

Ukraine Bans Political Opposition

Not just pro-Russian political parties, but individual dissidents, have been dealt with harshly by Ukrainian law and Ukrainian mobs.

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American media dedicated at least some coverage to Ukraine’s recent ban on the pro-Russian “Opposition Platform—For Life Party,” which effectively eliminated electoral competition in the country. But Ukraine’s sedition law of March 9 this year is less known.

The Rada Bill 7116, known as the *Not a Step Back* law, stipulated punishment for collaboration and sedition under martial law. It established life imprisonment with property confiscation as the maximum penalty for individuals found guilty of treason.

Among the accused under the law are [mayors](#) and other [elected officials](#) of the [towns](#) that surrendered to the Russian army when the Ukrainian armed forces withdrew, who allegedly provided the Russian Federation with logistical support. The law also applies to individuals who transmit information about troop movements. More controversially, it has prescribed penalties to Ukrainians who speak favorably of Russia.

Since the the law passed, I have been clipping news items about random citizens who fall under the latter category.

For instance, one entry on the KharkivLife Telegram Channel discusses police “exposing” a “[malefactor](#).” The malefactor is a forty-year-old woman who, in a private conversation, recorded by a person she apparently trusted, said “I’m waiting for Russia, yes. You know why? [unclear] because I am for Russia and because I am a person of Russian soul.” She is now under investigation for acts of collaboration.

A similar incident is recorded [approvingly](#) by KievLive Telegram. Ukrainian border police arrested a man for supporting Russia, exchanging photos and videos of artillery fire, and being in the possession of Russian food rations.

According to the Ukrainian channels, Ukrainian border cops arrested a man for

supporting Russia, exchanging photos and videos of artillery fire and being in the possession of Russian food rations. pic.twitter.com/LefJHK2MrQ

— Katya Sedgwick (@KatyaSedgwick) [June 29, 2022](#)

A drunk man brandishing a machete was arrested in Odessa for [screaming](#) pro-Russian “propaganda.” I admire the Odessa cops for arresting the lout—as a resident of the San Francisco Bay Area, I don’t take law and order for granted—but I find it difficult to see his actions as treason.

In another video posted on KharkivLife, a frightened thirty-four-year-old resident of the area issued a [public apology](#) for “actively expressing her hate of Ukraine’s defenders.” Her crime was “discovered” during routine “monitoring of social media,” presumably by security services. After “a conversation” with cops she decided to ask for forgiveness.

A news clip released by the [Associated Press](#) shows an arrest and a visit to the house of alleged traitors in the city of Kharkiv. One man, we are told, was found filming the aftermath of an artillery strike and this act drew suspicion. The man was later found to have exchanged electronic messages with enemy forces and his father confirmed that he is a Russian sympathizer. Creepily, a babushka from the neighborhood remarks that the security forces will “cure him.”

Another man in the video appears to be guilty of nothing more than displaying pro-Russian messages on social media. Visibly frightened, he apologized to Ukrainian Security Service during his arrest, saying that he already changed his mind. An arresting officer reassured an older member of the household that everything will proceed as prescribed by the law.

The rule of law in Ukraine is notoriously shaky. It was bad in peacetime, and I doubt the war is helping. In April Vitaly Kim, the genial-looking governor of Nikolaev Oblast, said in an interview with the Ukrainian [Channel 24](#):

Today, a Russian blogger was shot dead in his car [in Nikolaev]. This means that there are still Russian traitors in Ukraine and all traitors will be executed. I am not afraid of this world: it will be so. And we will not be able to stop people from shooting traitors either.

He added that Ukraine has the best cybersecurity in the world, and that they will be able to track everyone and “nobody will be able to escape justice.”

The ill-fated blogger was accused of informing the Russian forces of Ukrainian troop movements. If that was indeed his crime, of course no country would let him continue operations. But in Ukraine, where a man can be tried for sedition in court under the law, security services assassinated him and a government official called for lynching.

Lynchings are apparently taking place with the approval of verified and official Telegram channels. I have seen no dead bodies, but plenty of humiliation of alleged collaborators and Russian sympathizers—people kneeling and tied to the polls with plastic wrap, signs of recent beatings and partially naked bodies in full display.

I have found no estimate of prevalence of mob attacks on the alleged traitors. Thousands of alleged collaborators are now under investigation by the Ukrainian government. The actual

number of Russian sympathizers is unknown.

Given that Ukraine is in the midst of a major war, a tightening of rules regarding dissent should be expected. Our country has done the same: Abraham Lincoln suspended *habeas corpus* during the Civil War and the German-American ethnic identity was stamped out after U.S. entry into the First World War.

The recently banned “Opposition Platform—For Life Party” was the second largest faction in the country. It joins ten other parties already banned by the state. It is worth noting that Zelensky himself was elected on the platform of rapprochement with Russia and that prior to the 2014 Maidan overthrow of Victor Yanukovich, his “Party of Regions” commanded about half the country.

The key question about Ukraine is whether it can ever exist as a Western democracy. The country is contiguous to Russia, about one third of Ukrainians have relatives in the Russian Federation, and a large section of the population prefers the Russian language. If in a very tightly controlled media environment Ukraine can’t convince its people that Russia is their enemy, what will happen if the regime ever relaxes the rules?

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