

# With social media in tumult, Parler draws conservatives

● Parler has grown -- now claiming more than two million users

AFP | San Francisco

Amid rising turmoil in social media, recently formed social network Parler is gaining with prominent political conservatives who claim their voices are being silenced by Silicon Valley giants.

Parler, founded in Nevada in 2018, bills itself as an alternative to "ideological suppression" at other social networks.

Parler has grown -- now claiming more than two million users -- as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and Google fight demonstrably false information and content that could trigger violence.

The list of accounts recommended to follow at Parler is packed with conservative Republican politicians and commentators, along with the campaign to re-elect President Donald Trump.

Republican Senator Ted Cruz of Texas said he was a proud new user of Parler because the social network "gets what free speech is all about."

"Parler was founded on the principle that every individual has the right to speak and be heard," said an open statement from chief executive John Matze, who co-founded Parler with fellow University of Denver graduate Jared Thomson.

**"We reject censors and censorship."**

Parler is not the first social platform created over concerns of political bias. It follows the limited success of networks including Gab and Voat which aimed at conservatives feeling



Senator Ted Cruz is one of several prominent conservative Republicans using the social platform Parler, claiming that it "gets" the notion of free speech



**"Parler was founded on the principle that every individual has the right to speak and be heard," said an open statement from chief executive John Matze, who co-founded Parler with fellow University of Denver graduate Jared Thomson.**

out of place on the mainstream platforms.

But the path to financial success is likely to be challenging for Parler, which is dwarfed by the far larger networks such as Facebook and Twitter.

Silicon Valley firms take in billions in ad revenue each year, despite a growing boycott which mainly targets Facebook over toxic content and "hate" speech.

Matze, who started Parler with funds from friends, told Forbes of a plan to make money by matching advertisers with influential conservatives popular at Parler.

**'Venue for bigotry?'**

The platform has become home to Republican lawmakers including Senator Rand Paul, and right-wing activists kicked off other social media. Trump's son Eric is also a member.

But Matze told CNBC he wants to broaden the platform to all political voices and offered a \$20,000 "bounty" for an openly liberal pundit with 50,000 followers on Twitter or Facebook.

"Any platform that tries to bill

itself as only for conservatives or only for liberals is not going to be successful because conservatives want to talk to liberals, if not antagonize them, and vice versa," said Shannon McGregor, a professor and social media researcher at the University of North Carolina.

Parler at the moment is "just a blip" on the social media radar, according to McGregor and University of Hartford professor Adam Chiara.

Chiara suggested that Parler is a product of a free market system providing a venue for bigotry, hate and misinformation not welcomed on mainstream social networking platforms.

"If Parler decides that's what they want on their platform, questionable things like bigoted views, that is the decision the company makes," Chiara said.

Searches on an array of racist or anti-semitic terms at Parler turned up troves of accounts and comments.

A "lynchmob561" profile described the user as "proud white female Trump supporter."

An array of accounts played off "Boogaloo," a movement promoting a civil war, which was recently banned by Facebook.

Parler's policies appear to be "daring someone to post something so offensive they will have to pull it down, and they will be in the unenviable position Facebook has been in since 2016," McGregor said.

**No sex, no feces**

Parler did not respond to a request for an interview but Matze has outlined the platform's mission.

"We reject technofascism and those who think they are the sole arbiters of truth," Matze said in a post aimed at Parler rivals.

"We reject their biased editorial panels, we reject their 'fact

checkers' and we reject censorship."

Parler's terms of service, however, state the startup can remove content for "any reason or no reason." The platform bars pictures of fecal matter, profanity, pornography, obscene user names, male genitalia and female nipples.

"You cannot threaten to kill anyone in the comment section," Matze said.

Parler also said it bans spam, "terrorist organisations" and "any direct and very personal insult with the intention to stir and upset the recipient" including comments "that would lead to violence."

"Parler doesn't seem to necessarily be quite as free as they make themselves out to be," McGregor said.

"They do have guidelines that are as vague as those at Facebook and Twitter in terms of allowing the platform maximum interpretive flexibility."



Parler is a United States-based social networking service launched in August 2018, regarded as an alternative to Twitter. It is marketed as an unbiased, free-speech social media platform focused on protecting users' rights.



John Matze, 27, the founder of Parler, a new social media app

At the start, the app got a number of lucky boosts. During a networking lunch in 2018, Matze struck up a conversation with Candace Owens, the conservative activist, who promptly began encouraging people to join Parler.

Parler functions like a barebones Twitter with users (such as the Trumps and Giuliani) to follow and a feed to see their posts.



## Export gloom sours Pakistan's prized mango season

● Pakistan produced more than 1.5 million tonnes of mangoes in 2019

● Exported a record 115,000 tonnes worth \$80 m in 2019

● Known in South Asia as the "king of fruits"

Multan | Pakistan

Dwindling harvests, drooping demand and export supply chains hit by the coronavirus are biting into Pakistan's mango industry, with producers of the prized fruit battling to weather a disastrous season.

Across Pakistan's "mango belt" in Punjab and Sindh provinces, farmers say a long winter and changing rain patterns have slashed production by up to half this year -- just as virus shutdowns sparked border restrictions and spiralling export costs.

"There are multiple problems that mango farmers are facing," said Rana Muhammad Azim, whose family has been producing the fruit in Punjab for generations.

"The situation is extremely worrisome for us. The mangoes



Pakistan was the sixth-largest exporter of mangoes in the world last year

are ready, but no exporter is willing to take the risk and place orders," he said, adding that he was already suffering from a 40 percent decline in the harvest.

Pakistan produced more than 1.5 million tonnes of mangoes in 2019 -- and exported a record 115,000 tonnes worth \$80 million -- making it the sixth-largest exporter of the fruit in the world.

But Waheed Ahmed, head of a produce association in Pakistan, said exports have dropped around 40 per cent compared to the same period last year, with just a few months left of the season. Known in South Asia as the "king of fruits", the mango originated in the Indian subcontinent with two dozen varieties grown in Pakistan.

The country's most treasured

variety is the greenish-yellow Chaunsa, known for its rich, unique flavour and juicy pulp.

The fruit also helps sweeten diplomatic relations, with Pakistan sending crates of its best produce to India's prime minister every year, regardless of the political climate between the hostile neighbours.

It has also earned a place in recent literary history, with re-

nowned Pakistan author Mohammed Hanif longlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize for "A Case of Exploding Mangoes", a comic novel based on an unexplained 1988 plane crash that killed former president Muhammad Zia ul-Haq.

**Rotting fruits**

With much of the world's air traffic grounded by the corona-

virus, exports of the best prime, ripe fruit by plane to the US and Europe have been particularly hard hit, but ground transport has also been badly affected.

Dozens of trucks piled high with the yellow fruit were stranded at the border with Iran last month, their precious cargo rotting in the searing 40-degree heat. Even where trading has continued via sea to the key Middle East market -- which accounts for 70 percent of exports -- demand has plunged.

Since the virus took hold shoppers are making fewer outings to supermarkets and are wary of spending on luxury items, while Pakistani migrant workers who relish the fruit have returned home.

The domestic market brings far less revenue.

In one bright spot, harvests were at least spared the ravages of the worst locust plague in 25 years, which wiped out entire vegetable and cotton harvests.

As flights resume and border restrictions are eased, growers hope to increase exports in the second half of the season to avoid a complete lost season.

"The situation has forced us to think of new solutions," said producer Muhammad Ali Gardezi, who for the first time has taken his business online, delivering door-to-door in the age of social distancing.