U.S. in 2021. California, Texas, and Florida have shown steady trends year to date as parties continue to focus on expanding voter support in these key states. Following New York City's mayoral election in June 2021, New York climbed to second place. New York residents saw a 30% growth in average estimated monthly political texts from May to June 2021.
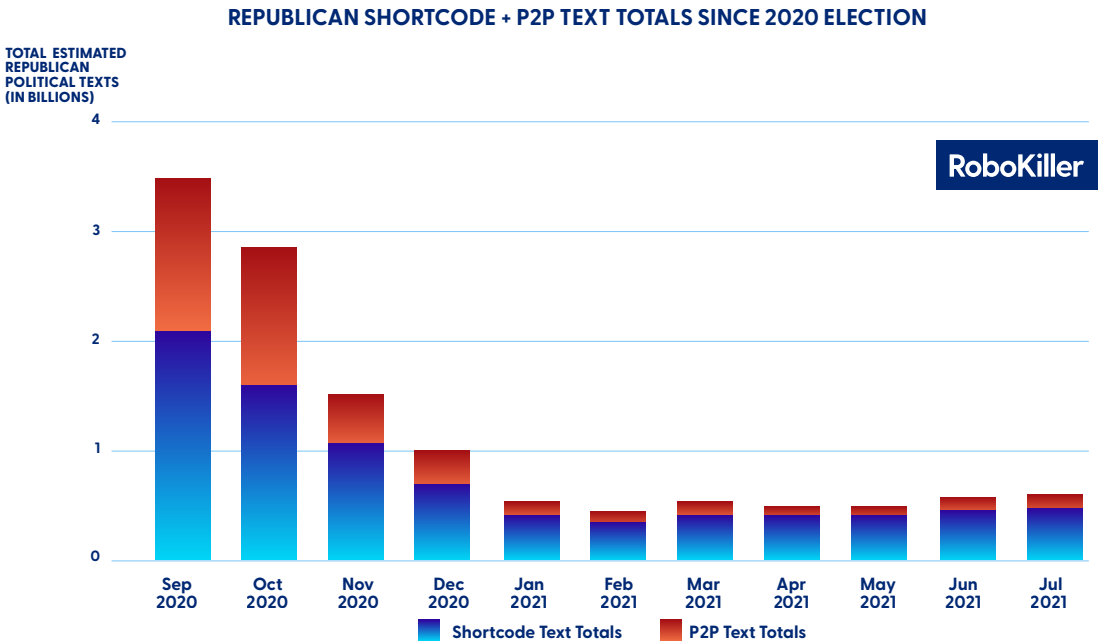

RoboKiller

MOST POLITICALLY TEXTED STATES

ESTIMATED REPUBLICAN TEXTS

ESTIMATED DEMOCRATIC TEXTS
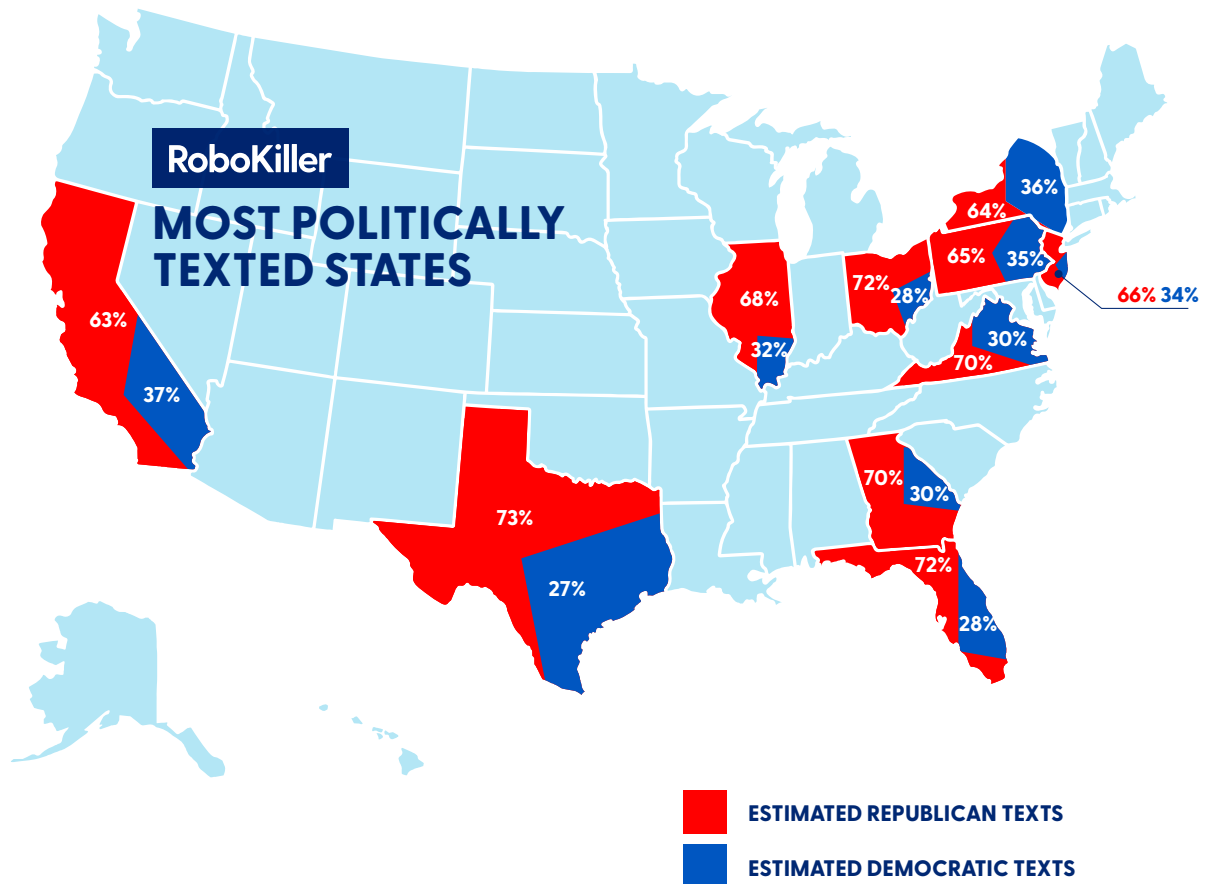
2021 Year To Date Estimated Totals

STATE	ESTIMATED REPUBLICAN TEXTS
TX	57,037,703
CA	48,596,375
NY	47,649,425
FL	32,964,597
OH	27,021,290
PA	18,579,671
IL	16,675,181
GA	16,096,370
VA	15,561,204
NJ	14,343,808

STATE	ESTIMATED DEMOCRATIC TEXTS
CA	28,395,174
NY	26,801,871
TX	20,811,777
FL	12,825,504
OH	10,375,591
PA	9,730,546
IL	7,589,991
NJ	7,316,384
VA	6,738,335
GA	6,714,266

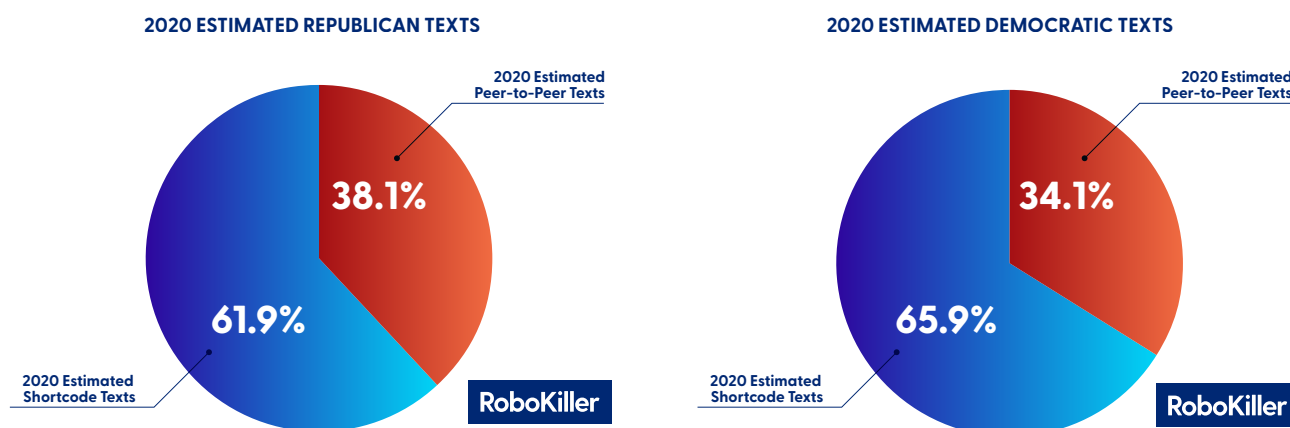# SHORTCODE AND PEER-TO-PEER TEXTING ACTIVITY

Peer-to-peer texting played a prominent role in driving record-setting political text message levels in the months leading up to the 2020 presidential election. Because peer-to-peer texting is largely driven by volunteers sending personal text messages, the distribution of peer-to-peer texting has decreased in the months following the election as manpower has decreased. At its peak in October 2020, peer-to-peer represented 40% of total political text messages. By December 2020, peer-to-peer fell to just 25% of estimated political texts.

Both Republicans and Democrats saw an influx of peer-to-peer texting in the homestretch of the campaign. Between September and November 2020, peer-to-peer texting accounted for 37% of Republican and 34% of Democratic political texts. These figures plummeted to 17% and 25%, respectively, in July of 2021—unsurprising given that peer-to-peer texting is fueled by volunteers seeking donations on behalf of their preferred candidate. In a non-election cycle, these numbers are bound to decrease.

DEMOCRATIC SHORTCODE + P2P TEXT TOTALS SINCE 2020 ELECTION

REPUBLICAN SHORTCODE + P2P TEXT TOTALS SINCE 2020 ELECTION

2020 ESTIMATED REPUBLICAN TEXTS

2020 Estimated
Peer-to-Peer Texts

38.1%

61.9%

2020 Estimated
Shortcode Texts

RoboKiller

2020 ESTIMATED DEMOCRATIC TEXTS

2020 Estimated
Peer-to-Peer Texts

34.1%

65.9%

2020 Estimated
Shortcode Texts

RoboKiller
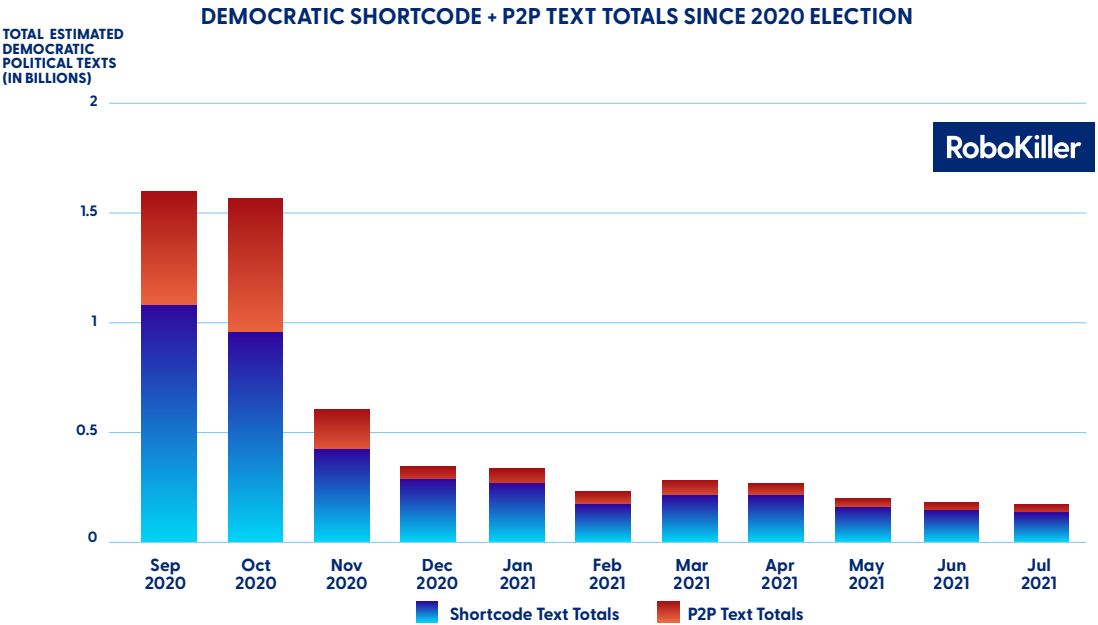
WHAT ARE SHORTCODE POLITICAL TEXT MESSAGES?

In 2012, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) announced that political campaigns could make use of SMS marketing to raise campaign funds. The Commission approved a proposed service that would allow certain political organizations to obtain a premium shortcode for receiving contributions by text message. Shortcodes are 5 or 6 digit phone numbers used by political campaigns to send and receive text messages soliciting campaign donations. They first emerged in the 2012 presidential election, then again in 2016 and 2020—each time on a larger scale.

To obtain a shortcode, a political party or organization must apply for one with phone providers that offer and process political shortcode donations. Campaigns often promote these shortcodes as a call to action (a user can text a keyword to donate a certain amount of money). If a voter texts this shortcode to donate, their phone provider adds the donation amount to the voter's next phone bill and processes the campaign donation to the campaign organization for a fee. Shortcodes are also regulated under the TCPA. Opt-in consent is required to be collected in order to send continued political promotional messages, which is often provided when a voter first texts the shortcode to donate. Opt-out consent must be provided by replying with a keyword such as "STOP." Read more about peer-to-peer and shortcode political texting here.

In response to the explosion of spam and political texts in the past 12 months, some major carriers such as T-Mobile and AT&T have implemented changes to help thwart unwanted text messages, even political ones. The changes—called "10DLC" for the 10-digit long codes that high-volume businesses and apps use to text local numbers—require high-volume text purveyors to register with the Campaign Registry as of March 2020. Carriers can now impose higher messaging fees on any businesses, campaigns, and other mass texting efforts that don't file with the Registry. In some cases, carriers can block them from delivering messages altogether. Although this change may help to slow mass texting to some degree, there are potential drawbacks: it could contribute to a "pay-for-play" political environment and even prevent smaller political organizations from being able to campaign at the same level as larger operations that are better funded.

2021's TOP 10 MOST ACTIVE POLITICAL SHORTCODES

SHORTCODE	REGISTERED TO*	ESTIMATED YTD TEXTS	EST. MONTHLY SENDS 2021
55404	NRSC ALERTS	98,074,286	16,345,714
80810	RNC ALERTS	66,840,103	11,140,017
88022	TRUMP ALERTS PROGRAM	57,533,781	9,588,964
58606	NGGW STATUS ALERTS	41,344,829	6,890,805
49400	PAC	21,567,515	3,594,586
39747	NEWSMAX	20,845,686	3,474,281
43367	DNC ALERTS	19,810,585	3,301,764
47682	TARGETED VICTORY ALERTS	14,640,714	2,440,119
43700	DCCC ALERTS	13,675,297	2,279,216
31033	PROGRESSIVE	13,211,670	2,201,945

Political shortcode registrants were confirmed using the US Shortcode Directory.

HOW CAN AMERICANS UNSUBSCRIBE FROM CAMPAIGN MESSAGES?

Though Americans are enjoying fewer total political messages than in 2020, that doesn't mean 2021's projected 10.6 billion political robocalls and texts are welcomed by voters. Political messages are not illegal, but they are undoubtedly a nuisance: in certain periods of the past 12 months, they have reached levels comparable with spam calls and texts. These concerning levels of political messaging combined with unclear tools to stop unwanted messages may leave consumers feeling helpless in their quest to control who can contact them.

To unsubscribe from unwanted political messages, we suggest taking the following steps:

- Reply "STOP" or ask to be removed from the campaign's list.

- Contact the campaign organization directly and ask to be removed. You can do this by calling or emailing the campaign.

- Download a call blocking app such as RoboKiller to stop a large percentage of political messages, rather than block phone numbers manually.

MEET ROBOKILLER

RoboKiller
## Good calls only.

RoboKiller gives you the power to control who can and can't contact you, so you can live life spam-call-free™

Political messages can be tricky, and at times unwanted. The desire to support your political party can be difficult to balance alongside your desire to not be interrupted.

At RoboKiller, we think you should have a say in **every** phone call and text you receive. That's why we offer the ability for you to customize what you do and don't want blocked.

RoboKiller's algorithm employs a level of democracy to block unwanted political messages. You tell RoboKiller what you'd like to block and provide feedback to help train RoboKiller over time. And, for any political message that gets enough negative votes among the RoboKiller community, RoboKiller will ensure it never reaches your phone in the first place. So you get all the political messages you want, and none that you don't.
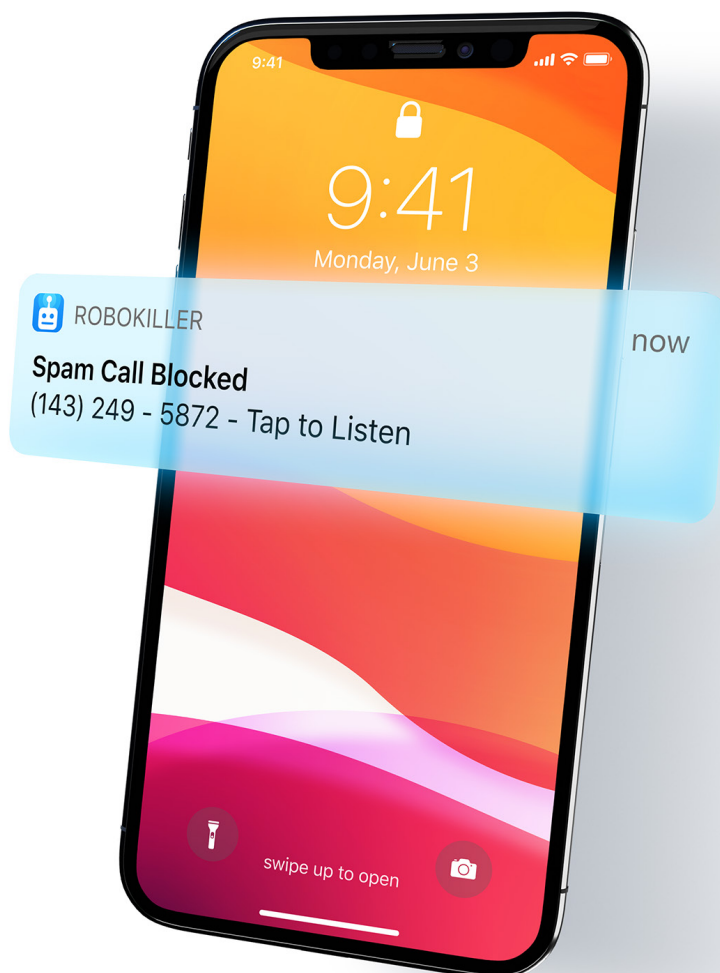
Only get the political messages you want, and eliminate 99% of spam calls and texts with RoboKiller now! Try 7-days risk-free today.

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

BBB ACCREDITED BUSINESS