

# How John Oliver became a weapon in Reddit's civil war

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A civil war between Reddit's owners and the volunteer moderators it relies on has taken an odd turn, with some of the biggest "subreddits" on the site devoting themselves to sharing pictures of one man and one man only – British TV comic John Oliver – in a cunning play in an increasingly fractious battle. What is the war over? Reddit's owners are planning to take the company public, and need to boost revenue from the social news site before they do. As well as advertising, the site has long made money from its Reddit Gold subscription service, and sells users the ability to send each other the status, along with badges and icons, as rewards for making quality posts. In recent months, Reddit has experimented with other revenue sources, such as selling non-fungible tokens (NFTs). But its most recent change has been even more controversial: it decided to introduce a hefty charge for users of its API, the system that allows other software and apps to connect to Reddit. Who is against that? The API has lots of users. Some, such as large data-scraping firms, are the direct target of change – Reddit says it wants these companies, which use Reddit data to train systems such as ChatGPT, to pay up. But in the process, it has also blocked others, including popular apps that normal users rely on to browse the site. The biggest controversy has been among the volunteer moderators of the site. These users, who are unpaid, perform most of the labour required to make the site operate on a day-to-day basis, deleting spam, enforcing rules, and corralling the users of their own "subreddits", the user-created forums around which conversation is oriented. What did the moderators do? They announced a strike, with more than 80% of the site's active subreddits locking themselves to new users, and many blocking all new posts, initially for a two-day protest. As Reddit's owners continued to hold firm, the protests extended, and are now in their second week. And how does John Oliver come into this? Reddit's owners began fighting the strike by removing moderators from power, arguing that by closing their subreddits they had become "inactive" and needed to be replaced with "active" moderators – who happened to support ending the strike. And so some of the biggest subreddit moderators came up with another plan: rather than going silent, they would actively enforce their subreddit's rules – but they would introduce new, very strict, rules, and put them to a vote, so they could not be accused of forcing their users to support a protest against their will. The cute-theme focused "Aww" subreddit, for instance, held a vote on Saturday for a new rule to "only allow adorable content featuring John Oliver, Chiijohn, and anything else that closely resembles them". It was adopted with 50,000 votes in support, and 3,000 votes against, and the more than 34 million subscribers – and their very active moderators – will continue to protest against the new charges indefinitely. John Oliver has supported the strike: