

Illinois gun media flourish with stories downplaying failed Jan. 6 insurrection, claiming election fraud

From new chat sites, to Facebook knock-offs, to print and radio, right-wing organizers are finding new ways to spread their message after being banned from social media following the failed Jan. 6 insurrection against the US government.

Common messages in the media are that Donald Trump supporters weren't responsible for the insurrection and that the presidential election was stolen from the former president, even though that is false. One magazine prints tips for armed citizens burying guns.

The Illinois Shooter and *Gun News* are two of the larger pro-2nd Amendment newspapers in Illinois.

The Illinois Shooter is the Quarterly Journal of the Illinois State Rifle Association. It contains political content and the organization has lobbyists in Springfield.

It has over 30,000 current subscribers and its Winter edition's front page ran three featured stories: Its main was "Michigan Senate's Election Fraud Hearing" Side bar: "Media Spikes Stories Helpful to Trump: Skews Election" and below the fold: "Justice Alito Warns of Threats to Our Rights."

The editor of the publication, Richard Vaughan, also runs Publishing Management Associations Inc. which specializes in Christian and conservative magazines and speciality publications. He said in an interview this past year he has seen an uptick in subscribers to the *Illinois Shooter* and his other publications and he attributes the increase to

ensorship on social media. He says there will be a print Renaissance because of it.

“I think magazines are going to have a kind of a Renaissance because people realize that it’s hard to cancel a publication because they are all owned by different companies and they’re, you know, the post office has to send it out,” Vaughan said. “So it has a bit of freedom that you don’t have when you’re under a platform like Facebook, Google, you know all the others that involve censorship.”



The Shooter/ISRA also runs a weekly email newsletter and

legislation alerts.

Gun News is another 2nd Amendment and right wing print publication in Illinois. It is published monthly by "Guns Save Life," a lobby group founded 20 years ago in the state and separate but associated with the NRA and ISRA. It is sent to each member and distributed to businesses in Springfield, Decatur, Rantoul, Bloomington, Chicago and the Pontiac/Dwight region. It is also inside the Capitol in Springfield. It has been in publication since 1999 and the editions are typically 24 pages.

Some of the stories in their recent editions included: "The good American" a column denying the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol was a full insurrection and comparing those who called it an insurrection to "Nazis" and fascists from 1933 Germany. Another story ran next to it titled "Rep. Mo Brooks says 'Evidence Growing' Antifa 'orchestrated assault on Capitol.'" Another story was headlined, "Hope for the best, prepare for the worst. Got shovel? Strategies to avoid the loss of your guns." It had detailed instructions on how to bury guns in safe containers made of do-it-yourself materials or piping. At the bottom of the page is a graphic with two rifles and the caption says "when democracy turns to tyranny... the armed citizen *still* gets to vote."

John Boch, executive director of Guns Save Life and editor emeritus of *Gun News*, said they distribute about 17,000 copies each month and the distribution network is 100% volunteer.

When asked how he finds a balance between publishing political issues and topics relating to gun interest, Boch said he tries to shy away from politics outside of gun rights and the right to self-defense.

Boch said he doesn't necessarily believe people are returning to print in general, but he thinks *Gun News* has a unique, niche market that is appealing to the gun owner demographic.

“Without that I think we would be like your local newspaper that’s shedding readers faster than a German Shepherd sheds hair. But we have had, I suppose in a sense, that upswing in political content simply because there’s more going on politically,” Boch said. “Back when Donald Trump was president, gun control was going nowhere. Back before last fall’s election we had a narrow majority in the Illinois House and Senate that blocked gun control legislation and as such there was really nothing notable or very little newsworthy. When it came to politics there was less politics on the table.”

Boch said the media is doing a “pretty good job of shooting itself in the foot.”

“The media are Democratic by line, Democratic operatives with bylines in today’s world. And as a result Americans are tuning out from media,” Boch said. “In large part the collapse in readership and viewership of print and video publication, news related to the expression get woke go broke, there’s more than a little truth to that if you watch and see what happens to the world of media out there.”

Aside from traditional forms of media such as print, those on the right are also turning to alternative forms of social media in the wake of Jan. 6 where many, including Trump, were purged from mainstream networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Some of these sites include MeWe, Telegram, Gab and Parler. These are popular among the right because of the lack of censorship and the encrypted chat features they offer.

MeWe is an alternative form of social media that looks similar to Facebook and operates like a blend between Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. After the social media purges took place in January on Facebook and Twitter, many rightwing groups moved to MeWe where founder Mark Weinstein says he

won't censor posts and values privacy.

Posters on MeWe spread false information/conspiracy theories. Some of these include posts saying masks don't work, others say the election was stolen and others involve hateful rhetoric towards the Black Lives Matter movement.

One of these groups where members of the right wing and Trump supporters congregate, includes IGOT-Illinois Gun Owners Together, who moved to the platform after their Facebook pages were shut down multiple times.

Some of the posts from their group include: A photo of Kyle Rittenhouse, who is charged with killing two protesters in Wisconsin last summer, with his gun and a depiction of Jesus over his shoulder whispering in his ear "You see that man over there? He's a pedo. That guy over there, he beats his girl. This other kid is not a medic he's a burglar." The post was captioned by an administrator named "Panda Man" and said "Kyle is a god Damm hero."

Another post by Mary Jene Howe with a photo of a statue with a woman on her knees who appears to be having sex, with the caption "They made a statue to honor Kamala Harris."

And another captioned "Why does anybody need 30 rounds?" With a photo of 30 masked individuals who seem to be peaceful protesters.

See more: [The state of Illinois' gun advocacy networks.](#)

Some on MeWe use the platform to buy and sell guns in much the same way as one would sell a couch on Facebook Marketplace. Southern Illinois Firearms Enthusiasts a group with 491 members who can buy, sell or trade firearms, accessories or ammunition by making a post or using the site's chat feature. This group also occasionally post's information about gun

legislation.

One of the more recent posts to the site reads “WTS-VP9 Tactical, tru dot night sites, 2 – 15 round mags, grip inserts to adjust for the perfect fit. Lightly used, safe queen since I always reach for my VP9 set up for 3 gun instead of the tactical. \$600. This one isn’t optic ready. Located in Pekin/Peoria.”

MeWe is one of the fastest growing social networking sites for the right and it gained 2.5 million users in the week that followed Jan. 6, [according to USA Today](#).

Telegram is a text/chat site similar to WhatsApp, rightwing groups praise its privacy because it lacks monitoring and it provides encrypted chat features that make it difficult to track and monitor.

Free Illinois has 512 members but more join every couple days. Many users share alternative news and spread conspiracy theories. Every third or fourth message is a petition, or someone collecting signatures about legislation.

See more: [Why right-wing extremists’ favorite new platform is so dangerous](#)

Right-wing social media sites show there is a return to radio, including HAM radio and [Radio Redoubt](#) groups creating a safe haven.

The FCC warned in a statement following the insurrection that amateur radios may be used as an alternative to social media for organizing.

A member of Illinois Gun Owners Together – a group active on MeWe – told this reporter that they use these radios to

communicate during demonstrations in the event that their cell phones don't work. The group has an IGOT Radio Operators group where they learn to use HAM radios for these situations and survival situations.

Right-wing social media also contains frequent references to AmRRON, which stands for The American Redoubt Radio Operators Network. The Redoubt movement is an anti-government movement rooted in Christianity that claims Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and the eastern parts of Washington and Oregon as the "Redoubt" region. The movement was popularized and the term coined by James Wesley Rawles, a former U.S. Army intelligence officer, [according to the Southern Poverty Law Center](#). The content is encrypted.

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