

Are political texts flooding your phone? Here's why and how to stop them

March 4 2020, by Jazmin Goodwin



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Political groups have been revving up their outreach efforts to reach voters and texting has been all the rage. But for some people, the bombardment of political texts has become as much of a nuisance as

robocalls.

"First it was Brittany, then it was Craig and finally Curt," Aron Early, 39, an educator based in Bothell, Washington, recalls of his experience with political texts. The texts, all from the same number, were about building a movement for Bernie Sanders. Early says he was befuddled on how they got his number in the first place and responded only to find out why.

"I don't feel comfortable telling them who I'm voting for," said Early.

Research shows that text messages have an open rate as high as 98%, making it a prime method of choice to contact voters. By comparison, email has an open rate of just 20%.

"It's a very cheap and effective way to make sure your message is getting to people in mass," said Eric Beans, CEO of Texting Base, a cloud-based automation and personalization [texting](#) platform.

He says the typical costs associated with sending a text message can range from as little to 5 cents to 6 cents.

"You got to try to find a way to reach people," Beans says. "It's just so much easier to operate a texting platform."

Peer-to-peer texting, known as P2P, is a rather new form of technological communication. P2P texting platforms allow organizations to communicate with a variety of audiences such as customers, employees and students through individualized text messages. Each text message is sent one-by-one to an individual person. This is done to prevent the definition of an autodialer by the Telephone Consumer Protection Act that prevents automated unsolicited texts.

Political campaigns use these platforms to send texts to inform voters, donors or activists. This includes a number of unsolicited texts that are usually sent by [campaign](#) workers or volunteers to a large list of phone numbers pulled from publicly available voter files. The database of registered voters typically includes the addresses, ages and phone numbers of millions of U.S. voters.

"2020 is going to be the year of the political text message," said Thomas Peters, CEO of peer-to-peer texting platform RumbleUp.

"We've definitely seen more and more campaigns use peer-to-peer texting than we've seen in previous years."

Peer-to-peer texting made its political debut in 2016 with Bernie Sanders through the app Hustle. Field directors for Bernie's campaign used the app to engage with people interested in volunteering, according to the Daily Dot. The efforts led to 381 people showing up to Sanders' first event in Oklahoma and then 338 people to the following event in Tulsa. The pioneering app in peer-to-peer texting says it allows teams to text up to 1,000 people per hour. Contacts receive a normal text message from a local number.

"Texting cuts through the noise," Peters said. "It's a good thing for campaigns to connect with people."

But while political texts pave the way for more human-to-human interaction, many consumers are not buying the new frontier of political advertisement.

"A lot of voters out there don't want to be bugged," Beans said. "Your phone is a very intimate thing and who you have messaging you is an intimately personal thing."

Marcus Summers, 33, from Raleigh, North Carolina, says he doesn't see the benefit of these types of texts beyond the annoyance it brings many people.

"Nobody signed up to receive these text messages in the first place. It should be opt-in, not opt-out," Summers said.

Are these texts legal?

They can be. The determining factor comes down to how they were sent, says Shawn Wanta, a consumer law attorney.

"Messages that were sent with an autodialer system are illegal unless the recipient gave their prior expressed consent," Wanta said.

Most [political campaigns](#) have volunteers send text messages from their personal or burner phones, making it legal because it involves text messages being sent from one recipient to another.

The FCC declined to comment on whether P2P texting is legal and what rules are in place for political campaigns employing the practice. FCC spokesperson Will Wiquist cited a pending petition filed in May by the P2P Alliance.

The P2P Alliance says in its petition to the FCC that, "P2P text messaging is an exciting technology that facilitates real-time communications that consumers want and expect."

The Alliance goes on to add that its intended use is "to facilitate communications between universities, non-profits, businesses, and political organizations with their students, donors, customers, and voters through one-on-one human-to-human interactions."

No rule date for the petition has been set, according to the FCC.

How did they get my phone number?

Political campaigns can get your [phone number](#) from a wide range of places. Typically, political campaigns obtain consumers' phone numbers from public records such as voter files. If you're a registered voter, your information is probably included in these files. Other ways could include if you made a political donation or may have voluntarily signed up to receive more information about a candidate.

How do I stop unwanted political texts?

Wanta says it's important for consumers to know they can revoke their consent at any time.

"At any time, you can contact the campaign and say "I don't agree to continue to receive this [text message](#)," Wanta said.

Consumers looking to terminate text communication from political campaigns can reply back with "STOP" in all caps or other terms associated with opt-out requests including "end," "unsubscribe," "cancel," "quit," or "please opt me out." The only caveat is that you may have to separately opt-out for each political text sent from a different candidate.

You can also write a letter, send an email or call the campaign directly to be taken off the contact list. Wanta says consumers who still receive texts after opting out can file a complaint of illegal texting to the FCC.

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Citation: Are political texts flooding your phone? Here's why and how to stop them (2020, March 4) retrieved 20 July 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2020-03-political-texts.html>

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