

Media Bias: The Good Kind of Protesters and the Bad Kind - Ukraine, Venezuela and Palestine

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

It's fair to say that the complex anti-government protest movements in both Venezuela and Ukraine were boiled down by US corporate media to send a clear message to their domestic audience: These are the good guys.

In Ukraine, the takeaway was that there are two sides, and the people seeking to topple the government (successfully, as it turned out) wanted to be more like us. On NBC Nightly News (2/18/14), correspondent [Richard Engel](#) explained: "The Ukrainian government is backed by Moscow. The protesters want closer ties with Europe and the United States."

ABC World News correspondent [Terry Moran](#) (2/19/14) framed it this way:

Will this country of 46 million people turn West toward the US and Europe and democracy, or turn East to Vladimir Putin and Russia, which ruled here for centuries?"

And ABC anchor [Diane Sawyer](#) (2/20/14) called it

an unremitting duel between protesters who say they want Western freedom and police enforcing the alliance with Russia and Russia's President Vladimir Putin and all that he represents.

This casting of the conflict is obviously simplistic. There is a case to be made that now-deposed Yanukovych spurned an economic deal with the European Union—one that he seemed inclined to accept weeks earlier—because it was insufficient to deal with the scale of the country's economic problems (Reuters, [12/19/13](#)), which made Putin's offer more attractive.

That is not to suggest that anti-government protesters do not have serious grievances with the state of their country. Likewise, it has to be said that, for all the portraits of a movement that wants US-style freedoms, a substantial minority of the protest movement is drawn from fascist and neo-Nazi factions (Guardian, [1/29/14](#); Slate, [2/20/14](#)).

In Venezuela, meanwhile, demonstrators are similarly labeled. Here's Mariana Atencio on ABC World News (2/23/14):

It's been 12 straight days of violent clashes here in Venezuela. On one side,

students and the middle class. On the other, police and pro-government groups, followers of the party of anti-American President Hugo Chavez.

So it's students versus people who support the "anti-American" government—not difficult to figure out whose side you're supposed to take. Nor did Newsweek ([2/21/14](#)) leave much doubt when it described protest leader Leopoldo Lopez this way:

With twinkling chocolate-colored eyes and high cheekbones, López seems to have it all: an attractive and supportive wife, two children who get along with each other and impossibly adorable Labrador puppies. He is charismatic, athletic and good-looking.



Venezuela: Good protesters.



Palestine: Not good.

In the Washington Post ([2/26/14](#)), the Venezuelan protests were portrayed as a reaction to the country's "hangover from 14 years of Chávez rule: a country with not enough milk or sugar in the supermarkets and far too many carjackings and murders in the streets."

If that were the most important legacy of the past dozen years, you'd expect the entire country to be protesting—and it'd be hard to fathom how Chavez and current president Nicolas Maduro managed to win numerous elections. But in truth, by many indicators, life for poor Venezuelans sharply improved during the Chavez years (FAIR Media Advisory, [3/6/13](#)), which explains their support for his party.

But the lesson is these are protest movements—despite adopting militant and in some cases [quite violent](#) tactics—that US media by and large were cheering.

In the midst of these conflicts, a new report from Amnesty International ([2/27/14](#)) on Israeli violence in the West Bank "documented the killings of 22 Palestinian civilians in the West Bank last year, at least 14 of which were in the context of protests." The report received minimal coverage in the US press, though—and perhaps *because*—it raised profound

questions about how a close US ally attacks protesters against military occupation.

Would the US press champion the cause of Palestinian demonstrators, or criticize harsh Israeli response to dissent? How about actually cheering on violent Palestinian resistance? It is simply unfathomable–Palestinians are the wrong kind of protester.

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