

Stripe, PayPal, Patreon: The Right Is Being Banned from Online Fundraising

Charles C. Johnson Discovers "The Payment Conspiracy"

 AP Photo

The Associated Press

The creeping exclusion of the right from online platforms like Twitter and Facebook is well-known, drawing the [attention](#) of Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale and the RNC. But a greater challenge is on the horizon: the exclusion of the right from financial services.

Conservatives have long been the target of [shadowbans](#), [biased algorithms](#), and [account bans](#) on social media. Not content with silencing their voices online, the left now wants to stop the right from using the web to fundraise. Thanks to the increasing willingness of online fundraising platforms and payment processors to ban clients for political reasons, they are getting their way.

One of the most popular fundraising platforms is Patreon, a site that allows users to collect monthly recurring donations from their supporters. With the decline of [ad revenue](#) on platforms like YouTube, Patreon has emerged as an important and effective tool for online content creators to earn a living. In some cases, it can take little more than a hundred fans contributing set amounts per month for a creator to support themselves full-time.

In theory, this creates an environment similar to that of talk radio in the 1980s: a decentralized ecosystem where new creators can quickly establish an independent support base, without relying on gatekeepers in the establishment media. With only their fans to answer to, as opposed to controversy-shy advertisers, it should be the perfect formula for free expression.

There's just one problem — Patreon itself. Like the rest of Silicon Valley, Patreon has decided it wants to be more than just a neutral platform, and now routinely cuts off income from content creators for political reasons. Chief among them is “hate speech”, which Patreon [says](#) it does not tolerate on its platform. It has used “hate speech” as a justification to ban a number of figures on the far-right,

including white nationalist Jason Kessler. But although the alt-right is shunned by most, including [Breitbart News](#), the idea that politics should dictate whether someone is allowed to access financial services is even more controversial.

As is often the case, banning extremists was the start of a slippery slope. Patreon's purge quickly escalated beyond the alt-right to target independent conservative journalists. The latest example is YouTuber and author Brittany Pettibone, who was banned from the platform last month. Patreon [cited](#) her support for the European identitarian organization Generation Identity, a group Patreon claims is a "violent organization." (The organization explicitly [disavows](#) political violence.)

Patreon also banned the independent journalist Lauren Southern in 2017 over her work exposing globalist NGOs assisting the illegal trafficking of persons into Europe via the Mediterranean. Patreon said her work could "cause loss of life" by stopping the work of NGO "rescue vessels" — but migrant deaths in the Mediterranean actually [fell by 40 percent](#) as attempted crossings declined in the wake of her reporting. Also, if interfering with the illegal activities of NGO vessels in the Mediterranean is unacceptable to Patreon, they should make it clear that the governments of Italy and Malta, which [now bar NGO ships](#) from their shores, aren't welcome on the platform either.

Double Standards

In the bans documented above, Patreon used tenuous, insufficiently supported accusations of "violence" to suspend services to right-wingers. But with the exception of [one](#) token ban against It's Going Down, a far-left site that encourages and celebrates political violence, the platform does not appear to apply its rules to the left with the same level of strictness.



Left-wing graffiti in Berkeley, California, where violent riots by self-proclaimed “anti-fascist” protesters led to **over \$100,000** in property damage JOSH EDELSON/AFP/Getty Images

British left-winger Mike Stuchbery currently **collects** donations from Patreon. Yet he has repeatedly encouraged and supported violence on his Twitter account, most recently **defending** an incident in which a teenage Trump supporter was attacked and robbed in a Whataburger restaurant for wearing a MAGA hat. Although he later backtracked on those statements, Stuchbery has also **said** that Trump supporters are the modern-day equivalent of Nazi brownshirts and that Nazis should be **punched**.

Patreon insists that Generation Identity, which publicly disavows violence, is violent, and went so far as to ban Brittany Pettibone simply for expressing support for the group. But Stuchbery, who uses Twitter to openly defend violence, is allowed to continue using Patreon.

It's not hard to find more examples like Stuchbery. Heidi Culliman is a far-left author who has over 200 supporters on Patreon. She has also [called her member of congress a Nazi](#), has called the [President](#) and the [current U.S. administration Nazis](#), and, you guessed it, has called for [punching Nazis](#). When people say the President is a Nazi, and that Nazis should be punched, that isn't just a problem for Patreon — it's a problem for the Secret Service.

Maybe Stuchbery, Culliman, and other violence-supporters who collect Patreon donations might clarify that they only want actual white supremacists like Richard Spencer to be punched, and not the President (they haven't yet, by the way). But you don't get a pass to punch someone like Spencer just because they're morally wrong. Punching actual white supremacists, unless they punch you first, is still unprovoked violence, and advocating for it is still against the law, as well as Patreon's policies (if they were enforced consistently.)

Patreon's bias can also be seen in its approach to Antifa, a far-left organization that, much like Stuchbery and Culliman, supports the use of violence against people they determine to be "fascists." As you might expect, those are frequently just ordinary Trump supporters and conservatives. Antifa's rampages at pro-Trump events, where random acts of violence are accompanied by widespread looting and damage to private property, [have](#) in the past caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage. Last year, an Antifa member pled guilty to [plotting an acid attack](#) on Trump supporters during the Presidential inauguration.

The U.S. government isn't keen on these self-appointed fascist-fighters, and has categorized Antifa as a [domestic terrorist organization](#). Yet it's a domestic terrorist organization that is still allowed on Patreon. A cursory search of Patreon reveals at least six [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#)] pages, some of them boasting dozens of regular contributors, which are affiliated with Antifa, express their support for Antifa, or display the movement's symbol, the red-and-white anarcho-communist flag.

One of these pages, LibCom.org, [defended](#) violent attacks on German police with glass bottles and rocks during the 2017 G20 protests in Hamburg as "large-scale resistance" and "basic self-defense" via a blog

named “Victory of the People.” True to the Antifa designation as domestic terrorists, LibCom also published a story [celebrating](#) the sabotage of U.S. army materials. Patreon, which takes a cut from the site’s donations, is directly profiting from this material.

Patreon is also directly profiting from the following image, which Antifa California is [distributing](#) through the platform as a reward to supporters:



[\(archive link\)](#)

The image of a bike lock is a reference to Eric Clanton, the left-wing professor and Antifa member accused of [assaulting a Trump supporter with a bike lock](#) in April 2017. Clanton was arrested on assault charges, and [faces up to 40 years](#) in prison if convicted.

Patreon, in other words, allows Antifa to glorify a real act of violence for which someone was arrested and charge. Meanwhile, Lauren Southern was banned because of a tenuous and ultimately debunked theory that her actions *might* cause harm.

Patreon's double standards go beyond its inability to clamp down on left-wing support for violence. In February, Patreon banned the account of Jeremy Hambly, a critic of the incursion of progressivism into the community associated with the popular card game Magic the Gathering (yes, the culture wars now extend to card games — read more about it [here](#)). Patreon said they banned Hambly for “doxing,” or the release of a person's private information online, a charge Hambly denies.

Whether the charge is true or false — and the Southern incident suggests Patreon is disingenuous in its allegations of rule-breaking against the right — the Hambly ban again reveals Patreon's inconsistency. The platform has for years refused to take action against Randi Harper, a serial bully who poses as an “anti-abuse” activist, but who herself has a long, [well-documented](#) track record of abusing others. This extends to doxing, which Harper has unapologetically used as an intimidation tactic. She once [revealed](#) the CEO of a debt collection agency's home phone number, and threatened to release those of his family if the debt collectors did not stop trying to contact her (doing their job, in other words.) Despite this well-publicized behavior, Patreon has taken no action against Harper to this day.

Competitors?

Patreon isn't the only way to raise money on the web. There are other fundraising platforms, including Kickstarter, IndieGoGo, and GoFundMe, which allow users to raise money for their projects.

GoFundMe, in particular, has emerged as a popular method for activists, who use it to raise money for causes and campaigns.

But if you're looking for a neutral platform that doesn't come with the risk of a politically-motivated ban, these services are no better than Patreon. All have publicly committed to interfering in their users' activities if they offend the company's progressive values.

Earlier this year, Kickstarter [banned](#) the project of a Swedish academic who was raising funds for a book examining the statistical correlation between immigration and rape in Sweden. The academic, Ann Heberlein, said she started the project because the Swedish government no longer keeps adequate records of the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of offenders in the country.

IndieGoGo, another crowdfunding site, explicitly [bans](#) any campaign that “promotes hate” or “promotes hate symbols and/or hate terms on their website, as defined by the Anti-defamation league.” (The Anti-defamation league, which has previously [blamed Trump supporters](#) for rising anti-semitism, includes the internet meme Pepe the Frog on their [list](#) of “hate symbols.”) IndieGoGo also has a blanket ban on crowdfunding for “weapons, ammunition, and related accessories.”

GoFundMe also takes sides politically. It deleted the fundraising campaign of a Christian-owned bakery from Oregon, which was at the time facing a \$135,000 fine for refusing to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding. GoFundMe has also deleted conservative Jamie Glazov's fundraiser for an [anti-Sharia law](#) tour, a [campaign](#) to expose Hillary Clinton's anti-Israel sentiments during the 2016 election, and a fundraiser by an organizer of the “Draw Muhammed” contest which [aimed to cover security costs](#) for his family.

PayPal and Stripe: Impassible Gatekeepers

It's not difficult to build a website. If all existing online fundraising services have been co-opted by censor-happy progressives, why not build competing services that don't ban users for political reasons?

When you don't like what's on offer, build your own. That's the free-market conservative argument.

But it's not as simple as that.

In order to build a fundraising platform, you need a payments processor. And the market for payments processors is dominated by just two companies: PayPal and Stripe. And they're just as intolerant as the fundraising platforms.

When Lauren Southern was banned from Patreon, she did what free-market conservatives recommended, and set up her own fundraising platform, powered by Stripe. Then, directly after Southern hit the headlines again over her lifetime ban from the U.K. for [distributing leaflets](#) satirizing Islam, Stripe abruptly withdrew their service.

Stripe informed Southern that she was banned for violating their rules on "[Prohibited Businesses and Activities](#)", although they did not highlight precisely how she violated it. The list includes a prohibition on activity that "encourages, promotes or celebrates unlawful violence toward any group based on race, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, or any other immutable characteristic."

Stripe has also withdrawn services from FreeStartr, an alternative to Patreon and GoFundMe set up by free speech maximalist Chuck Johnson. Johnson says the platform has also been banned by PayPal. Already notorious for freezing WikiLeaks' account in 2011, PayPal [also](#) withdrew services from nationalist YouTuber Faith Goldy earlier this week.

Because of the lack of a payment processor, all of FreeStartr's funds are now at risk, including a legal defense fund for jailed British Islam critic Tommy Robinson, a support fund for South African farmers at risk of racial violence, and income streams for various mainstream conservatives like organizer Ali Alexander and YouTuber Ashton Whitty.

Johnson says Stripe accused him of “obfuscating funds”, although the company did not respond to a request to comment asking them to elaborate on the allegation.

Johnson also says Stripe changed their story. He says he was initially contacted by senior Stripe employee Edwin Wee, a former Democrat operative who previously worked for Joe Sestak and Mike Bloomberg, who informed him that the presence of a legal defense fund for white supremacist Richard Spencer meant that Stripe could no longer do business with him. Because of one objectionable fund, the entire platform had to go.

“Everyone will think like, ‘oh it’s Richard Spencer, he can go f*** himself’ — but they shut down my entire business over his account,” said Johnson, who claims his goal is to build an open, neutral platform, and not to personally endorse the people who use it.

“My position on this is simple, it’s the same position the ACLU had in [Skokie](#).” said Johnson in comments to Breitbart News. “Everyone has certain rights... If they need a legal defense, and people donate to it, and all the money’s legal, then I don’t see an issue with it. People have a right to donate to controversial causes.”

MakerSupport 
@GoMakerSupport

A few weeks ago, Stripe indefinitely disabled payouts for creators. Now, Stripe has terminated the MakerSupport account. We’ve taken a few days to attempt to resolve this with Stripe, but no progress has been made.

12:14 PM - Apr 28, 2018

 49  40 people are talking about this 

MakerSupport, another alternative to Patreon that promised to allow creators to raise funds regardless of their political affiliations, has

effectively been destroyed after Stripe withdrew service from the platform. MakerSupport revealed their difficulties with Stripe back in April, before going silent. People who donated to creators through the site were left wondering where their money had gone.

That's the brutal reality of payment processor censorship. Once a service like Stripe decides to withdraw support for a platform, thousands of dollars — peoples' donations, income streams, and livelihoods — can be left in limbo.

Can a conservative competitor to Stripe or PayPal be created? Almost certainly not. The regulatory hurdles of setting up a payments processor, the difficulty of forging relationships with major banks, and the complexity of the technology and scarcity of talented programmers with experience in the field mean the operating and start-up costs are high. A payments processor targeted at the niche market of former Patreon users who have since been banned from the platform will not turn a profit. Anyone willing to set one up would have to be willing to burn a lot of money. Much like competing with Google or Apple, it's easier said than done.

Moreover, a PayPal or Stripe competitor would still be dependent on business relationships with banks and credit card providers, none of which have any incentive to be first amendment friendly. MasterCard proved that back in 2011 when they [joined](#) a financial services boycott against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. In order to fully guarantee a politically neutral service, you would need more than your own version of PayPal: you'd need your own bank and your own credit card business.

The existing banks can't be relied on, that's for sure — even mainstream conservative causes are too controversial for them these days. Citi, the fourth-largest bank in America, announced in March that it would [withdraw its services](#) from weapons and ammunition stores that refuse to accept a range of progressive gun control demands, none of which are mandated by U.S. law. These included prohibitions on the sale of bump stocks and “high-capacity magazines.” A week later, an investing group claiming to represent over \$600 billion in assets [urged](#) its members to cut ties with the NRA.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders was recently [refused service](#) at a restaurant because of her position in the Trump administration. Now imagine being refused a bank account because you won't comply with progressives' gun control demands.

But it's not just conservatives who are concerned by the power of payment processors and financial institutions to shut down political expression. The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a liberal organization known for promoting left-wing causes like the Obama administration's "net neutrality" regulations, has expressed grave misgivings at the decision of financial institutions to withdraw services for political reasons.

In detailed comments provided to Breitbart News ([read them in full here](#)), the liberal group said payment processors like PayPal have become "de facto internet censors."

"EFF is deeply concerned that payment processors are making choices about which websites can and can't accept payments or process donations," an EFF spokeswoman told Breitbart News. "This can have a huge impact on what types of speech are allowed to flourish online."

An Existential Threat

In online fundraising as in social media, the internet provides a tremendous advantage to those who know how to use it. When allowed, conservatives and critics of progressivism have used these platforms to great effect. The dissident Canadian academic Jordan Peterson is supported by [over 9,500](#) small donors on Patreon. Memories Pizza, the Indiana-based pizza parlor forced to close its doors after it was publicly attacked by the establishment media for refusing to cater gay weddings, was able to [reopen](#) after its supporters raised over \$800,000 via GoFundMe.

As the left prepares for the 2018 midterms and the 2020 general election, they want to ensure that only they have access to that tremendous power. And with PayPal and Stripe withdrawing support from politically neutral fundraising platforms, they are well on their

way to achieving that aim. Like the social media purges, this represents an existential threat to the conservative and pro-Trump movement.

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