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Vigilantism and ''Plastic Wrap Civil Justice'' in 2022 during the Russo-Ukrainian War

Opinion article

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Abstract

Objectives: The aim of the article is to present the results of observations related to the phenomenon of vigilantism in the context of military operations in Ukraine, in 2022.

Methods:
A purely observational method was used in 2022 to gather evidence of vigilantism via social media, accompanied by a Google search for relevant literature.

Results:
In the first months of 2022, during the ongoing Russo–Ukrainian war, an "unusual" phenomenon was observed on social media, namely the wrapping of suspected lawbreakers (e.g., marauders and petty thieves) with plastic wrap to structures, such as utility poles. In some cases, such individuals were whipped, chastised, sometimes even left naked and exposed to the elements, and open to mistreatment by passers-by. This raw form of wartime justice is loosely referred to in this article as "plastic wrap civil justice", and is interpreted as a form of vigilantism. Several examples are provided in the context of the wider literature on vigilantism in times of war.

Conclusions: It is concluded that neither the specific phenomenon of "plastic wrap civil justice", nor vigilantism more broadly, can provide a sustainable path to peace, civil security and a law-abiding society. In times of war, especially where social equilibrium is at risk and where conventional justice infrastructure, like policing, has broken down, some may take it upon themselves to implement their own form of justice, or vigilantism, in order to restore it. Although not a legally recognized form of justice, vigilantism may reduce crime. However, it introduces a parallel form of justice that may leave fellow citizens vulnerable.

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1. Societal breakdown in the Russo-Ukrainian war

War, whether civil or transnational, has the ability to destroy the fabric of those societies that are involved, economically (Garon, 2020) and psychologically, sometimes leaving scars that last a generation or more (Rzeszutek et al., 2020). The civil strife, sacrifices and losses that arise from war and its ultimate objectives of power acquisition and land conquests are, to some extent, a consequence of organized violence that has, as one of its core strategies and objectives, to cause pain among the population, fighters or leadership to a point that ultimately leads to subjugation of the losing side (Centeno, Yang, 2019). In modern warfare, such physical military action is often accompanied by a parallel cyberwar (Hughes, Shaffer, 2020; Lehto, 2023), resulting in a hybrid war (Rauta, 2020; Person et al., 2024). In addition, in the case of the armed conflict between the Russian Federation (hereafter Russia) and Ukraine, which is now a *de facto* war whose origins are multi-polar (Bakalov, 2024), it is also a cognitive war, i.e., the battle for hearts and minds (Aydemir, 2022), and has also mushroomed into lawfare (Goldenziel, 2023).

In Ukraine, there are many direct social consequences of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, which started in 2014 (Mykhnenko, 2020; Wilson, 2024), initially evolving from a hybrid war (Perepelytisia, 2021) to a full-blown one (Davies, 2024). Those consequences include the loss of human capital (Hapieieva et al., 2023), the entrapment of innocent civilians who are caught up in the military cross-hairs (Kaźmierczak, 2024), a mass adjustment in the psyche of the population to accept that their nation is in a state of war (McBride, 2023), the disruption or fragmentation of families, the eradication of social support, and the loss or breakdown of healthcare (Bins, Low, 2022; Kumar et al., 2022; Andrieiev et al., 2023), homelessness, mass internal displacement of populations, and the emigration or unnatural dislocation of populations to neighboring countries, including Russia (Chumachenko, Chumachenko, 2022; Sereda, 2023; Harris-Brandts et al., 2024; Krakhmalova, 2024), forced deportations to Russia (Coleman, 2022), the psychological suffering of children and youth (Elvevåg, DeLisi, 2022; Kostruba, Fishchuk, 2023), the disruption of academia and education (Kurapov et al., 2023), and many other aspects of the social fabric that have become fragile or destroyed by this ongoing war, but that are not debated in detail here.

The forced mobilization of combatants (Hayoz, Stepanenko, 2023) may leave them with a sense of disoriented "belonging" (Aliyev, 2021), while captive soldiers, as prisoners of war, may suffer unspeakable acts of physical and psychological aggression, torture or reach an irrecoverable state of health, especially if they are maimed and their limbs are lost (Timchenko et al., 2021; Ishchenko et al., 2023; Onishchenko et al., 2023). Ultimately, the nation of Ukraine is fighting to maintain its independence and territorial integrity of its 1991-based borders following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while seeking a pro-Western path (Ishchenko, Yurchenko, 2019; Dumitru, 2021; Oliinyk, Kuzio, 2021; Palko, Férez Gil, 2023). For Russia, this war is also both ideological and existential (Putin, 2021; Courter, 2022; Kuzio, 2023; García-García, 2024; Kuzio, 2024; Malyarenko, Kormych, 2024). Military conflicts to resolve contested sovereignties elsewhere around the world, such as in Abkhazia, Northern Cyprus, and Taiwan (Coppieters, 2022; Rich et al., 2023), Israel and the Gaza Strip and West Bank (Hassan, Mustafa, 2024), or the Korean Peninsula (Davis, Bennett, 2022) are seemingly in an era where war or military aggression might land up speaking more effectively than diplomacy.

Other than the inevitable spread of geopolitical military conflicts and wars, the effects of the Russo-Ukrainian war are not only regional, but impact nations directly neighboring Ukraine or Russia, such as those of the EU (DeDominicis, 2023), but also global, including spill-over effects of sanctions against Russia such as strained global supply chains, food security (Jagtap et al., 2022; Rabbi et al., 2023; Rose et al., 2023) and energy markets (Kuzemko et al., 2022; Osička, Černoch, 2022; Cui et al., 2023), or at more finer scales such as the risk of imposed academic publishing sanctions (Nazarovets, Teixeira da Silva, 2022). This war may have induced a rise in the levels of anxiety among adults in nations that are peripheral to the battle zone, as was noted, for example, in Germany (Saalwirth, Leopold, 2024), the Czech Republic (Riad et al., 2022), and elsewhere (Poland, Ukraine, and Taiwan) (Chudzicka-Czupała et al., 2023), suggesting that the effects are not just tangential. The use of strategic narratives to describe the "other" (Khaldarova, 2021; Tyushka, 2022; Claessen, 2023), combined with punitive and non-punitive measures of memory governance by both Ukraine and Russia (Belavusau et al., 2021), may result in polarization of the citizenry of both nations as eternal foes, given the irreversible long-term damage caused by this war between these neighboring nations.

This paper does not debate these issues in detail, but merely indicates them as a general background to set the contemporary complex socio-political context for the observations noted next.

2. One of war's side-effects: Looting and lawlessness

In times of conflict or war, as the structures responsible for maintaining social order come under strain, some may collapse or cease to function altogether, such as policing and security, leading to the military assuming policing roles (Harig, 2020; Dyson, Pashchuk, 2022). In Ukraine, this was evident during the Euromaidan Revolution (Bolin, Ståhlberg, 2022; Sæther, 2023) and during the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, even accompanied by the physical destruction of infrastructure, including of police stations (Watling et al., 2023). This paper focuses primarily on events observed in the first few weeks and months of 2022, in this phase of the war that started in 2014. At that time, social media did not appear to be as regulated as it currently is (Maathuis, Kerkhof, 2023; Pierri et al., 2023), and was thus adjusting how to disseminate large volumes of material that could visually or psychologically be distressing to readers in society, i.e., after an initial period of adjustment, a policy of visual gate-keeping was implemented (Durani et al., 2024). While some (a very select few) sought art as a way to express their opinions on the war (Kot et al., 2024), select mainstream or social media-based news outlets abused stock (or archived) photos to offer an erroneous or misleading visual representation of select aspects of the war, but in doing so, may have misrepresented the truth, i.e., news reporting involving such use could be construed as disinformation (Teixeira da Silva, 2023). Although there is a large body of literature related to misinformation and disinformation related to war, including due to influence by the nationalist leaning (Gentile, 2023), and to the Russo-Ukrainian war more specifically, and the need for open source intelligence as a way to counter it (Hauter, 2023), those topics are not abridged in this paper.

During that phase of the war, i.e., the first months of 2022, distinct episodes of looting, theft, and lawlessness were recorded on social and other media, mainly by citizens. Several

possible factors may have contributed to those episodes. First, as was noted above, there was a breakdown in security, leading directly to lawlessness (Watling et al., 2023). There was also a flood of weapons, both national and foreign (Ti, Kinsey, 2023; Toscano, Grippo, 2023; Jakupec, 2024), often based on self-justifiable beliefs (Fiala, Kling, 2023), but whose ownership was not always clearly traced or strictly controlled (Damon, 2022). Although foreign mercenaries were operating in Ukraine (Habtom, 2022), it is not clear to what extent they fortified or weakened society's security, and how much they were in the war zone merely to profiteer (Pizzi, 2023). At that time, law enforcement, alongside the Ukrainian military and paramilitary (Aliyev, 2022; Laryš, Souleimanov, 2022; Aliyev, 2023; Käihkö, 2023; Mutallimzada, Steiner, 2023; Gomza, 2024; Thomson, Pankhurst, 2024), which were maintained under some state control via "undermining, co-option, incorporation and coercion" (p. 147) (Käihkö, 2018), not only served as national defense, they also offered civil protection, but in war-torn locations where there was active warfare and bombing, law enforcement sometimes appeared to be sparse, overwhelmed, or even non-existent. In such cases, *ad hoc* paramilitary groups emerged, as occurred in Kyiv, offering support to police where and when the Ukrainian police force was stretched thin (Graham-Harrison, Mironova, 2022).

Members of a population might, in acts of desperation, and when faced with food shortages, lack of housing, warmth or other basic commodities, turn to theft in order to survive. Increased drug use or alcoholism to deal with the stress and anxiety related to the war, or the lack of health-related aid (WHO, 2022), might also have spurred some to turn to crime. Others yet, taking advantage of a weakened security environment, may have turned to crime simply because they could, i.e., opportunism. For example, supermarkets or stores whose windows or entrances had been smashed or destroyed by bombing or artillery fire may have been susceptible objects for theft, looting and burglary (Kopotun, Murzo, 2023). For whatever reason, in some Ukrainian cities that were under heavy bombardment, and where the local police force was likely overwhelmed, local militia, community-based security forces and/or *ad hoc* paramilitary groups may have formed, i.e., civil defense (Akimbayev et al., 2024), and justice in select instances, including self-appointed "law-makers" or civil vigilantes, or lynch mobs, was observed to have taken a somewhat raw form of expression, as is described next.

3. The emergence and expression of "plastic wrap civil justice"

In 2022, a unique phenomenon emerged (or became more visible due to greater media exposure) in which suspected criminals or law-breakers were tied to objects, such as trees or posts, using plastic wrap and other available materials, such as wires, a form of justice that is informally referred to as "plastic wrap civil justice" in this paper. As noted in select news items and online sources, looters (or more accurately, suspected looters) were tied to electricity or other poles, sometimes with their pants (and underpants) pulled down (Chung, 2022; Gleadow, 2022; Kaonga, 2022). In several of those cases, suspects were either simply tied, beaten then tied, or beaten while being tied or after being tied, and in some exceptional cases, even individuals in military uniform – whether they were military or not remains unclear – participated in such activities (Chung, 2022; France 24, 2022). Other instances showed suspects being stripped naked, or having their genitalia exposed in public, to shame them, while tied or duct-taped to objects, and/or prior to being beaten (Chung, 2022; France 24, 2022). Very few formal reports of such cases existed at that time, such as clause #41 in HRMMU (UN, 2022),

which only alluded to this form of vigilantism very briefly. In one case (Kaonga, 2022), a Twitter account on which some of the reporting was based was deleted and the visual evidence has now been irretrievably lost. Recording and archiving such visual evidence is a big challenge of photo-journalism (Fernández-Castrillo, Ramos, 2023, 2024). This makes it difficult to fact-check news items that are heavily based on photographic evidence (Savolainen, 2024). Incidentally, a Google Trends search for "Ukraine looters" indicates a peak of search activity and/or social interest on 27 February 2022 (Google Trends, 2024).

To offer a more formal "academic record" of this phenomenon, "plastic wrap civil justice", which is treated as a form of vigilantism in this article, instances (and thus evidence) of such events, as covered by select social media and mainstream media in early 2022, were captured by the author (Table 1).

Table 1: Select cases of raw justice (vigilantism) observed during 2022 in the current Russo-Ukrainian War

Links to case examples	Approximate date and location of event or media source (if known or indicated)
https://www.tiktok.com/@tombradysrightnut/video/7070150231278718254	Unknown; unknown (photo compilation)
https://www.newsflare.com/video/482695/marauders-tied-to-trees-in-the-city-of-melitopol-ukraine	March 2, 2022; Melitopol (video)
https://x.com/VladDavidzon/status/1498688774640914433	March 2, 2022; unknown (photo)
https://www.newsflare.com/video/481974/the-armed-forces-of-ukraine-caught-a-marauder-in-kyiv-and-tied-him-to-a-tree	March 4, 2022; Kyiv (video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdEIgksbUUg	March 4, 2022; Kyiv (video of photo compilation)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OL1zYTVfQdA	April 4, 2022; Dnipro (video)
https://t.me/vorposte/20371	April 29, 2022; Mikolaiv (photo)
https://t.me/vorposte/20413	April 30, 2022; Krivoy Rog (photo)
https://t.me/vorposte/20438	April 30, 2022; Kharkiv (video)
https://t.me/vorposte/20830	May 5, 2022; Cherkassy (photo)
https://t.me/vorposte/20876	May 6, 2022; unknown (video)
https://t.me/truexanewsua/47118; https://t.me/rybar/32806	May 17, 2022; Kyiv (video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVPk5lRHQGc (~1:30 to 2:01); https://www.tiktok.com/@viceworldnews/video/7109134058877193477	June 11, 2022; Kyiv suburbs (video)

Source: own elaboration[1]

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[1] The table lists select cases of raw justice (vigilantism) that had been observed in the first half of 2022 during the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, in which suspects who had apparently committed some crime (e. g., petty theft) were apprehended and tied to objects using, among other materials, plastic wrap, string, tape and other materials, in some cases, with notes and explanations attached to their bodies, either with insults, or explaining the apparent crime. Due to potential issues with privacy (both of the apprehenders and those being apprehended), as well as potential copyright issues related to sources of the images, i.e., lack of clarity related to the identity of the photographer or the nature of copyright of the images themselves, only the URLs are provided. Screenshots were taken of these social media posts as evidence, and kept privately, should they be deleted (in fact, three sources originally found in 2022 had dysfunctional URLs, and are not indicated in the table). The functionality of all URLs was last verified on 27 June 2024. Other media or social media examples may be found by searching, in Google,

It is unclear what ultimately happened to those suspects, since many of those posts (photos or videos) were on popular social media accounts, if those individuals were finally arrested, and if they faced a fair trial or not. In cases of individuals who acted as elements of the "law", or those who decided to take the law into their own hands, i.e., vigilantes, it is unclear if they suffered any consequences for their actions, such as the public humiliation of suspected looters, especially where those acts involved aggression or violence. Vigilante-style justice is one feature of the post-Euromaidan era in Ukraine (Zabyelina, 2019), amplified by low trust in the Ukrainian judicial system (Revkin et al., 2024).

4. Vigilantism in times of war and in war-torn zones

The phenomenon of citizen policing merits greater debate and examination by experts in criminal law and civil justice. Is the extraordinary state of strife of a human being during a war sufficient reason to engage in criminal acts (e.g., theft of food to avoid hunger, or the theft of medicine to avoid illness or death) if those acts ensure their own survival or the survival of their family members? In other words, in select cases, are crimes that do not involve bodily harm to others morally justifiable (Nussio, 2024)? Similarly, are the actions of self-appointed members of the public who take the "law" into their own hands – i.e., vigilantes – during an extraordinary event, such as war, legally justifiable, especially if they engage in extortion or robbery (Laryš, 2022)? These observations, alongside the recorded cases in Table 1, can serve as a springboard for more in-depth studies within the context of an evolving Constitutional Court of Ukraine (Trykhlib, 2019), especially given that several such actions were apparently condoned, even supported by some Ukrainian Government officials, at least according to one news source (France 24, 2022).

To try and appreciate the role of vigilantism in times of war and in war-torn zones, and to try and identify academic papers that might shed light on the observed phenomenon of "plastic wrap civil justice", a search was conducted on Google in December 2022 using the keywords "vigilantism" and/or "war" and/or "Russia Ukraine" to identify primarily English literature, crudely restricting the search to 2014–2022. In addition, using Google Scholar, a search was conducted for papers published between 2014-2024 describing wars and/or armed conflicts where civilians have taken up arms and/or justice themselves, or where vigilante groups and civilians (i.e., non-state actors) sought justice as a way to make up for a lack of such services by state bodies, wherever possible, related to the Russo-Ukrainian war. Although it is recognized that vigilantism is also known as lynching, while groups of vigilantes are known as lynch mobs (Jung and Cohen, 2020), or that vigilantism can be referred to as "civil agency" (Masullo, 2021) or "rebel governance" (Teiner, 2022; Florea, Malejacq, 2024), these alternative terminologies were not used in this paper. Moreover, the recruitment of civilians based on popular grievances, as a way to feed rebel movements (Thaler, 2022) is also not debated in this paper, even though some themes are in common with vigilantism.

When the rule of law breaks down, especially in low-capacity states, and when a

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for "Russia-Ukraine war tie looter pole", "Ukraine marauder looter tied to pole", etc. All indicated cases are open source (at the time of access).

community or society's security or value systems are at risk, due to theft, ranging from petty theft to hard crime, some individuals may take it upon themselves to reinstitute an orderly state, in the form of extrajudicial punishment, in the absence of formal state-regulated bodies, such as police, as has been richly documented for nations in Africa (Fouchard, 2011; Petrus, 2015; Bagayoko et al., 2016; Fouchard, 2018; Super, 2023; Tapscott, 2023). In such instances, when governments or political institutions fail to protect their citizens, equally minded or motivated individuals may band together to form "justice groups" to achieve this objective (Ivanov et al., 2021). Several academics have provided short, useful and succinct definitions for vigilantism: "the extralegal prevention, investigation, or punishment of offenses" (p. 923) (Bateson, 2021), or a "person who monitors their environment for signs of norm violations, and who punishes the perceived norm violator, without formal authority" (p. 1) (Chen et al., 2022). In this paper, these definitions form the basis of our understanding of vigilantism, based on the notion that the community intervenes in matters of security where the state has failed (Abrahams, 1998; Pratten, 2008). Separately, are civilians who witness acts of vigilantism, but do not take any action to counter or stop it, enablers of such acts, or innocent by-standers (Barter, 2023)?

Vigilantism may involve legally questionable actions to enforce security, including the use of aggression and violence, which would otherwise be considered transgressions of the law (Favarel-Garrigues, Gayer, 2016), placing vigilantism in a paradoxical or antithetic relationship with the law (Favarel-Garrigues, Shukan, 2019). In some cases, e.g., in Guatemala, vigilantism might be more "permissible" (Dow et al., 2024), but in others not so much, as was evidenced in Turkey where initially non-violent vigilantism became violent, and then those who joined such groups were charged as "terrorists" (Yonucu, 2018). There may be an attempt to camouflage or temper such transgressions with patriotic discourse (Malyarenko, Galbreath, 2016), i.e., the use of vigilantism in defense of national values. As Shukan (2019) pointed out, during times of extreme conflict, such as civil or transnational wars, "rules, discourses, narratives, social roles and behaviors, valuable resources (political, economic, paramilitary), and legitimate distribution of violence are all radically redefined" (p. 76). However, the sustained maintenance of such groups requires financing, and the greater risk is that power may be abused to ensure wider community participation. This occurred in *autodefesa* groups in drug-torn regions of Mexico, where civilian regimes of security were legalized (Wolff, 2020). In the Kosovo crisis, vigilantes took the law into their own hands in the belief that state justice was too slow, or that it would not provide a fair resolution (Krakowski, Kursani, 2024). Vigilantism has a history of targeting minority groups and migrants (Bjørgo, Mareš, 2019).

However, these cases tend to describe organized groups within a community or society, as a way to offer protection where state mechanisms have collapsed. As was observed in the cases highlighted in Table 1, in this case in Ukraine during several weeks or months of 2022, the observed actions do not seem to have been based on a wider collective grouping of organized members, as for example the *autodefesa* vigilante groups in Mexico, nor do they seem to reflect a notion of "belonging" that may accompany a collective call to violence when paramilitary groups form (Aliyev, 2021). Rather, the observed actions seem to have stemmed spontaneously from individuals or small groups of self-appointed individuals. This is vigilantism nonetheless, just a different type that also does not seem to match the profile of

"police vigilantism", in which police use extralegal coercion to impose the law (Jauregui, 2015, 2024), even though in some instances, members of the Ukrainian military appear to have been involved, at least according to France 24 (2022). Those individuals took it upon themselves not only to be members of the security apparatus, but to also apply the law in the way they saw fit, in this case, tying apparent law-breakers to posts, or exercising "plastic wrap civil justice", until such point that such individuals collapsed, or were released or arrested.

Shukan (2019) offers some insight into this unique form of vigilantism in Ukraine, observing that in Odessa, which lies somewhat marginal to the military conflict that is currently primarily taking place in the Donbas and five other oblasts (Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia), four of which were regions of pro-Russian secessionist movements (Laryš, 2024), and that were formally annexed the Russia at the end of September 2022 (Barakat, 2023; Boman, 2023; Kiryukhin, 2023), that individuals associated with four social backgrounds were attracted to vigilantism, namely "businessmen, former combatants or security officers, far-right activists, and young people" (p. 101) (Shukan, 2019). In other words, a wide range of the social spectrum was drawn to vigilantism, and that part of their social mandate was to train participants "into the use of weapons and combat sports" (p. 77), while offering them social recognition (Shukan, 2019). The greater recruitment and acceptance of far-right ultra-nationalist groups in Ukraine (Gelashvili, 2024) may also have contributed to forming a backbone for socially accepted vigilantism (Umland, 2020). It might have also been a way to try and overcome a policy of competitive influence-seeking by Russia, especially in the Donbas (Malyarenko, Wolff, 2018; Wolff, 2021). However, here, too, the circumstantial evidence in sources listed in Table 1 does not seem to point to the involvement of such structured or organized groups, but instead points toward choices related to the implementation of social justice by individuals or small groups, although they or their actions may have been broadly influenced by a wider culture of vigilantism inculcated by ultra-nationalist groups. Similarly, even though Favarel-Garrigues and Shukan (2019) claimed five consensual key elements underlying vigilantism ("a collective form of action"; "the use or threat of coercion"; "action [that] targets people who have transgressed legal or moral norms"; legitimization "relies on reference to a third party, a larger community allegedly worrying for its security and preservation"; "a vigilante group has a limited life span but experiments with a sort of routine") (p. 5), the individual nature of the acts observed in social media posts in Table 1, or even as small informal groups, do not seem to strictly meet all five of these criteria, although acts such as molesting or covering with paint seem to be in common. However, a collective moral sense of victimization, for example being communal victims of a crime, might drive the vigilante mentality (Freire, Skarbek, 2023). In response to the death of an apparent looter who had been tied to a pole, an informative article appeared indicating that citizens were lawfully allowed to arrest suspected looters, and that this citizen's arrest may have involved bodily harm (Antonenko, 2022). Melanovski (2022) suggested that such vigilante actions existed since 2014.

The severity of the crime is accentuated by society's ability to openly, and without hindrance, transmit these events to a local or global society via social media, as was witnessed via then-Twitter, Tik-Tok, Telegram, YouTube, Facebook, and other social media platforms (Gulzer et al., 2024). In other words, civil vigilantism is amplified by digital vigilantism

(Trottier, 2017; Favarel-Garrigues et al., 2020; Galleguillos, 2022). Not only is a physical public spectacle created, such as in the center of a town or city where petty thieves are tied to posts, and where they are openly and publicly visible, but those acts are recorded by witnesses on their cell, mobile or smart phones and transmitted to social media where they may be widely circulated in the public domain, serving as either a sympathetic or hostile amplification of the events. As an extension of that digital vigilantism, post-war, a "trial" of war crimes may take place by media and via the court of public opinion (Rae, 2020; Wahyudi et al., 2022). In other words, 'conventional' vigilantism is amplified by 'digital' vigilantism in which conventional justice-seeking will be accompanied by a digital presence, with the ultimate objective of shaming the subject of vigilantism, i.e., the petty thief (Plesničar, Šarf, 2020; Durani et al., 2024). The hope is that paramilitaries that used violence-based punishment systems, even those that have strong community support, might adopt a restorative justice system instead, as was observed in Northern Ireland, although readers should also be aware of this strategy's shortfalls (Ashe, 2009), also taking into consideration the national breadth of that particular example (relative to the very localized cases in Table 1).

Evidently, compared to the war itself and the atrocities being evidenced therein, the events related to "plastic wrap civil justice" observed and noted in this paper might be perceived or considered as trivial. Even so, the phenomenon is itself a "fascinating" sociological or legal phenomenon nonetheless. However, there is a practical issue at hand, namely the need for public debate on this practice, especially as Ukraine seeks EU membership, in which state vigilantism is occasionally not considered to be against the law (Viehoff, 2022; Flander, 2023; Olsen, Tuovinen, 2024). The author's perception is that ultimately, this unique form of vigilantism seems to reflect a way to channel anger and frustration into an object – in this case, an individual tied to a post by plastic wrap, even if that individual may have committed a crime like stealing from a store with a smashed window-front so as not to go hungry – as a way to somehow overcome the negative and frustrating emotions associated with them and their nation being at war. Absent personal testimonies from those who were apprehended and tied in such a manner, and thus to some extent "victims" of vigilantism and "plastic wrap civil justice", these personal interpretations remain speculative.

Finally, this opinion paper has some limitations. Observations are made on social media websites whose reliability, sources and/or permanence might be questionable. The relatively few observations in Table 1 only refer to approximately the first half of 2022, in the first part of the 2022 chapter of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. It is possible that other evidence or literature exists, including in other languages.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest of relevance to this topic.

Author contributions

The author contributed fully to the intellectual discussion underlying this paper, literature exploration, writing, reviews and editing, and accepts responsibility for the content, analyses and interpretation herein.

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