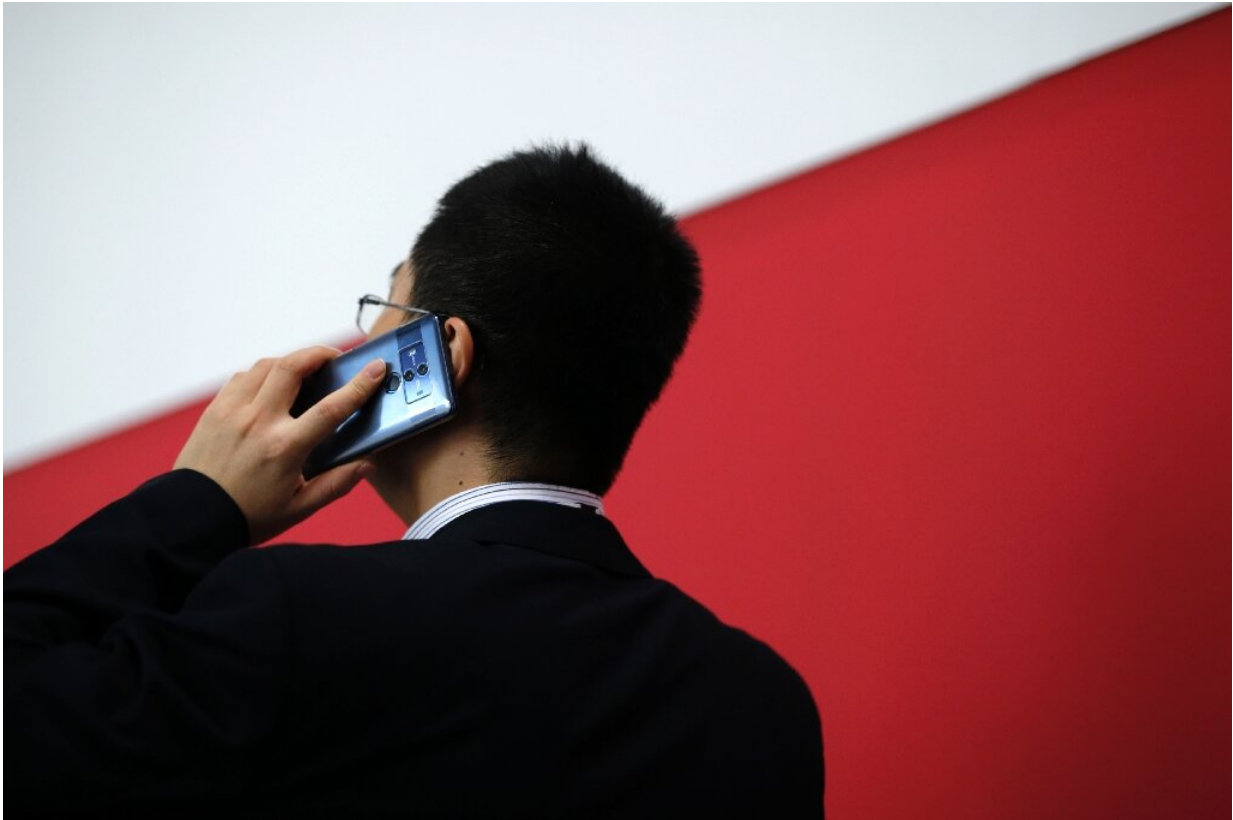


US moves to tackle scourge of 'robocalls'

June 8 2019, by Julie Charpentrat



Billions of automated spam calls or "robocalls" have prompted US regulators to adopt rules giving carriers more authority to block the messages

"Hello? Who's calling?" For many Americans these days, the call is coming from a "bot" or automated program that seeks to trick them into giving up money or important personal data.

The scourge of "robocalls" by the billions has prompted US regulators to adopt new rules allowing carriers to implement tools to block calls with suspicious origins.

The automated calls may tell respondents that they owe back taxes or other bills that need to be settled immediately, or direct them to call numbers where they are charged for the connection.

Advances in telecom technology have made it easy to create programs using VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) which can autodial thousands of people with [spam messages](#), with numbers disguised to make it seem as if the calls are from local residences or legitimate businesses.

According to mobile app maker Truecaller, fraud from robocalls cost Americans some \$10.5 billion between April 2018 and April 2019.

Nearly one in six Americans reported losing money to scams over the 12 months, with an average loss of \$244 per victim, according to the report.

YouMail, a firm which makes software designed to block unwanted calls, said Americans received a total of 48 billion robocalls in 2018.



FCC chairman Ajit Pai says the battle against unwanted "robocalls" has united Americans on the right and left

YouMail said the number has reached 25 billion so far this year with 4.7 billion alone in May. The calls can be used to extract fraudulent payments, obtain [personal information](#) for [identity theft](#) or other scams.

"Robocalls are so common because they are easy to make, very cheap, and they work," said Alex Quilici, chief executive of YouMail, who noted that the phenomenon is growing in many countries around the world.

The epidemic of robocalls could have [economic impacts](#) beyond those of the spam victims, by dissuading people from responding to legitimate or

important calls.

According to a survey by Consumer Reports, nearly 70 percent of Americans won't answer calls from unknown numbers.

United against robocalls

The trend that began with landlines has spread to mobile phones, used by most Americans now.

Telcom provider First Orion predicts that nearly half of all calls to mobile phones will be fraudulent in 2019.



Billions of spam "robocalls" have prompted many Americans to refuse calls

from unfamiliar numbers

After months of studying complaints, the Federal Communications Commission this week adopted rules allowing carriers to block certain numbers by default if analysis shows them to be suspected robocalls.

"If there is one thing in our country right now that unites Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, socialists and libertarians, vegetarians and carnivores, Ohio State and Michigan fans, it is that they are sick and tired of being bombarded by unwanted robocalls," said FCC chairman Ajit Pai in a statement after the vote.

FCC commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel said the new rules are "good news" for consumers but had hoped for a provision to prevent new fees from being imposed by carriers.

"That's not right. We should stop robocalls and do it for FREE," Rosenworcel said on Twitter.

With internet technology allowing calls from virtually anywhere in the world, the fraud may originate abroad, including in parts of Africa.

The FCC in 2017 imposed a \$120 million fine on Florida resident Adrian Abramovich, who was accused of engineering some 100 million spoofed robocalls to trick unsuspecting consumers into answering and listening to his advertising messages, many described as "exclusive" vacation deals.

But news rules are unlikely to stop all robocalls, and some categories of automated calls are legal if they do not deceive consumers.

Rules against robocalls are not applied to political messages, and Americans can expect lots of those ahead of the 2020 US elections.

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