

Two of the biggest Reddit communities reopened in the funniest way possible



Two huge subreddits, r/pics and r/gifs, now only allow posts about comedian and *Last Week Tonight* host John Oliver. Both have reopened after going dark as part of the ongoing protests toward Reddit, and after each subreddit polled users, the new rules are now in place.

“As many of you are aware, we recently held a poll to decide on the future of the subreddit,” wrote r/gifs moderator u/IronSentinel. “This initiative was prompted by statements from Reddit’s CEO, who suggested that the desires of the platform’s everyday users were being eclipsed by those of moderators.” Moderators of thousands of subreddits set their communities to private to protest upcoming API changes that will force beloved third-party apps to shut down, but CEO Steve Huffman has argued that not all users are in support.

“It’s like a protest in a city that goes on too long, and the rest of the citizens of the city would like to go about their

lives,” he said to me in an interview on Thursday. When I pointed out that top posts on r/all were about the protests, he noted that those posts didn’t allow comments. “If there were comments on there, I bet I can tell you what those comments would say. They would say “knock this off, it’s annoying.”

In an interview with NBC News, he also equated moderators, who are unpaid volunteers, to the “landed gentry” – a characterization that struck a nerve for the moderators of r/pics. “We – the so-called ‘landed gentry’ – *definitely* want to comply with the wishes of the ‘royal court,’ and they’ve told us that we need to run the subreddit in the way that its members want,” u/pics-moderator wrote. “To that end, we figured that the only *reasonable* thing to do was directly ask how you’d like things to progress from here.”

Both r/pics (more than 30 million subscribers) and r/gifs (more than 21 million subscribers) offered two options to users to vote on: have the subreddit return to normal, or to only allow pics or GIFs (respectively) featuring John Oliver. The results were conclusive:

- r/pics: return to normal, -2,329 votes; “only allow images of John Oliver looking sexy,” 37,331 votes.
- r/gifs: return to normal, -1,851 votes; only feature GIFs of John Oliver, 13,696 votes.

And sure enough, both subreddits are now filled with content about John Oliver. As I write this, the top post in the “hot” tab on r/pics is a picture of Oliver flipping the double bird next to an image of Huffman. On r/gifs, it’s a GIF of Oliver hitting a table and saying “go fuck yourself” next to an image of the Reddit logo.

On Twitter, John Oliver encouraged the subreddits – and even gave them some fodder. “Dear Reddit, excellent work,” he wrote to kick off a thread that included several ridiculous

pictures. A spokesperson for *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* didn't immediately reply to a request for comment.

More than 4,000 subreddits are still dark, according to one tracker, but many have reopened in recent days. (During the peak of the protest, more than 8,000 went dark.) Some are reopening under duress; Reddit sent a message to some moderators saying that the company could help process a Top Mod Removal request "if mods higher up the list are hindering reopening," and a mod for r/Apple said they opened the community back up because they feared the it would otherwise be forcibly reopened.

Moderators voiced their concerns over Reddit's "threatening behavior" in a post on r/ModCoord. "Volunteer moderators are the lifeblood of Reddit's communities," u/demmian wrote. "Our dedication shapes the platform's success. It is crucial for Reddit to listen to our concerns and work with us in order to maintain the vibrant communities that make Reddit what it is. Until our voices are heard and our demands met, we will continue our blackouts – without fear of any threat." More than 170 users have commented to co-sign the post.

Update June 17th, 5:51PM ET: Added tweet from John Oliver.

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/6/17/23764729/reddit-users-pics-gifs-subreddits-john-oliver>