



**Framing Rebellion: An Analysis of the
New York Times 2014 Anti-government
Protests in Venezuela**

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List of Acronyms

ISS	<i>Institute of Social Studies</i>
NYT	The <i>New York Times</i> ; also referred to as the <i>Times</i>
IMF	<i>International Monetary Fund</i>
WB	<i>World Bank</i>
IDB	<i>International Development Bank</i>

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Abstract

This research explores how the mainstream news media outlet, the *New York Times* framed the 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela, which erupted online in February, 2014. A content analysis revealed that the dominant narrative disseminated by the *New York Times* conveyed the misleading impression that Venezuela was yet another nation ripe for democratic revolution, poised to overthrow a violently repressive regime. The Venezuelan anti-government protest(or)s were overwhelmingly framed in terms of *state repression of peaceful protes(or)s*, which masked their underlying causes. This research demonstrates that the framing of social protests is heavily influenced by the geopolitical interests that inform them, especially when mainstream news media outlets report on protests in “regimes” considered to be damaging to geopolitical interests, and a threat to western and U.S. hegemony.

Keywords: Venezuela anti-government protests, media framing, media representations, media-state relations, protest paradigm

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

With the onset of the global financial and economic crises, and the wide implementation of government austerity policies, there has been a marked increase in popular protests commencing in 2010 (Berrada et al., 2013). Since then, the world has witnessed some of the largest protests in history with the overwhelming majority of crowds demonstrating against a lack of “real democracy” (ibid). More often than not, protestors have been demonstrating - or purport to have been demonstrating against repressive governments that have been unfairly or inadequately responding to citizens’ needs. This seemed to be the case in February, 2014, when the Venezuelan government was faced with street demonstrations and protests that resulted in 40 deaths and over 800 injuries (Ismi, 2014).

Mainstream news and social media have an important democratic function to inform citizens about popular protests around the world, especially as the speed at which news media is disseminated has impacted the ways in which we digest and interpret political information. Information concerning events can spread almost immediately and the ways information is framed opens up windows through which the public is supposed to see protest events. However, the specific framing of information disseminated to the public is not free from the geopolitical interests of those who are (re) producing it.

In this research paper I argue that the predominance of geopolitical interests in framing an event is precisely what occurred when news media coverage of the anti-government protests in Venezuela erupted online in February, 2014. Online news sites and social media were bombarded with Twitter–influenced posts accompanied by the hashtag and slogan, *#Pray for Venezuela* conveying the misleading impression that Venezuela was yet another nation ripe for democratic revolution, poised to overthrow a violently repressive regime. This was the dominant narrative disseminated by the mainstream news media, including the *New York Times*. Taking the specific case of the *New York Times*, this research examines how the U.S. mainstream news media framed the 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela. It hopes to challenge the *New York Times* framing of the protests, instead showing that the geopolitical history and U.S.-Venezuelan relations have been crucial in framing their representations of the protests. It is attempt to show how the mainstream news media outlets employ different framing strategies when reporting on protests in “regimes” considered to be damaging to geopolitical interests, and a threat to western and U.S. hegemony.

1.2. U.S. Foreign Policy Interventions in the Post-Cold War Era: Destabilising Venezuela

With the collapse of the former Soviet bloc, post–Cold War foreign policy shifted from “straight power concepts¹” to “persuasion” (Robinson, 1996; 16). Thus, if the post - World War II years were characterised by the U.S. exerting its dominance in the periphery primarily through “coercive domination”, then the change in U.S. foreign policy in the 1980’s towards “democracy promotion”² can be viewed as, “The method through which the core regions of the capitalist world system exercise their domination over peripheral and semi-peripheral regions, from coercive to consensual mechanisms, in the context of emergent transnational configurations” (Robinson, 1996; 7).

It’s accompanying “democracy promotion” apparatus has included: “new governmental and quasi-governmental agencies and bureaus, studies and conferences by policy-planning institutes, and government agencies to draft and implement ‘democracy promotion’ programmes” (ibid).

Robinson (1996; 6) explains the urge to “promote democracy” as a means to, “secure the underlying objective of maintaining essentially undemocratic societies inserted into an unjust international system.” It not only eases political tensions produced by elite-based and undemocratic *status quos*, but helps to subdue mass or popular ambitions to transform the twenty-first century international order (ibid.).

During the 1980’s and 1990’s, neoliberal client regimes flourished across Latin America through “democracy promotion” institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the International Development Bank (IDB)³. Under President Perez, Venezuela was exposed to IMF policies which dictated the privatization of the country’s primary resource sectors, caused devaluations and implemented austerity programmes. However, Venezuelan national treasury funds were depleted and Venezuelan workers became poverty-stricken, which instigated a massive popular uprising - the *Caracazo*.⁴ An estimated 1000 to 1,500 protestors were massacred by government forces (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; 31). The Venezuelan economy struggled to recover from this crisis with the continuation of free-market policies under the subsequent Caldera regime and “the government presided over the triple scourge of triple digit inflation, 50% poverty rates and double digit unemployment” (Petras, 2013; n.p.). The Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA) called the 1980’s Latin America’s “lost decade” largely due to econom-

¹ Post-World War II, U.S. policy-making took the form of tactical alliances with dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. However, “as the ‘elective affinity’ between authoritarianism and U.S. domination unravelled, ‘democracy promotion’ substituted ‘national security’ in the U.S. vernacular” (Robinson, 1996; 16).

² According to Robinson (ibid.), “democracy promotion” is a universal goal and the endorsement of it has mass potential reach, which raises its ideological significance.

³ During the 1980’s and 1990’s, over 5,000 public enterprises in profitable economic spheres were denationalized and privatized across Latin America (Petras, 2013; n.p.)

⁴ “The mass opposition against the dictatorship in 1958 had united people across class lines. In contrast, the *Caracazo* of 1989 was the first mass action with strong class overtones since 1935” (Ellner and Hellinger, 2004; 31)

ic stagnation and the absence of a viable economic strategy to counter “underdevelopment.” Venezuela’s economic performance was lower than the rest of Latin America (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; 18). Increasing corruption across public spheres, critiques of the state’s role, disillusionment with import substitution policies and demand for better political participation in civil society featured prominently in public debate (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; 74). It was from these conditions that the rise and consolidation of a nationalist populist government under Hugo Chavez (1999-2012) was made possible.

Chavez’ own 21st century Bolivarian-style socialism pursued a radical socialist and nationalist agenda with a strong political institutional base in the legislature, civil administration and military, followed by socio-economic reforms that provided large scale, long-term social welfare programmes to reduce unemployment, poverty and inequality (Petras, 2013; n.p.). He created a new national constitution updating human rights coverage, incorporating indigenous and environmental rights, reorganising the judiciary and deepening political democracy with the inclusion of diverse forms of direct participation (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; 85). However, significant weaknesses of the constitution remained in place; mainly, increased concentration of power in the presidency, the prohibition of public financing of political parties and excessive detail in many articles which produced impractical rigidities (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; 86). Decentralisation represented in the constitution was also criticised, as was the high level of state interference in guaranteeing housing rights, access to free education across all levels and free hospital services (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; 86). Furthermore, Chavez’ social reforms left 80% of the economy intact (Petras, 2013; n.p.). Banking, foreign trade, manufacturing and agriculture all continued to operate under private ownership and over 95% of the television programmes viewed by the public were produced by a domestic media owned by US-financed private clients (Petras, 2013; n.p.).

Widespread popular uprisings across a large part of Latin America and the concomitant rejection of IMF policies and regional trade agreements signaled the demise of U.S. client political regimes in the region (Petras, 2013; n.p.). As Robinson (1996; 15) notes, “The structures of authoritarianism and dictatorship began to crumble, above all, in U.S. client regimes, and a general crisis of elite rule began to develop in the South.” Populist-nationalist sentiment was seen as an impediment to Washington’s foreign policy objective of mobilizing regional support for its global “war on terror”. Chavez publicly rejected the rationale of “fighting terror with terror” and Washington retaliated with threats at his refusal to support U.S. military offensives in Iraq and Afghanistan. Petras (2013; n.p) states that soon afterwards, the U.S. ambassador Charles Shapiro met with Venezuelan officials, union leaders and business associations to discuss plans for the *coup* to topple Chavez’ *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV)⁵ government and the U.S. State Department “increased contacts and funding for opposition NGO’s and right wing street gangs” (ibid.). James Petras (2013; n.p.) also notes that the 2002 *coup* plan was warmly welcomed by the *New York Times*, who he labels, “Washington’s semi-official mouthpiece” in part due to its premature front-page story heralding its success.

⁵ The United Socialist Party of Venezuela

The author, Eva Golinger's account of events leading up to the 2002 *coup* attempt supports Petras' (2013) assertions, and provides extensive evidence showing U.S. government involvement. For example, on March 5th, 2002, CIA operatives working inside Venezuela sent a Senior Executive Intelligence Brief (SEIB) to 200 top-level state representatives working at agencies including (but not limited to) the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), the CIA, the State Department and the National Security Agency (NSA). In part, it stated: "Opposition to President Chavez is mounting...calls for his resignation by public officials and private sector leaders are becoming daily occurrences...the military is also divided in its support for Chavez...A successful coup would be difficult to mount" (Golinger, 2006; 61). The brief also mentioned that, "Opposition leaders are not unified and lack a singular strategy for replacing Chavez." Relating this to the "democracy promotion" apparatus, Golinger (ibid.) writes that "...the CIA was well aware of the opposition's downfalls, hence the need for more than \$1 million in NED⁶ (National Endowment for Democracy) funding to "strengthen political parties." ACILS (American Center for International Labor Solidarity) also received that additional \$116,001 to back the CTV⁷ (Confederacion de Trabajadores Venezolanos). Leaders of those very same political parties and labor unions were precisely the ones the CIA was referring to as "not unified" and lack[ing] a singular strategy for replacing Chavez."

On April 11th, 2002, Fedecamaras, CTV and NED-funded opposition parties arranged one of the largest opposition protests Venezuela had ever witnessed (Golinger, 2006; 67). Opposition leaders called on protesters to march to the Presidential Palace to demand Chavez' resignation, at the moment when pro-Chavez demonstrations were going on. In the initial violence that erupted, 12 pro-Chavez demonstrators were killed (Golinger, 2006; 70). More than 60 Venezuelans were killed in the violence that unfolded after the *coup* (Golinger, 2006; 76). Chavez was detained and imprisoned, and Pedro Carmona was installed as Interim President under the Carmona Decree, immediately dissolving all of Venezuela's democratic institutions (Golinger, 2006; 75). A pre-recorded opposition video⁸ was broadcast by the privately-owned Venezuelan media, as well as military calls for insurrection (ibid). A number of pro-Chavez legislators were also viciously attacked and held by the Caracas police force (Golinger, 2006; 76).

In a dramatic development, however, millions of Chavez supporters amassed in the areas around the Presidential Palace, filling up the surrounding streets and cities' demanding that Chavez' be released (Golinger, 2006; 72). The opposition were forced to surrender, politically defeated and militarily

⁶ Golinger (2006; 4), argues that the formation of the NED signalled a new era in U.S. intervention globally: "it was in Nicaragua that this method of interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign nations first evolved. More than one billion dollars were invested in Nicaragua during the 1980's to destroy the Sandinista Revolution."

⁷ Confederation of Venezuelan Workers: Venezuela's most powerful union organisation consisting of over a million members (Golinger, 2006; 215)

⁸ On 11th April, 2002, 10 high-ranking military officers called CNN journalist, Otto Neustald, to a residential location to pre-record a prepared statement: "the testimony deplored the massacre of innocent civilians, announcing that a macabre conspiracy had been implemented by Chavez, resulting in death of six Venezuelans, killed at the hands of government forces"(Golinger, 2006; 68).

outnumbered, and Chavez was reinstated. Washington had greatly underestimated Chavez' popular support base, as well as the military's nationalist and political allegiance to their President (Petras, 2013; n.p.). This was undeniably the most sensational of failed U.S. interventions in Venezuela.

Washington also experimented with what Petras (2013; n.p.) calls an, "external destabilization strategy." This was allegedly to be carried out with the assistance of President Uribe of Colombia who agreed to the use of seven of his military bases, numerous airfields and a "Special Forces" mission for cross-border intrusions (ibid.)⁹. However according to Petras (2013; n.p.), "the failure of the U.S. to destabilize a democratically elected nationalist popular regime in Venezuela occurred when Washington was already heavily engaged in multiple, prolonged wars and conflicts in several countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Libya)", which he asserts, "validates the hypothesis that even a global power is incapable of waging warfare in multiple locations at the same time."

Thereafter, representative of what Robinson (1996; 16) deemed, "democracy promotion", the U.S. has been annually investing millions of dollars of U.S. tax payers' money into Venezuela, strengthening political opposition parties, NGO's and student organisations involved in anti-government street protests and agitation:

"Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a congressionally created entity funded by the State Department, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Washington has channelled more than \$100 million to anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela since 2002" (Golinger, 2011; n.p.).

With the specific goal of taking advantage of local grievances, Petras (2013; n.p.) points out that, "US funding of domestic proxies led to extra-parliamentary, destabilization activity, like sabotage, disrupting Venezuela's economy while blaming the government for 'public insecurity' and covering up opposition violence."

More recently, "Plan Estrategico Venezuela" (Strategic Plan Venezuela) which was brought to the public's attention by Eva Golinger in 2013, unveiled another a plot to oust current Venezuelan president Maduro's "Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela" (United Socialist Party of Venezuela: PSUV) government. According to leaked documents, leaders of the political opposition (collectively aimed to "turn Venezuela back into a 'true democracy'" (Blough, 2013; n.p). The documented plan objectives made explicit reference to instigating violence, by creating, "situations of crisis in the streets that will facilitate U.S. intervention, as well as NATO forces, with the support of the Colombian government. Whenever possible, the violence should result in deaths or injuries"(ibid.).

The relationships between Venezuela and the U.S. have remained problematic to this day, with accusations being sent back and forth. When in February 2014 anti-government protests erupted again in Venezuela, the US ad-

⁹ Petras (2013; n.p.) alleges the plan was to be implemented under the false pretense that Venezuela provided and safeguarded FARC guerillas.

ministration was clearly supporting the anti-Maduro oppositional forces. My research into the reporting of the *New York Times* about these protests purports to show that the media framing of the protests follows the agenda of the U.S. policy towards Venezuela. In a broader sense, this investigation into the *Times* serves as a contribution to a larger debate on the relationships of the media and geo-political interests of the state, within which the media operates.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. Research Questions

The objective of this research is to contribute to existing media research on social protests by expanding on the ways in which the *New York Times*, one of the most widely read mainstream U.S. news media outlets, reports on protest, with specific reference to the 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela. My main research question (R.Q.) and sub-questions (S.Q.) were:

R.Q. How did the U.S. mainstream news medium, the New York Times, frame the 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela?

S.Q. How did the New York Times framing of the 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela relate to the socio-geopolitical history of the relationship between the U.S. and Venezuela?

1.3.2. Selection of Sources and Unit of Analysis

Data was extracted from one of the most widely read online U.S. mainstream news media outlets: the *New York Times*. This newspaper was selected because it is the most popular online mainstream U.S. news media outlet in terms of audience readership (Burrelles Luce, 2013).

According to Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013; 26), “the unit of analysis in a study is the level of abstraction at which you look for variability.” For the purpose of this research, the main units of analyses were the *New York Times* online news articles which reported on the 2014 Venezuelan anti-government protests as a main topic. The *Times* online news protest coverage commenced on February 12th 2014 and continued almost daily throughout that month. Coverage decreased slightly in the month of March¹⁰ and in April, only 9 articles were published. Referred to as the “three-month protest movement” (Cawthorne, 2014), by May 15th 2014, the protests had subsided to “a hard core of a few hundred violent troublemakers” (ibid.). Due to the sheer volume of articles published by the *Times*, the period of my analysis draws to a conclusion on February 28th, 2014. This meant that a total of 15 articles were coded for analysis to draw out conclusions about how the protests were framed. Main units of analysis were retrieved by using the following simple keywords: “Venezuela” and “protests”. Texts were filtered to eliminate any irrelevant articles, meaning i) articles in which the Venezuelan anti-government protests were not the main focus; ii) articles discussing street protests in Venezuela in previous years, or prior to February 12th, 2014; and iii) articles not in the *Times* online *World* section.

A selection of web-based news sources was also used to show how different kinds of news media can provide the reader with a very different version of events. Many of these sources fall into Kenix’s (2011;3) definition of *alternative media*, which distinguishes them by, “their ideological difference from the mainstream [media], their relative limited scale of influence in society, their reliance on citizen reporting and their connection with social movements.” This might suggest they would tend to be sympathetic towards social movements, which in this case was not true. Many of the alternative media sources, especially those of social media, were vehemently opposed to Venezuelan protests and especially to U.S. support of protestors. This is especially so in the case of alternative media by Venezuela solidarity groups.

¹⁰ The *New York Times* published 25 articles related to the protests in Venezuela in the month of March, 2014.

1.3.3. Qualitative Content Analysis and Framing

To address the research question(s), research methods were combined by carrying out a qualitative content analysis using the concept of framing as an analytical tool. Hsieh and Shannon (2005; 1278) describe qualitative content analysis as, “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.” Qualitative content analysis, unlike the quantitative content analysis, does not engage in the quantification of specific words and expressions and their relationships, but aims to go beyond what is explicitly stated in the texts by identifying latent content that can be assimilated into the research. In my own research, this meant constantly connecting the media texts to unstated references about geopolitical relations between the U.S. and Venezuela; in other words, the assignment of specific political roles of the actors in the protests and the peaceful or violent nature of those actors and their actions.

Entman (1993) argues that a content analysis informed by framing can prevent the treatment of all negative or positive terms as equally salient or influential; as terms are often simply tallied up, deemed positive or negative and conclusions drawn thereafter. A content analysis informed by framing, however, is an attempt to measure the salience of textual elements and to gauge the most important frames or clusters of messages with the audience’s schemata. To extract data and encourage a deeper analysis, the research was approached inductively, by remaining open to any kinds of frames or patterns of reporting that emerged from studying the texts; although, it has been noted that studies adopting solely an inductive approach often use too small a sample thus creating difficulties in replicating them (Hertog and McLeod, 2001 cited in de Vreese, 2005).

1.3.4. Researcher's Bias

I have no immediate or direct connection to Venezuela or the U.S. professionally. I view this research as a learning process, as a form of social interaction and a way of engaging with the present. However, I acknowledge that I am neither neutral nor objective in the research process and that it is important to situate myself as an active political subject within the research itself as my political affiliations lie left of centre. I strongly believe that social protest can be an effective tool to challenge (or defend) existing systems of authority and over the years, I have taken part in many demonstrations. Situating myself as an active political subject within this research is an attempt to counter what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 39 cited in Juris, 2008) call, “intellectual bias”, the manner in which our position as an external observer “entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically.”

Chapter 2: Theorizing Media, Journalistic Practices and Protests

2.1 Representations & the Mainstream News Media

Media representations are central to the processes in which meaning is reproduced. How political events are represented emerges out of cultural practices that “inform and shape our understandings so that we interpret the world in similar ways” (Hall, 1997; 2). Meanings are also what “those who wish to govern and regulate the conduct and ideas of others seek to structure and shape” (Hall, 1997; 4). It is this notion of how politico-social realities inform the production of meanings that inspires this research into the mainstream news media. I am particularly interested how social protests are represented in the mainstream news media, following the assumption that those media are closer to the mainstream geo-political interests.

This research is informed by a constructionist approach to textual analysis and theorizing of representation that distinguishes between the material world and the symbolic processes through which representation, language and meaning function. According to this approach, material reality is not refuted, although it is within the realm of symbolic practices and processes in which meaning is constructed which makes it worthy of further scrutiny. It is an approach that

“recognises the public, social character of language. It acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs” (Hall, 1997; 25).

Considering the vast audience reach of the mainstream media, media outlets that fall into this category may be viewed as important vehicles for constructing social realities (Kenix, 2011; 3). Kenix defines the mainstream media as media types situated within the ideological norms of society that “enjoy a widespread scale of influence, rely on professionalized reporters and are heavily connected with corporate and governmental entities” (ibid). In the U.S., these are generally large news conglomerates that went through mergers after the *Telecommunications Act* of 1996, which paved the way for what is commonly now known as vertical integration; the sole ownership or control of successive stages of production and distribution processes of goods or services (Cissel, 2011; 69). As a result, contemporary mainstream news media content tends to be compromised in terms of diversity and quality: “a trend that seems to mirror the predominant tendency within capitalism to work towards the centralisation of economic power in the hands of oligopolies” (Bettig and Hall, 2003; 16 cited in Cissel, 2011; 69).

Contemporary news media output lies in the hands of a few large transnational media corporations. These corporations tend to be politically conservative and opposed to any form of social change that may diminish their power and reduce their profits.

Opposition to forms of social change rooted in the desire to maintain the *status quo* serves as a basis for the mainstream media’s widespread repro-

duction of negative stereotypes upon which discursive constructions of the Other tend to flourish. It is notable that that which is different, is generally subjected to binary forms of representation (Hall, 1997; 230). Stereotyping is a representational practice that, “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference” and it generally takes place when there are flagrant inequalities of power (Hall, 1997; 258). It is a practice that operates through exclusion: “It symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong” (ibid). Hall (1997; 259) notes that this notion is closely correlated to Gramsci’s concept of hegemonic struggle and turns to a quote from Dyer (1977; 30) to illustrate this:

“The establishment of normalcy (ie. what is accepted as ‘normal’) through social- and stereo-types is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups...to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology. So right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make it appear (as it *does* appear to them) as ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable’ – and for everyone in so far as they succeed, they establish their hegemony.”

This research will attempt to identify patterns of representation adopted by the *Times* in its coverage of the 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela and explore how difference is represented in a country with a radical social-democratic government that adheres to the *chavista* ideal of participatory democracy: “an anti-bureaucratic democratic ideal that proposes to devolve power and statecraft to local populations” (Leary, 2009; 26).

2.2 News Media Framing

“Since power is the ability to get others to act as one wants (Nagel, 1975) and assuming coercion isn’t an option, exerting power to affect behavior in a democracy requires framing – telling people what to think about – in order to influence the attitudes that shape their behavior” (Entman, 2008; 392).

The power of a communicating text is in framing. The range of definitions of news frames in both theoretical and empirical contributions is substantial (De Vreese, 2005). Broadly speaking, frames are: “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, 2001 cited in Janssen, 2010; 24). A frame may also be described as,

‘A central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue’ (ibid.).

Gitlin (1980; 7 cited in De Vreese, 2005; 52) describes frames as, “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and conclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse.” The following definition also highlights how a frame can be conceptualised as an emphasis in salience of different aspects of an issue:

“To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993 cited in De Vreese, 2005; 53).

Despite what Entman calls the “fractured” disciplinary status of framing (D’Angelo, 2002) and the inconsistency in definitions, there tends to be agreement that frames are embedded within all forms of texts and at each stage of the communication process. Frames have several locations: in the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture (Entman, 1993 cited in De Vreese, 2005; 51).

According to De Vreese (2005; 51), there are identifiable framing components that occur at different stages of the framing process: frame-building, frame-setting, as well as the individual and societal consequences of framing (d’Ángelo, 2002; Scheufele, 2000; de Vreese, 2002 cited in De Vreese, 2005; 51). Frame building is a result of factors both external and internal to journalism; structural qualities that influence how news media organisations frame issues. Frame-building occurs through continuous interaction between journalists, elites and social movements (De Vreese, 2005; 52). Frame-setting refers to the interactions between media frames and the audience’s existing knowledge and predispositions (ibid). Gamson (1992 cited in Harlow & Johnson, 2011) similarly expresses the notion of frame resonance whereby personal experiences, community beliefs and media discourse affect how the audience understands a frame.

D’Angelo (2002; 870) argues that there is no correct way to study framing and maintains that diverse models can provide an effective conjectural base for researchers: “The vitality and success of communication ought to be gauged vis-à-vis how well researchers coordinate theories towards the end of elaborating and understanding complex communication processes” (Babrow,

1993; Dervin, 1993; Malloran, 1983 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 883). D'Ángelo's multi-paradigmatic, integrated theoretical approach to communication research is used in my research.

The cognitivist approach is concerned with how frames interact with thought processes, triggering semantic associations and how prior knowledge can impact individual decision making. This approach purports that certain "schemata", particularly those that have been often used in the past, "will remain on the top of the mental bin, enabling [them] to direct how an individual recognizes and uses framed information" (Wyer & Srull, 1981 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 875). According to this theory, meaning is negotiated by the individual at the point where frames come into contact with pre-existing knowledge (ibid.). Cognitivists seek to explain how news frames are remembered, interpreted and activated when they come into contact with similar frames in the future (D'Ángelo, 2002; 878).

The constructionist approach also explores framing at an individual level, but concerns itself with how frames are used and expressed by individuals as part of the socialization process. It recognizes that "those tools that are developed, spotlighted and made readily accessible have a higher degree of being used" (Gamson & Modigliani; 10 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 877). Constructionists are of the view that journalists prepare information to create "interpretative packages" (Gamson & Modigliani 1987, 1989 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 877) which reflect politically motivated sponsors (ibid.). Constructionists recognize that news frames can dominate media coverage over long periods of time, ultimately constricting the political awareness of individuals (Gamson, 1992, 1996 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 877). Dominant frames are then seen as forms of "tool kits" from which the public *ought* to draw when formulating opinions (ibid.). When frames dominate over time, co-optation occurs (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; 10 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 877). The constructionist paradigm acknowledges that news can still provide readers with a variety of views that are potentially valuable to the audience's understanding of policy issues (Andsager, 2000, Andsager & Powers, 1999 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 877).

Critical theorists, however, argue that the constructionist approach inadequately accounts for the ideological elements of news reporting and the institutional mechanisms that are in place. Critical scholars argue that frames are a result of newsgathering routines whereby journalists send out information about issues from the position of values defended by political and economic elites (Becker, 1984; Hackett, 1984 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 876). These frames are believed to dominate news coverage (D'Ángelo, 2002; 876). Frames that paradigmatically dominate news are also believed to dominate audiences (ibid), leading readers to understandings that tend to be in line with political interests. This link between political and economic elites and the news frames in the media is particularly relevant for my research.

Critical scholars also stress the importance of how information is selected and how selection processes, "limit the range of debate...and occlude the potential for a democratic public sphere" (Martin & Oshagen, 1997; 691 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 876). In contrast to the constructionist paradigm, critical theorists propose that news frames encourage a single viewpoint that adheres to the *status quo* (Reeses & Buckalew, 1995; Solomon, 1992; Watkins, 2001 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 876). The critical paradigm of framing is propped

up by political economy theory where news is seen as part of the structuration process as it frames social relations in specific ways that echo the views of political and economic elites. The selection of sources for news gathering is seen as part of a hegemonic media process.

According to D'Ángelo, framing should be approached as a research programme with four empirical aims. The first is to identify thematic units (frames) that are ontologically distinct from the topic of the news story (Pan & Kosicki, 1993 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002) and these are always supported by what is called, "framing devices". Framing devices refer to the constitutive elements of news frames (D'Ángelo, 2002; 881). Entman (1993 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 881) argues that these are necessary to detect and prove the existence of frames. In media research carried out on the mainstream news coverage of the *Students for a Democratic Society* (SDS) campaign, one single frame was found to be carried by multiple framing devices such as, "trivialization, polarization, emphasis on internal dissention, marginalization, undercounting and disparagement of the movement's effectiveness" (Gitlin, 1980; 27-28 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 881). The second research imperative is to examine the conditions in which reality is constructed, with an understanding that frames are "powerful discursive cues that can impact cognition" (Rhee, 1997 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 873). The third is that news frames are inter-related to those cognitive and social behaviours they have influenced in the first place (D'Ángelo, 2002; 873). Pre-existing knowledge offers a basis to "alternatively accept, ignore and reinterpret the dominant frames offered by the media" (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 874). Finally, framing researchers tend to agree that the role of the journalist is "to provide citizens with the information that will enable them to gain an adequate understanding of politics" (Schudson, 1983; 15 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 874). Thus, it should be acknowledged that framing plays an important role in influencing public debate about political issues. At the same time, there should be the recognition that, "in mirroring society the media frame... [there is] a particular conception of politics embedded in that society's political life" (Hallin & Mancini, 1984; 834 cited in D'Ángelo, 2002; 874).

This research is inspired by the recognition that news frames can and do influence and shape political socialization and collective action. Framing is concerned with how issues are represented and is always evident in political arguments, journalistic norms and social movements' discourse (De Vrees, 2005; 53). Furthermore, framing research carried out within the sphere of social movements has shown that framing can determine how successful protest action might be (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986 cited in Harlow & Jognson, 2011). Frames can additionally be legitimizing or delegitimizing, which can either encourage support for protests or marginalize them (Gitlin, 1980, McLeod & Hartog, 1999 cited in Harlow & Johnson, 2011).

2.3 News Media and Political Consent

In the 1980's, U.S. free-market policy advocates backed a pluralistic media model and argued that encouraging media competition would create diversity and an expansion of views, as well as reduce regulation and censorship (Jewkes, 2004). However, in a study carried out by Benson & Hallin, (2007; 41) that examined the influence of media structure on journalistic discourse, findings showed that a more commercialised American press offered a, "narrower range of viewpoints as indicated by lesser representation of civil society." Benson and Hallin's (2007; 37) research also revealed that "foreign viewpoints...expressed in political news paragraphs, were virtually invisible in national political coverage in the *New York Times*." In the U.S. there is a tradition of apathy towards foreign affairs (Dimnock and Popkin, 1997¹¹ cited in Curran et al, 2009; 7). Other studies have also demonstrated that commercial imperatives restrict the range of voices represented in the news (McChesney, 1999; Baker, 1994 cited in Benson and Hallin, 2007; 30). In the U.S., a broad section of the public is disengaged from public life (Dionne, 1991 cited in Curran et al., 2009; 7) and on average, 80% of newspaper revenues are secured through advertising (Baker, 1994; Devillard et al., 2001 cited in Benson and Hallin, 2007; 28).

Curran et al. (2009; 6), who examined the relationship between media systems, news delivery and citizens' awareness of public affairs also demonstrated that commercialised systems, "impede the exercise of informed citizenship." This has negative implications for the democratic process, especially in the U.S., where the country's media is almost entirely in private hands (ibid). Furthermore, when nations display high levels of income inequality, the deregulation of markets has more profound consequences on informed citizenship (Curran et al., 2009; 22). Conversely, public service models of broadcasting (such as those found in Denmark and Finland) can narrow the knowledge gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged in society, encouraging a "more egalitarian pattern of citizenship" (2009; 22). Curran et al. (2009; 7) also noted that while American journalism still tended to reflect a 'social responsibility' tradition, the growth of satellite, cable television and web-based journalism had "weakened social responsibility norms."

In addition, commercialisation has also led to a heightened reliance on political elite sources, partly due to the privileged access that government officials have to journalists (Benson and Hallin, 2007; 30). This may suggest that, "a commercialised press is forced to move closer to the state in order to maintain its legitimacy and authority" (Benson and Hallin, 2007; 43). Benson and Hallin's (2007) comparative content analysis of the U.S and French national press in the 1960's and 1990's showed that French press news coverage was closely connected to the political arena with greater representation of civil society viewpoints. The U.S. press news coverage, on the other hand, was found to have close ties to political elite viewpoints

This point resonates loudly with Herman and Chomsky's popular "manufacturing consent" paradigm, which purports that news media mobilise support for the policy preferences of dominant elites and news content adheres to

¹¹ See also Kull et al., 2004 cited in Curran et al., 2009; 7

the agendas and frames of references of those elites (Robinson, 2001; 526). It is a model that is extremely useful for my research to help understand why the news media perpetuates the views of the political and corporate elites. Yet, it is a totalising theory that seeks to explain the marginalisation of oppositional viewpoints as the “largely unintended outcome of market structures and economic determinants” (Cottle, 2006; 14). In the “manufacturing consent” paradigm, the news media are reactive actors, passively dependent on elite sources and unable to influence policy outcomes.

Robinson (2001; 528), however, contests the notion of a passive media that is wholly servile to elite interests, exemplified in the U.S. press role during the Vietnam War. The U.S. press adopted a strong critical stance against government foreign policy. This however was related to the fact that there was a section of the Washington political elite questioning the U.S. government’s involvement in the war. This implied that news media *could* shape public policy when there was elite conflict over an issue (Robinson, 2001; 531). Alternatively, when there is elite consensus, the news media do not tend to engage in critical journalism (*ibid*). Research related to media reporting in times of state discord or elite dissensus on policy issues and the possibilities these conditions produce for more engaged media criticism is placed in media studies within the wider “media contest” paradigm (Cottle, 2006; 21).

Robinson (2001; 529) makes a salient point stating that many political economy theorists have not tended to further develop the potential transformative element of the media, denying the possibility that journalists may also take sides in policy disputes. Nor do they consider that mediated coverage of events may affect those it reaches in profound ways, a factor that may also influence policy-making decisions. It has been previously documented that senior U.S. policy-makers are often moved by emotive reports of suffering people. The “manufacturing consent” paradigm fails to address the fact these news reports may compel them to intervene in humanitarian crises (Robinson, 2001; 528). In sum, the “manufacturing consent” paradigm does not acknowledge the possibility of news media *effects* on policy outcomes (Robinson, 2001; 528). It also fails to adequately address the complexity of power relations between journalists and their sources, and how these might change over time.

Gadi Wolfsfeld’s (1997) “political contest” paradigm represents a theoretical development that highlights the democratic capacity of the media in the “public sphere”. The idea of media as “public sphere” (Habermas 1974, 1989, 1996) - as a space in which thoughts, information, discourses and ideas can be raised, discussed and given public representation, therefore forming civil societies - is closely linked to the media contest paradigm (Cottle, 2006; 20). It is a theoretic model that takes issue with the certainties implicit in the “manufacturing consent” paradigm. It can be situated within the broader “media contest” literature. According to Cottle (2006; 20), the “media contest” paradigm incorporates research which recognises,

“...the complexities of the social landscape; evidence of contest and contention within media representations as well as the strategic interventions informing their production; occasional successful media campaigns by “challenger” groups, such as environmental activists; and the changing media ecology including new interactive communication technologies and communicative possibilities “ (Cottle, 2006; 20).

Although criticised for replacing “the political” in the theoretical framework at the expense of “the economic”, Wolfsfeld’s (1997) “political contest” theory recognises that mediated conflicts are “neither linear, nor constant” (Cottle, 2006; 23). It is built on the premise that diverse groups in society contend for media attention as a way to secure political influence. It also acknowledges an imbalance of power relations, accepting that the political process is more likely to influence the media than the other way around (1997; 5 cited in Cottle, 2006; 22). According to Wolfsfeld (1997), “The ‘authorities’ level of control over the political environment is one of the key variables that determine the role of the news media in political conflicts.” Thus, when authorities have full control outside of the media environment, attempts to control the media should not be difficult. However, if and when authorities start to lose power over challenger groups, opportunities emerge for different voices to enter the media environment, giving challengers the possibility to endorse their own frames and use the media as an instrument for political influence (ibid).

In addition, the “political contest” model addresses the importance of exploring the competition and antagonism between actors across two dimensions: the structural and the cultural, as they contest both access to the news media and the control of media frames (1997; 5 cited in Cottle, 2006; 22):

“While the former prompts *structural* analysis of the interactions and dependencies between media sources and the media, the latter invites *cultural* analysis of how norms, beliefs and routines influence the construction of media frames or the guiding interpretative frameworks organizing news representations. This second dimension reminds us that ‘political contests are also struggles over meaning in which success within the news media can lead to higher levels of political support.’” (ibid)

Wolfsfeld’s research on “political contests” has been criticised for its lack of long-term historical contextualisation¹² (2006; 24). Furthermore, while Robinson (2001; 540) praises Wolfsfeld’s work on how and why challengers manage to steer the media agenda, he also draws attention to his failure to theorize the connection between the resulting media coverage and policy outcomes. Instead, Robinson (2001; 525) advocates a “policy-media interaction” model, which seeks to define the specific conditions in which the media may shape political decisions. He expands on both the “political contest” and “media influence” paradigms proposed by Hallin (1986) and Bennett (1990) in order to achieve a more “nuanced 2-way understanding of media-state relations” (Robinson; 541). According to Robinson, (2001; 528) news media influences policy when there is elite dissensus over an issue. However, the conditions regarding “policy uncertainty” must be present, in addition to critically framed media coverage- and when this is the case, the media becomes an active part of the elite debate. The higher the level of policy uncertainty, the more susceptible the policy process will be to negative media coverage (Robinson, 2001; 535).

¹² Wolfsfeld’s (1997) most renowned study, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* addressed “challenger groups” and the role of the media in the Israeli / Palestine conflict. In the context of the struggles in the Middle East, Cottle (2006; 24) sees the absence of historical contextualisation as a political shortcoming.

Those debates in media studies are especially relevant for my research, as they allow me to explore the links between the *New York Times* framing of the 2014 protests in Venezuela and the conflictual relationships between Venezuela and the U.S. In this particular case, I argue that the *New York Times* has closely followed dominant U.S. foreign policy interpretation of the events, using some of the old and well established political “schemata”, such as those produced during the Cold War.

2.4 Protest Reporting: Departing from the Protest Paradigm

McLeod and Hertog's (1999) research demonstrates that social movements and protests often become victims of what is known as the *protest paradigm*: "a routinised pattern of social protest reporting with heightened emphasis on violence, deviance and strange or erratic behavior". This form of reporting often focusses on the violence, deviancy, collective nuisance and /or spectacle surrounding the protestors. According to this paradigm, when expressions of collective discontent towards the ruling class can no longer be ignored, the media tends to demonize protestors by portraying them as chaotic and violent. The more radical the changes demanded by a protest group, the more likely it is that the protest will be marginalised, delegitimized and criminalized by the media (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). These kinds of reporting techniques shift attention away from important issues and political function of the protest through masking its socio-political and economic causes. Although, generally, media coverage of social movements or protests has for a long been either negative or non-existent, the protest paradigm has been one of the most commonly used journalistic models for covering social protests (ibid). This routinised pattern of reporting goes some way to explain why most people who saw the fatalities from protests in Venezuela assumed they were the result of actions of state forces as this is often the case in other protests when people take to the streets (Weisbrot, 2014).

This journalistic paradigm, however, offers an insufficient explanation of how and why some protests and social movements manage to secure more positive media coverage than others; a salient point in relation to the U.S. mainstream news media coverage of the recent 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela. One of a number of recent allegations made by a group of human rights advocates¹³ against the *New York Times* has been its extensive coverage of the recent Venezuelan anti-government protests, compared to its far less extensive coverage of the Occupy Wall Street protests (Robertson, 2014b; n.p.), which one might have thought would have been more relevant to the U.S. audience.

It is relevant to note here that *protest paradigm* was created before the *Arab Spring* protests, in which the protesters have received more positive coverage in the news, while the governments they protested against have been depicted in negative terms. Importantly, in the Venezuelan protests, U.S. newspapers have underplayed, or even ignored, the violent nature of the anti-government protests, "echoing the wider international media's coverage, [where] the focus has been on the supposedly peaceful nature of the protests and the supposedly violent state repression they face." (Robertson, 2014b; n.p.). Thus, in contrast to the normative representational strategy manifest in the *protest paradigm*, anti-

¹³ A group of forty two human rights activists gave their views on the Venezuelan protests and issued a warning about the media's continual distortion of the human rights issue, which they asserted could be seen in the "disinformation campaign" that many national and international media outlets upheld (Robertson, 2014b).

government protestors in Venezuela were portrayed in a positive light, as victims of human rights abuses, living in a repressive and authoritarian regime.

Cottle (2006; 33) argues that further layers of complexity may be situated within the political context surrounding social movements, in the sphere of cultural symbolism and in the strategies that the movements themselves adopt in order to gather and rally around support for their cause. More recent research reveals that further complexity and political opportunity can be found in the, “discursive contention and often spectacular forms of contemporary mediated protests, as well as considerations of geopolitics, dramaturgy and the changing repertoires of protest” (ibid.). Cottle (2006; 33) further proposes:

“Attending to these dimensions of demonstrations and protests introduces more politically contingent, historically dynamic and tactically evolving interactions between protestors and media and these help to explain how some demonstrations and protests can in fact buck the media trends documented in earlier studies and secure sympathetic media coverage to advance their strategic and political aims.”

I argue in this research that an understanding of the exception of Venezuelan protests from the *protest paradigm* rule necessitates an analysis of U.S. – Venezuelan geopolitical relations and the adhering of the *New York Times* to the U.S. geopolitical agenda.

Drawing on a concept of binary opposition rooted in Saussurian linguistics, mainstream news media outlets commonly create categories such as *good versus evil* or *us versus them* (Hartley, 2002; 19). Binary opposition is a concept that explains how words and signs generate meaning in relation to how they function in opposition to the other; “their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not” (ibid). The *Times* coverage of the 2014 anti-government protests in Venezuela adhered to this mainstream news tradition, opting for monolithic binary categories of explanation over a more nuanced pattern of reporting. As a result, a meta-frame that emerged from the *New York Times* coverage of 2014 protests was that of the *state repression of peaceful protest(or)s*, capturing the protests from a US-centric position. As my analysis will show, this frame borrowed amply from political discourses related to communism that proliferated during the Cold War era.

The *state repression of peaceful protest(or)s* frame portrayed the 2014 Venezuelan protests in binary terms; non-violent or peaceful protest(or)s juxtaposed with a powerful, repressive dictatorship. Assigning positive or negative values to opposing categories helps to strengthen ideological productivity (Hartley, 2002; 19). However, when groups or actors do not fit neatly into the assigned categories, journalists require alternative tools and strategies, and have to adopt different discursive practices. In this particular research, I also investigate what those alternatives are and which discursive practices have been adopted.

The *state repression of peaceful protest(or)s* meta-frame depended on two sub-frames: first, on dictatorship sub-frame which represented Venezuela as a repressive state using both direct violence against population and repressing freedom of expression; second, on representing protest(or)s as peaceful and political opposition as non-violent.

Chapter 3: Dictatorship Sub-Frame: Violent and Repressive State

3.1. The Dictatorship Sub-Frame

The sub-frame on *dictatorship* discursively constructed the Venezuelan state as a dictatorship and President Maduro as a dictator wielding absolute power over citizens. President Maduro was represented as a repressive and archaic ruler, out of touch with a modern electorate. The *dictatorship* frame was identified in all fifteen analysed articles, which indicates that it played an essential role in reinforcing the *state repression of peaceful protest(or)s* meta-frame. At times, the dictatorship frame added a dramatic dimension to the discursive battle as its support was essential to the representation of violent repression and lack of freedom of expression; both of which are characteristics of totalitarian regimes. The *dictatorship* sub-frame also incorporated a number of features generally associated with totalitarian states: high levels of military aggression, the suppression of basic civil liberties, a monopolised and state-owned media, the absence of individual freedoms and an overbearing state apparatus.

The power of the dictatorship frame lay in its ability to resonate with pre-existing geo-political discourses about Venezuela, by relying heavily on anti-communist discourses rooted in the Cold War which framed the former Soviet Union as a major military and ideological threat to U.S. security and the American way of life. Jenkins (2002; n.p.) argues that discursively, communism and totalitarianism have become indistinguishable in public discourse; one and the same to the average American citizen.

In politics, the delegitimisation of a political opponent is common practice; yet for news media consumers the incessant blame game played out by political opponents can become repetitive and mundane. Dramaturgy, the art and technique of the theatre, however, can reanimate the political sphere when diametrically opposed ideologies reach an impasse, (re)invigorating what might otherwise have been deemed stagnant by the public (Jenkins, 2002; n.p.). Jenkins (ibid.) argues that nowhere has the delegitimisation of a political system been more apparent than in the US - Soviet Union stand-off during the Cold War, which created ideological animosity of an unparalleled scale. During the Cold War, the U.S. government successfully mobilised mass anti-communist sentiment through its *Red Scare* campaign. A relentless stream of propaganda kept the public alert to the constant threat of communism and an impending nuclear war that could bring civilization to a halt. Later on, the Soviet Union came to epitomize the failure of communism, and its offshoot, socialism, became not only a political anathema, but a point of ridicule (Jenkins, 2002; n.p.).

Dramaturgy was used in the *Times* as a discursive framing tool to invoke the *dictatorship* sub-frame which transferred attention away from any investigation into the historical, political, economic and ideological conflicts that produced the opposition to President Maduro's politics. Instead, the journalists provided elaborate, lengthy and colourful descriptions of public events that resonated with pre-existing Cold War discourses, tapping into those frames to reactivate anti-communist sentiment in the readership. Maduro was framed as a *dictator* through the use of detailed coverage of particular features of public events that the reader would associate with dictatorships:

“On Wednesday night, television audiences could watch a special nationwide broadcast of Mr. Maduro as he attended a parade in honour of the country’s Youth Day. The parade included generals riding on tanks, female soldiers carrying swords and dressed in ornate red, black and gold uniforms with knee-high patent-leather boots” (Appendix 2).

Interestingly, Jenkins (2002; n.p.) also argues that throughout the Cold War, the combination of the legitimization of the threat and delegitimation of the source of the threat had come to be representative of how the American public dealt with their fears about the outcome of the Cold War.

In the *Times*, President Maduro was also portrayed as a delusional and paranoid dictator waging an imaginary war with his political opponents: “I alert the world,” he said, draped in the yellow, blue and red presidential sash with a large gold badge like a giant sheriff’s star pinned to his left breast, “we are facing a planned coup d’état” (Appendix 2).

A textual reference to Stalin also triggers the *dictatorship* sub-frame in the article, *Venezuelan Opposition Chief Surrenders But Not Without A Rally*: “On a building behind him were posters from last year’s presidential election, with Mr. Maduro’s moustached face looking placidly down on the scene” (Appendix 6).

The negative value assigned to *the dictatorship* sub-frame throughout the *Times* protest reports helped to undermine the legitimacy of the Venezuelan government. The representation of Maduro as a pale imitation of his predecessor, Hugo Chavez, who was similarly portrayed by the U.S. press as a dictator, also functioned to the same end:

“But Mr. Chávez also had an instinctive feel for the limits of such tactics and never engaged in repression on this scale. It’s that politician’s grasp of the pitfalls of going too far, too fast that seems lacking in Mr. Maduro” (Appendix 11).

The discursive construction of communism as a violent and repressive system; the antithesis of peace, installed tremendous fear in U.S. citizens’ of any alternative political ideology, any system regarded totalitarian in nature or opposed to American ideals (Jenkins, 2002; n.p.). For Senator McCarthy, the very nature of communism was bereft of any trace of *Americanism*:

“Combining the legitimacy of combating Communism with the desire to ridicule it became the status quo for the American public and became symbolic of the American attempt to unite ideology and identity, that is being “American” with both “republican democracy” and “capitalist” in direct opposition to the enforced identity of the Soviet behemoth” (Jenkins, 2002; n.p.)

3.2. Violent Repression of Citizenry

The *state repression as violent repression* meta-frame constructed the Venezuelan government as a repressive state that resorted exclusively to violence and force in order to quash popular dissent. This was particularly evident in one article written by the journalist, Francisco Toro explicitly entitled *Rash Repression in Venezuela*:

“The government’s response, however, has been grossly disproportionate—ranging from an almost inexhaustible supply of tear gas and plastic bullets to the use of armored personnel carriers, tanks and paramilitary shock troops on motorcycles. At one point, the Venezuelan Air Force had its Russian-built Sukhoi fighter jets circle above San Cristóbal to cow rock-throwing kids” (Appendix 11).

Across the texts, lexical choices including the vocabulary the *Times* journalists used, tended to strengthen the *dictatorship* sub-frame and the *state repression as violent repression* meta-frame:

“The police stayed well away from the rampaging youths around the prosecutor’s office until their vehicles were set afire. Then, plainclothes and uniformed officers rushed into a small park in front of the office, grabbing people indiscriminately, pummelling them, pushing them to the ground and kicking them. Most of the protesters were gone by then, so many of those beaten by the police were news photographers and cameramen” (Appendix 2).

In the article entitled *In Venezuela, Protest Ranks Grow Broader* (Appendix 12), the sentence, “Later, residents burned tires and threw rocks at guardsmen, who advanced and entered a side street, firing tear gas and shotguns directly at the houses” informed the reader that guardsmen fired tear gas and shotguns “directly at the houses”, which accentuated the immediate danger state violence could pose to the private domain of the home where it is assumed that peaceful families live. This emphasised the dichotomy between the violent public sphere and the insecurities of the private homes, characteristic of the violent totalitarian regimes.

Elsewhere in the news reports, the kinds of verbs that were chosen also helped to frame the state as brutal, as exemplified in the following paragraph:

“Last week, President Nicolás Maduro sent extra troops to contain the unrest in this bastion of the political opposition, and in recent days National Guard soldiers have swept through residential neighbourhoods, firing tear gas and plastic buckshot at residents, menacing or detaining protesters and destroying motorcycles and other property” (Appendix 13).

The above text uses the phrasal verb “swept through” to create the impression of a powerful and efficient militarised state with the ability to move swiftly through large public spaces destroying anything that comes in its path. “Menacing” is a verb we would normally associate with threat or a villain, whilst the words “detaining” and “destroying” helped to strengthen that frame. Once again, the focus on residential neighbourhoods creates associations with peaceful citizens whose lives are endangered by the actions of a violent state. The *Times* news reports routinely employed such language an important framing function discursively connected to the Cold War. The Venezuelan state represents the violent nature of totalitarian states and is constructed as a communist regime that suppresses any form of dissent through the use of violent force.

In many of the *Times* articles, the arrangement of sentences in terms of the state's actions against protestors also highlighted the importance of syntax when framing the state as violent. In a study carried out by the Yew-Jin Fang (1994 cited in Cottle, 2002; 42), it was found that one way to avoid addressing the causations of death during protests was to use intransitive verbs; for example, "thirty people died" or "thirty people sustained injuries" (ibid). The use of intransitive verbs allows the agent of the action to stay anonymous and the widespread use of intransitive sentences throughout the *Times* articles in reporting the wounded, killed or arrested steered blame for the violence away from the hard-line political opposition in the direction of the Venezuelan government:

"Three people were shot to death during protests" (Appendix 5); "At least four people have been shot to death" (Appendix 9); "Fifty students were wounded on Day 2" (Appendix 11); "Two students were arrested" (Appendix 11); "Since last week, four people have been shot to death in protests" (Appendix 7); "Several were fatally shot" (Appendix 13)

How the information was structured throughout the texts strengthened the discursive construction of *state repression as violent repression*, as is the case in the following text where the information sequencing with statistics at the end of the paragraph leaves the impression that the Venezuelan government is guilty of excessive force:

"The government continues to ignore the vast majority of demonstrators, who have acted peacefully, and instead focuses attention on acts of violence and property damage that have been associated with some of the protests. At least four people have been shot to death" (Appendix 9).

The discursive construction of Venezuelan *state repression as violent repression* was further supported by including articles that focussed on the U.S. government's response to the violence, evident in the article explicitly entitled, *Kerry Says Venezuela Crackdown is Unacceptable* (Appendix 9) in which the word "crackdown" leaves the reader in no doubt that excessive force has been used. The British-based *Venezuela Solidarity Campaign (VSC) Media and Information Working Group* argues that the commonly-adopted media narrative of widespread state repression of peaceful protests is "wide off the mark":

"The claim of a crackdown also doesn't stack up. Over the past three months of violence around 3200 people have been arrested, around 600 face criminal charges and 174 remain detained including 12 police officers. This is for violence that has seen 42 dead, 800 injured, the centres of cities brought to standstill by roadblocks, targeting and arson of public transport and the burning down of public facilities. "(Venezuela Solidarity Campaign Media and Information Working Group, 2014.) The working group goes on to make the point that, during the 2011 London riots, a similar number of people were arrested (3,100 people) and over 1,500 people appeared before magistrates on charges (ibid). However, in that case, the British government was not subject to the same accusations by the U.S. government. In the *Times* article, *Kerry says Venezuela Crackdown is Unacceptable*, Neuman states:

"I am watching with increasing concern the situation in Venezuela," Mr. Kerry said in a statement on Friday night. "The government's use of force and judicial intimidation against citizens and political figures, who are exercising a legit-

imate right to protest, is unacceptable and will only increase the likelihood of violence” (Appendix 9).

In addition, there was no real discussion of Venezuela’s judicial apparatus in the *Times* news reports analysed. This particular point has been reiterated by a number of prominent Venezuelan human rights experts¹⁴ who called for an end to the media distortion of protests and state response. The *Times* failed to report that the Venezuelan Attorney General’s office was,

“...investigating 59 cases of presumed violations of human rights and 17 officials of different security bodies are being held in custody as a consequence of the violent acts which have occurred in recent days.” (*Venezuelan Human Rights Experts Call for End to “Media Distortion” of Protests and State Response*, 2013)

The U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, also publicly accused President Maduro of pursuing “a terror campaign against his own people” (Weisbrot, 20th March 2014, *The truth about Venezuela: a revolt of the well-off, not a 'terror campaign'*) and threatened to implement the Inter-American Democratic Charter of the Organisation of American States (OAS) against Venezuela, despite the fact that the OAS had previously announced the regional organisation’s solidarity with the Venezuelan government: “twenty-nine countries approved it, with only the right-wing governments of Panama and Canada siding with the U.S. against it” (ibid).

¹⁴ A group of forty two human rights activists shared their views on the Venezuelan protests and issued a warning about the continual distortion of the human rights issue, which they assert can be seen in the “disinformation campaign” that many national and international media outlets upheld (Robertson, 2014).

3.3. Violation of Freedom of Expression

The *dictatorship* sub-frame and *state repression* meta-frame were also supported by the representation of the state as a violator of *freedom of expression*. This was mainly invoked in articles 7, 11 and 12 that discursively constructed the Venezuelan government as an authoritarian state that uses systematic control of information.

For example, on February 14th, 2014, the *Times* published an article entitled *Protests Swell in Venezuela as Places to Rally Disappear* which linked the repression of violent protest(or)s to a wholly imaginary state-controlled media. It informed the readers that a Colombian cable news channel *NTN24* had been taken down by President Maduro due to its coverage of the demonstrations:

“Caracas, Venezuela - The only television station that relentlessly broadcast voices critical of the government was sold last year, and the new owners have softened its news coverage. Last week, President Nicolás Maduro banned a foreign cable news channel after it showed images of a young protester shot to death here” (Appendix 7).

The lead to this story inserted President Maduro into the epicentre of the discourse and described him as a dictator, creating the impression that the majority of Venezuelan news media outlets uncritically supported the state, although there was wide evidence that suggested the opposite was true. For example, journalist, Mark Weisbrot’s recent analysis of the *Times* protest coverage of Venezuela revealed that the assertion about the sale of the TV station critical of the government was entirely false (Hart, 2014). This suggests that the accuracy of the *Times* report may have been deemed of secondary value to the discursive framing of the state as inhibiting citizens’ freedom of expression. Weisbrot’s research produced extensive evidence that contested the dominant discourse about lack of freedom of expression employed by the *Times* and highlighted the fact that pro-opposition TV news coverage regularly provided voices critical of the Venezuelan state (Zeese & Flowers, 2014). In addition, nearly all private TV stations in Venezuela are controlled by those opposing Maduro’s government, which they regularly criticize (Schepers, 2014).

The *Times* assertion that a lack of freedom of expression is manifest in the state’s refusal to provide voice for the political opposition on television was immediately questioned by *Just Foreign Policy*, an independent and non-partisan membership organization dedicated to reforming U.S. foreign policy, that gathered together a petition with 13,000 signatures calling for a retraction of the *Times* statement. Reluctantly, the *Times* succumbed to pressure and reprinted a correction on February 26th, 2014;

“An earlier version of this article referred imprecisely to Globovision. Before its sale last year, it broadcast more voices critical of the Venezuelan government than any other TV station, but it was not the only one to regularly feature government critics.” (Peter Hart, 2014)¹⁵

However, the correction of this single fact continued to mask the fundamental problem with the *Times*’ consistent representation of the absence from Vene-

¹⁵ The *Times* correction appears on February 20th, 2014 at the end of the article entitled *Protests Swell in Venezuela as Places to Rally Disappear* (Appendix 7)

zuelan TV of voices critical of the government (ibid), thus leaving the representation of the repression of freedom of expression intact.

This was further reinforced elsewhere in the protest reports through the use of one-sided quotes pulled from the speeches of hard-line opposition leader, Leopold Lopez (*Voluntad Popular*)¹⁶: “we no longer have any free media to express ourselves in Venezuela” (Weisbrot, 2014). In the article entitled, *Venezuelan Opposition Chief Surrenders, but Not Without a Rally*, the reader is also informed that Lopez is, “demonized in government-controlled television and radio” (Appendix 6), suggesting that the state exercises absolute authority over and control of the nation’s news media which served to strengthen the framing of the Venezuelan government as a totalitarian state:

“The government has also mobilized its sprawling propaganda apparatus — newspapers and radio stations, half a dozen TV stations, hundreds of websites — in a concerted campaign of vilification to demonize the protest leaders as a shadowy fascist cabal in cahoots with American imperialists” (Appendices 11 and 6).

The representation of Venezuela as a brutal militarized state where the citizens are insecure in their homes, and control of media and the repression of freedom of expression are rampant, supports the dictatorship frame, recalling discourses from the Cold War associations with communism. While some of the statements in the *New York Times* were direct lies, it is the framing of the reported events that plays the crucial role in these representations.

¹⁶ The Popular Will Party

Chapter 4. The *Protest Paradigm* Inverted: Peaceful Protest(or)s and Non-Violent Political Opposition

4.1. Protest(or)s as Peaceful

The representation of the Venezuelan anti-government *protest(or)s as peaceful* by the *Times* is both part of - and lends essential support to - the political saliency of the *state repression of peaceful protestors* meta-frame. These protests were represented as peaceful in all but two of the fifteen analysed articles. Notably, in those articles in which protests were not explicitly portrayed as peaceful, the principal journalistic task seems to have been not to report about the protests. This may be inferred from the titles: *Venezuela Leader Pulls Foreign Channel Over Protest Coverage* and *Response from Latin American Leaders is Muted*. In nine out of the fifteen analysed articles, the word “peaceful” was explicitly used in the text in either its adjective form to describe the protests: “peaceful march” (Appendix 1), “after the peaceful march” (Appendix 14), “demonstrations in recent weeks have been peaceful” (Appendix 1) or in its adverbial form to either describe how the event unfolded: “the march, through the center of Caracas, unfolded peacefully” (Appendix 2) or how the protestors behaved: “demonstrators, who have acted peacefully” (Appendix 9).

The protests were represented as peaceful by depicting the protestors as inhibited in agency and power to influence events. In part, this was achieved by using simple linguistic strategies such as clusters of words that have similar or shared meanings. For example, the protestors are repeatedly referred to as “young protestors (Appendices 1, 7, 13 and 14), “youths” (Appendices 3, 6 and 2), “young people” (Appendix 2), “young demonstrators” (Appendix 13), “teenagers” (Appendix 12) and even “rock-throwing kids” (Appendix 11). Reconstructing the identities of protestors as youths, or even as children, in the minds of the reader can alter perception of events in subtle, but meaningful ways and lead the reader to conclude that the young protestors had a justifiable degree of naivety or lack of control, effectively diminishing their responsibility.

Other labels describing the protestors were used interchangeably, which made it more difficult for the reader not only to understand the chronology of events, but also the relationships that existed between actors. Words and collocations that were exchanged in conjunction with the violence included: “students” (Appendices 2, 5, 11, 12 and 13), “student activists” (Appendix 11), “people” (Appendix 1), “protestors” (Appendices 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12), “students and other protestors” (Appendix 13), “teenagers” (Appendix 12), “residents” (Appendix 12) and “anti-government supporters” (Appendix 13). This confused the issue of accountability and affected how the reader assigned responsibility for the violence.

In the initial *Times* protest report of Feb. 12th, several different descriptive terms are assigned to the actors: “two people”, “thousands of people”, “government opponents”, “student demonstrators”, “several hundred young protestors” and “one demonstrator”. This helped convey the impression that the anti-government protestors were one homogeneous group (of young people):

“At least two people were killed in unrest in Caracas on Wednesday, officials said, as thousands of people took to the streets of the capital in the largest anti-government protests in months. The violence erupted after government opponents attended a peaceful march and rally to protest the arrest of student demonstrators elsewhere in the country. Following the march, several hundred young protesters threw rocks at riot police officers and broke windows in a government building. One demonstrator was shot in the head and killed” (Appendix 1).

One week prior to the onset of the *Times* protest coverage, there had also been violent demonstrations in the states of Táchira and Mérida in the Andean region, which involved groups of masked students armed with Molotov cocktails who set up barricades, destroyed government buildings and attacked a Governor’s residence, an incident which reportedly left twelve police officers injured (Robertson, 2014e). The *Venezuela Solidarity Campaign* (VSC, n.d.), a left-wing, pro-government, but independent website also addressed this point, adding the following information:

“In early February, in Tachira (a state bordering Colombia) the state Governor’s house was attacked with Molotov cocktails, stones and bottles by opposition supporters when a group of up to seventy attacked his official residence. 12 people were injured and they allegedly destroyed a police sentry post, broke down the main gates and threatened his wife, who was protected by police. A bus of Cuban baseball players was also attacked by opposition activists. Targeting Cubans is symbolic as Cuba provides Venezuela with doctors in exchange for oil – one of the social policies closely identified with the Government.”

However, the aforementioned violence went unreported in the *Times*. *Venezuela Analysis* also reported on these incidents, noting that the violent demonstrations led by a few pro-opposition student groups who were “masked and hooded” and did not display banners describing the reasons for their protests heralded the beginning of “a new phase of radical Venezuelan opposition activity” (Robertson, 2014e).

Throughout the analysed *Times* protest reports, a number of tropes were employed to invoke the protest(or)s as peaceful. The first was to represent protest violence as a last resort to normally peaceful and law-abiding citizens;

“Across town, Isbeth Zambrano, 39, a mother of two, still fumed about the time two days earlier when the National Guard drove onto the street, where children were playing, and fired tear gas at residents. Now she sat in front of her apartment building, casually guarding a beer crate full of firebombs” (Appendix 12).

Alternatively, it was constructed as an act of self-defence: “pointing to the casualties around the country and the aggressive tactics, many protesters said they saw no choice but to do what was needed to act in self-defence” (Appendix 13). Violence was thus framed as a direct response to the state repression:

“In the neighborhood of Barrio Sucre, residents said they were outraged last week when a guardsman fired a shotgun at a woman and her adult son, sending both to the hospital with serious wounds. In response, the residents built barricades to keep the guardsmen out” (Appendix 12).

The wide portrayal of the protest(or)s as peaceful concealed the particularly violent nature of the barricades (or *guarimbas* as they are also referred to) which were erected during the anti-government protests, although it is estimated that 21 of the 42 protest-related deaths can be attributed to the barricades (VSC Media and Information Working Group, 2014). In a letter to the *Times* calling for an end to media distortion of protests and state response, prominent human rights experts stated:

“Above all, we cannot speak of peaceful barricades, as they have been verified to be dangerous. The barricades have affected the main and secondary roads in middle and upper income sectors in eight of the country’s 335 municipalities, all of which are governed by opposition mayors. Cables, barbed wire, felled trees, rocks, and spilt grease oil on asphalt mix with disused furniture, tires and rubbish that are lit on fire have been used. The covers of public drains have been lifted, leaving holes in which at least two motorcyclists have died.” (Robertson, 2014b)

The aforementioned description of the barricades constructs an entirely different picture than the one given in the *Times*:

“On Monday, residents in Caracas, the capital, and other Venezuelan cities piled furniture, tree limbs, chain-link fence, sewer grates and washing machines to block roads in a coordinated action against the government” (Appendix 12).

Barricades are an effective civil disobedience tool as they can cause extensive disruption and in barricaded areas in Venezuela, protestors blocked traffic for over a month, charging fees for safe passage (Johnston, 2014a). Outside the capital city of Caracas, in Mérida, areas were entirely cordoned off and the director of the Mérida state regional health authority, Denis Gomez, condemned the situation:

“In other countries this doesn't even happen in times of war. When the symbol of the Red Cross is seen, it can pass through in the midst of a conflict. Here not even the staff or an ambulance have been able to get through. This can't be called a peaceful protest” (Robertson, 2014a).

Often the tone of a journalistic text supports the framing of political events as it expresses the journalist’s attitude toward either the subject matter or the reader. In the *Times* article entitled, *Crude Weapons Help Fuel Unrest in Bastion of Venezuelan Opposition*, in which the journalist explicitly acknowledges the extremely violent nature of the protests, the overall tone helps to portray the protestors in a positive light. The use of metaphor is particularly useful in this article as it allows the reader to make immediate sense of what is experienced. In this way, the protest(or)s are constructed as harmless and spontaneous:

“No one here is hiding the heavy artillery, such as it is. Students camping out on an intersection of this city, which has become a battleground between the authorities and antigovernment protesters, have a variety of homemade weapons — mortars to lob small, noisy explosives, miniature firebombs, slingshots, clubs and nasty-looking things called Miguelitos made from hoses festooned with nails“ (Appendix 13).

Use of the phrasal verb “camping out” conveys the impression of a Boy Scout camp and the violence that could be inflicted by “nasty-looking things” is lost in the listing of slingshots and devices that appear to make more noise than harm:

“The camp sprang into action with an improvised arsenal. That included homemade mortars made from steel tubes. A small bag of explosive powder is put inside the tube and a fuse is lit. When it goes off it makes a loud bang and launches a firework-like projectile about half a block” (Appendix 13).

The representation of inexperienced youth “camping out”, rather than violent protestors is strengthened in the paragraph above through the description of what is commonly known as “pipe bombs.” These are described as “improvised firework –like projectiles”. Actualised through linguistic strategies, the frivolous tone down-playing violence adopted throughout this article reflects the biases of the journalist’s approach, especially in the sentence: “still, at times the whole business has the naïve feel of a boy’s adventure tale” (ibid). This is indicative of the overall treatment of the protests throughout the coverage, echoed in the reports where the protests are framed as spontaneous events:

“The protests’ lack of structure has given them resilience, but also an anarchic edge. There is no single leader in a position to give the movement strategic direction. Its favored protest tactic — the improvised barricade to isolate given neighborhoods from the outside world — appears self-defeating at best, as some of these barricades have led to violence” (Appendix 11).

Similarly, in *Protests Swell in Venezuela as Places to Rally Disappear*, the protests are constructed as devoid of any real objectives. Moreover, the protestors are represented as victims which strengthened the representation of protests as peaceful:

“Many protesters are calling for Mr. Maduro to resign, but beyond that, the rallies seem to be general expressions of outrage, often with few specific demands. Even some opposition activists admit to being bewildered about how to direct the anger into concrete political objectives” (Appendix 7).

Whilst demoting the agency of the protestors, such a representation constitutes a purposeful construction of the meanings of the protests. The sentence, “there is no single leader in a position to give the movement strategic direction” functions in a similar way: it excluded the possibility of pre-meditated and planned coordination of action from the opposition. Ultimately, if there are no clear leaders, it is more difficult to assign responsibility for the violence and hold the perpetrators accountable.

Through the discursive construction of the (youthful, naïve and inexperienced) protestors, the relationship between the street violence and U.S. funded government opposition groups is concealed. However, there is evidence that suggests that students were being trained in street violence techniques and use of social media in order to advance *regime* change (a word generally used for governments considered hostile to the U.S.):

“Over one third of US funding, nearly \$15 million annually by 2007, was directed towards youth and student groups, including training in the use of social networks to mobilize political activism. Student leaders were sent to the US for workshops and conferences on internet activism and media networking. They were informed in tactics to promote regime change via street riots and strategic use of media to portray the government as repressive” (Zeese and Flowers, 2014). In one article, *The Times* protest coverage addressed, but down played

the extent of financial support given to Venezuelan student organisations by the U.S. (Appendix 5).

Zeese and Flowers (2014) in the alternative news media website, *Truthout* further note that:

“Venezuela’s opposition receives funding from U.S. ‘democracy promotion’ groups including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and core grantees such as the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The NED, which the Washington Post noted was set up to conduct activities ‘much of which ‘the CIA used to fund covertly’ has made a number of grants directed at empowering youth and students in Venezuela in recent years, and USAID has also given money to IRI, NDI and other groups for Venezuela programs.”

4.2. Political Opposition as Non-Violent

In eleven out of the fifteen analysed articles, the political opposition were framed as non-violent, which not only lent support to the representation of *protest(ors) as peaceful*, but also to the broader *state repression of peaceful protest* meta-frame. Analyses showed that the *Times* tended to avoid in-depth political analyses, particularly in relation to the role of the government opposition coalition, MUD (*Mesa de la Unidad Democrática*¹⁷), which inhibited a thorough understanding of the violent nature of the protests. The role of the government opposition coalition, MUD, tended to be limited to discussion of the hard-line, right-wing opposition leader, Leopold Lopez, leader of the *Popular Will* party, who the government arrested on conspiracy charges and for inciting violence after he turned himself in to state authorities on 18th February, 2014 (Robertson, 2014c).

None of the analysed *Times* reports provided any context to the political manoeuvrings of Lopez, who had been banned from holding office in Venezuela due to corruption charges in 1998, after transferring public funds from the state oil company, *PDVSA*, into his own political party (ibid). Lopez was additionally involved in the short-lived 2002 *coup* against former president, Hugo Chavez, signing the decree which dissolved the Venezuelan constitution and installed business leader Pedro Carmona as interim president (ibid). However, Lopez was consistently framed by the *Times* as a peaceful politician and the victim of a repressive state:

“Mr. López, who had declared his intention to surrender peacefully, spoke over a loudspeaker, urging the members of crowd to let the vehicle pass” (Appendix 6).

“Mr. López, the former mayor of a wealthy part of Caracas, denies the charge and has repeatedly called for demonstrators to act peacefully“(Appendix 13).

In many of the *Times* articles, it was Lopez’ quotes that were used to support the representation of political opposition as non-violent which tended to give the impression that the opposition consisted of one party, rather than a coalition. Lopez was used as a symbol of a better future, standing for Venezuelan democracy:

“We are living in a dark time when criminals are rewarded and they want to imprison the Venezuelans who want peaceful, democratic change” (Appendix 6).

In the article *Venezuelan Opposition Chief Surrenders, but Not Without a Rally*, Lopez is glorified by the *Times* report, assigned a God-like status and heralded as a heroic figure surrounded by a mass of loyal supporters: “The crowd around the car eventually swelled into the thousands, and Mr. López’s trip to prison took on a parade like air.” In the same article, he is represented as symbolic of peace:

“holding four white daisies above his head...After turning to the crowd and holding the flowers and a small Venezuelan flag over his head in a gesture of defiance, he climbed into the vehicle “ (Appendix 6).

¹⁷ The Democratic Unity Roundtable

In addition, testimony from the U.S. government, particularly from John Kerry the U.S. Secretary of State, is used to support the political opposition as non-violent frame throughout the reports:

“These actions have a chilling effect on citizens’ rights to express their grievances peacefully” (Appendix 4).

“Last week, the government arrested a prominent opposition leader, Leopoldo López, whom it charged with inciting protesters to violence. Mr. Kerry did not name Mr. López in his statement, but he called on the government to release jailed opposition members” (Appendix 9).

Information conveyed to the reader about the political opposition and violence was also articulated through the words of President Maduro and other Venezuelan government officials who acted as a mouthpiece for reports that linked violence to the government opposition: “Diosdado Cabello, the president of the National Assembly, said the man was killed by “fascists,” a term the government uses for its opponents” (Appendix 1). The journalist then discredits Diosdado Cabello by using quotation marks around the word “fascists”, followed by the use of, “a term the government uses for its opponents.” This delegitimises his statement, rendering the existence of a hard-line, violent and extremist element within the opposition impossible in the reader’s mind. Discrediting government official sources was a common pattern of reporting throughout the analysed articles and no critical distance from the U.S. foreign policy regarding Venezuela was taken in the reports as the following example demonstrates:

“The government quickly accused Mr. López of being responsible for the unrest and the deaths, claiming he had trained activists to unleash a campaign of violence that was part of a coup attempt against Mr. Maduro. They have provided no evidence for the charges but have demonized Mr. López in speeches and in programs on government-controlled television and radio” (Appendix 6).

Unreported in the *Times*, Leopold Lopez, along with Maria Corina Machado¹⁸ openly called for the ousting of Venezuelan President as early as January 23rd, 2014. Lopez’ calls for were disseminated across *Twitter* and through other (social) media under the hash tags, *#La Salida* (Spanish), *#The Exit* (English) or another translation sometimes used by English-speaking alternative media, *#The Solution*, which not only has references to Nazi Germany, but also characterises the nature of the revolt. His aim was to bring down the democratically elected government:

”there should be a complete ... change in those who are in power... It’s clear now that the problem isn’t just Maduro, it’s all the heads of the public powers who have kidnapped the state“(Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, 2014; n.p.).

If one was only to consider the timing of the outbreak of the 2014 Venezuelan protests, less than a month after this call, it might be logical to assume that there could be a connection between the opposition’s calls to oust President Maduro and outbreak of violence. However, even in the report of 13th Febru-

¹⁸ Maria Corina Machado is an independent opposition MP (formerly Primero Justicia party member) known for her close links to Washington (Martin. 2014)

ary, 2014, which was entitled *Prominent Opposition Leader in Venezuela is Blamed for Unrest*, the political opposition's calls went unreported.

One month prior to this call, nationwide municipal elections had given the Chavista coalition a remarkable 10-point lead. This is politically salient because Capriles, considered to be one of the more moderate opposition candidates, had been defeated by Maduro in the Venezuelan presidential elections in 2013 by only 1.7%; the narrowest defeat the opposition coalition had experienced since Chavez came to power in 1998 (Zeese and Flowers, 2014; n.p.). This was the closest the opposition had to come to power, yet there was no discussion of this in any of the *Times* articles analysed, although there was reference to Maduro's narrow victory, which helped to strengthen the narrative that the protests had mass support.

Critics have noted that such a dramatic loss in the nationwide municipal elections would have come as a heavy blow to the opposition coalition, especially in light of their narrow defeat to Maduro in the presidential election earlier the same year. The right-wing opposition have lost 18 out of 19 elections or referendums since Chavez was elected in 1998 (Zeese and Flowers, 2014; n.p.). Their frustration, manifest in their calls for ousting the government, should not only have been addressed in the *Times* reports, but also contextualised alongside the government's municipal elections victory as Maduro's nationwide lead may have signalled, "a period of stability and consolidation, at least until the next elections in late 2015" (Ellner, 2014; n.p.).

In Venezuela, there is a democratic way to oust a president during term-time and this should be sought through a "recall referendum", rather than street violence. Nevertheless, this was rebuffed by the opposition at the time and the first violent incidents occurred soon afterwards "(Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, 2014; n.p.).

Representing the political opposition as non-violent throughout the *Times* protest reporting concealed the role of the militant and right-wing element in the Venezuelan political opposition. The violence, according to Zeese and Flowers (2014; n.d.) showed how desperate the opposition had become, its expression being, "symptomatic of an oligarch class that had lost its power."

The discursive construction of the protest(or)s as peaceful and political opposition as non-violent effectively created the impression that the violent protests were spontaneous and without leadership, a justified uprising of ordinary citizens and youth against the violent dictatorial regime, while the framing of the President Maduro as a communist-style leader evoked the well-known Cold War discourses. In all this, the *New York Times* has rehearsed the narratives from the dominant U.S. policies towards Venezuela.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

A content analysis of the *New York Times* framing of the 2014 Venezuelan anti-government protests revealed that the *Times* opted for the use of monolithic categories over a more nuanced pattern of reporting as the *state repression of peaceful protest* meta-frame dominated the articles analysed for this study. The protes(or)s were portrayed positively, as opposed to the Venezuelan state, who were portrayed negatively. Through the reproduction of rigid categories, binary opposition masked a complex network of relations that existed between students, protestors, political opposition groups, U.S. - funded NGO's, Cuban-based lobby groups, U.S. politicians, the Venezuelan government and the U.S. State Department. These relations were brought to light not through the *Times* coverage, but through alternative news media sources. Linguistic strategies and tools, such as the use of intransitive verbs or word clusters and collocations, as well as the arrangement of sentences in paragraphs and sentence structure itself, were also employed as useful framing devices across the texts.

As an inversion of the normative news media representations of protestors as violent and deviant, or as a threat to society - representations generally reproduced by the *protest paradigm*, the Venezuelan protestors were overwhelmingly portrayed as peaceful, with inhibited agency to influence events and victims of a repressive state. This was identified as the *protest(ors) as peaceful* sub-frame which lent essential support to the *state repression of peaceful protestors* meta-frame. When violence associated with the protestors was reported, it tended to be represented as a last resort, as an act of self-defence or as a response to state repression, which masked the violent nature of the *guarimbas* (barricades), as well as the turbulent and violent socio-political history of Venezuela. Other discursive practices, such as the construction of protest(or)s as youths helped to this sub-frame.

Representing the political opposition as non-violent left the reader with the impression that the anti-government protests were devoid of any real objectives, which minimised the role of violence historically associated with a sector of the political opposition. It eliminated the possibility of any pre-planned coordination, concealing the role of the hard-line, right-wing element of the political opposition who seemed desperate to make political gains at all costs after consecutive electoral losses. However, it was through alternative news media sources that this information was supported. Representing the political opposition as non-violent also masked the extent of the US –financing of government opposition, upon which U.S. foreign policy has been predicated, specifically through the “democracy promotion” apparatus. Lack of socio-political or historical context to the current political situation in Venezuela did little to provide the readers with a clearer picture of contemporary Venezuelan politics. The *Times* tended to rely on official sources from elites, generally sourced from within the U.S. State Department, which tended to support official U.S foreign policy towards Venezuela.

The dictatorship sub-frame was also widely invoked through the uniform representation of the Venezuelan state as violent and repressive, which supported the second part of the *state repression of peaceful protest(ors)* meta-frame. The Venezuelan state was represented as brutally violent, as inhibiting freedom of expression and as a dictatorship. The *dictatorship* frame added a powerful and dramatic element to the protest reports, and was fundamental to the represen-

tation of both the *violent repression of citizenry* and *violation of freedom of expression* frames. It was essential to constructing the Venezuelan government as an undemocratic regime, representative of a failed political system that suppresses civil liberties. Dramaturgy, with some colourful descriptions that conjured up notions of an archaic state, was used as a discursive framing tool to redirect considerations of the socio-historical, political, economic or ideological tensions produced by opposition to Maduro's politics.

The *Times* protest reports took full advantage of its western privilege by tapping into geopolitical discourses that played on pre-existing anti-communist sentiment and fear of communism, firmly rooted in the psyche of the average American or perhaps, global citizen. Maduro's government was constructed in a similar way as the enemy often is, as a dictatorship to be feared and constructed as the Other. The long-lasting effects of the Cold War on the discursive construction of communism in the American social consciousness provided an important backdrop for the *Times* framing of the anti-government protests. This would tend to suggest that it served to legitimise aggressive U.S. foreign policies towards Latin America, evident in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee in May, 2014 to impose sanctions on Venezuela. The representation of the Venezuelan state as inhibiting freedom of expression through a state-controlled media can be also related to U.S. foreign policy through its attempt to weaken Latin American integration and solidarity, which currently stands in opposition to the traditional hegemonic control of the United States over the Western Hemisphere.

The predominance of the *state repression of peaceful protest(or)s* meta-narrative across the *Times* protest reports analysed set the discursive boundaries of debate, by functioning through exclusion. As a result, the immense social gains achieved by Chavez' (and his successor, Maduro's) Bolivarian-style socialism received scant attention. The framing pattern employed by the *Times* constricted space for debate about the political future of Venezuela, about the remarkable social and political gains Venezuela has made in a relatively short period of time and about its successes in incorporating the poor and the marginalised into public life; something, we could perhaps learn from as global inequality continues to rise. At the same time, the *Times* protest framing limited discussion about the challenges the Bolivarian process now faces, about its radicalisation by aggression from the right and its inability to incorporate wealthier sectors into the process.

The news media's relation to the state has been widely contested, as has its influence on the public's understanding of political issues. However, if creating a socially just and responsible society is a collective goal worth pursuing, news media must fulfil its democratic function by providing meaningful public affairs information. In this way, citizens may become more empowered and able to hold elected officials and elites accountable for their actions. As more austerity measures look set to be enforced, the number of protests may also continue to rise. This would suggest it is of paramount importance that we understand why citizens are protesting, so that national and global policies to address those grievances can be formulated. Findings suggest that citizens should always seek out a variety of news media sources when seeking information about social protests.

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Appendix 1: At Least Two People Are Killed in Protests

[William Neuman, Feb. 12th, 2014]

At least two people were killed in unrest in Caracas on Wednesday, officials said, as thousands of people took to the streets of the capital in the largest antigovernment protest in months. The violence erupted after government opponents attended a peaceful march and rally called to protest the arrest of student demonstrators elsewhere in the country. Following the march, several hundred young protesters threw rocks at riot police officers and broke windows in a government building. One demonstrator was shot in the head and killed, and protesters blamed armed pro-government supporters. Later, President Nicolás Maduro said a community activist he had known for years had also been killed. Diosdado Cabello, the president of the National Assembly, said the man was killed by “fascists,” a term the government uses for its opponents. Mr. Maduro later said on television, “I alert the world: we are facing a planned coup d’état.” The protests in various cities in recent weeks have sprung from widespread discontent amid increasing economic problems, including high inflation.

Appendix 2: Prominent Opposition Leader in Venezuela is Blamed for Unrest

[William Neuman, 13th Feb. 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — Top government officials on Thursday blamed a prominent opposition leader for unrest that resulted in three deaths, amid growing tension over antigovernment protests.

A local newspaper, El Universal, posted on its website a photograph of what it said was an arrest order issued by a judge for the opposition leader, Leopoldo López, a Harvard-educated former mayor of a wealthy section of Caracas. It said he was accused of murder and terrorism, among other charges. Aides to Mr. López said they were trying to confirm the report.

The violence came after thousands of government opponents on Wednesday took part in the largest protest march since the days immediately after the narrow election victory in April of President Nicolás Maduro. Mr. López, who spoke at the protest, has been active in organizing similar, though smaller, rallies throughout the country in recent weeks.

The march, through the center of Caracas, unfolded peacefully, but afterward a few hundred young people, mostly men, stayed, and some threw rocks and chunks of concrete at the riot police, who responded with tear gas.

At one point, the protesters, many with their faces covered by T-shirts or bandannas, threw projectiles at the headquarters of the national prosecutor's office, breaking a few windows on the second floor of the concrete and glass skyscraper. Five police vehicles were set on fire nearby.

During clashes near the prosecutor's office and in a separate part of the city later in the day, three people were shot to death, officials said. Two were identified as protesters, and one was described as a government supporter. It was not clear who opened fire in each shooting, but each side blamed the other for the violence, with government officials naming Mr. López as the "intellectual author" of the unrest.

"Mr. Leopoldo López directed a well-trained group of his followers toward the national prosecutor's office, and once he had left the demonstration there began a coordinated and massive attack," the foreign minister, Elías Jaua, said Thursday in a television interview, although he offered no proof. "We can no longer tolerate that this group acts with impunity, bathing the Venezuelan people in blood."

Mr. López, in an interview on CNN en Español on Wednesday night, denied any responsibility for the disturbances and said, "I have no doubt that the violence today was the responsibility of the government."

The shootings in the capital came as protests against the government, often headed by university students in smaller cities elsewhere in the country, had been building in recent days. Wednesday's march was called to demand the release of several students arrested in the earlier protests.

But the march included many who were not students, most of them longtime opponents of the socialist government, which was led for 14 years by Mr. Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez, who died last March.

The recent marches have been fueled by growing discontent over issues like rampant violent crime, high inflation and shortages of basic goods, as well as the growing frustration of opponents of the government over being excluded from any form of power-sharing or role in setting policy.

After the violence, government officials went on the offensive, portraying the events in often exaggerated terms.

Mr. Maduro claimed that the demonstrators had destroyed the headquarters of the national prosecutor's office, though the damage consisted largely of broken windows. He said the protesters were trained and attacked the police in a carefully organized fashion, when the scene on the street was chaotic and there was little, if any, sign of coordination.

The clashes on Wednesday had their bizarre moments.

The police who fired tear gas at protesters did not have gas masks to protect themselves from the gas. In any case, the gas appeared to be relatively weak, and its effects were limited.

The police stayed well away from the rampaging youths around the prosecutor's office until their vehicles were set afire. Then, plainclothes and uniformed officers rushed a small park in front of the office, grabbing people indiscriminately, pummeling them, pushing them to the ground and kicking them. Most of the protesters were gone by then, so many of those beaten by the police were news photographers and cameramen.

On Wednesday night, television audiences could watch a special nationwide broadcast of Mr. Maduro as he attended a parade in honor of the country's Youth Day. The parade included generals riding on tanks, female soldiers carrying swords and dressed in ornate red, black and gold uniforms with knee-high patent-leather boots, and children riding dirt bikes and skateboards. Afterward Mr. Maduro said the day's violence was an attempt to overthrow his government.

"I alert the world," he said, draped in the yellow, blue and red presidential sash with a large gold badge like a giant sheriff's star pinned to his left breast, "we are facing a planned coup d'état."

Local news media reported more protests in several cities on Thursday.

Appendix 3: Venezuela’s Leader Pulls Foreign Channel Over Protest Coverage

[William Neuman, 14th Feb. 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — Venezuela’s president said that a Colombia-based cable news channel was ordered to be removed from cable lineups in Venezuela because of its coverage of an antigovernment protest. President Nicolás Maduro said Thursday that the channel, NTN24, had tried to “foment anxiety about a coup d’état.” He said that he gave the order to pull the channel because “No one is going to come from abroad and try to perturb the psychological climate of Venezuela.”

It was removed on Wednesday, the same day that thousands of people rallied in the capital, Caracas, in the largest antigovernment protest in months. After the rally, a few hundred youths rioted, throwing rocks at the police and government buildings. Two opposition protesters and a man identified as a government supporter were shot to death during the unrest, which Mr. Maduro said was part of a coup attempt.

Appendix 4: Venezuelan Leader Announces Expulsion of 3 U.S. Officials

[William Neuman, Feb. 16, 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — After several days of student-led protests against his government, President Nicolás Maduro said Sunday that he was expelling three American consular officials who he said had been visiting universities here.

He did not say exactly what the officials had done to deserve expulsion, nor did he identify them, saying they had claimed to be visiting private universities to offer visas to students.

Mr. Maduro, a socialist who was elected in April, has often said the United States is seeking to oust him from office; Sunday was the third time in less than a year that he has announced the expulsion of American officials.

Mr. Maduro kicked out the American chargé d'affaires and two other embassy officials in September. In March, on the same day that he announced the death of his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, Mr. Maduro expelled two American military attachés. In both those cases he said the officials had been conspiring against the government, charges that Washington denied.

Mr. Maduro also said Sunday that a State Department official had contacted Venezuela's ambassador to the Organization of American States in Washington and warned of negative consequences if Venezuela arrested a prominent opposition politician, Leopoldo López. He said Mr. López was responsible for violence tied to the recent demonstrations.

"I don't accept threats from anybody," said Mr. Maduro, who has said the recent protests are part of a coup attempt against him.

Demonstrators say they have taken to the streets to protest rising crime, high inflation and government pressure on the news media, among other complaints.

It was not possible to immediately confirm the conversation with the State Department official.

Secretary of State John Kerry released a statement on Saturday expressing concern about the violence in Venezuela and the reports that the government was seeking to arrest Mr. López.

"These actions have a chilling effect on citizens' rights to express their grievances peacefully," Mr. Kerry's statement said.

Appendix 5: Venezuela Cites Unrest in Expelling 3 U.S. Officials

[William Neuman and Andrew W. Lehren, 17th Feb. 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — Venezuela on Monday ordered three American Embassy officials to leave the country, saying they had been recruiting students to take part in violent antigovernment protests, in the latest in a series of expulsions that have marked a low point in relations between the two countries.

The expulsions came as the country's socialist president, Nicolás Maduro, was facing more than a week of sometimes violent demonstrations led by students in several cities, fueled by broad discontent over rampant crime, high inflation, product shortages and mounting government pressure on the media. Three people were shot to death during protests here in Caracas, the capital, last Wednesday.

It was the third time in less than a year that the government had expelled American diplomats, as Mr. Maduro has repeatedly accused the United States of supporting opponents who he says are plotting a coup. But critics say that he regularly seeks to provoke crises with the United States to distract from problems at home.

Mr. Maduro announced the expulsions Sunday night, and on Monday the foreign minister, Elías Jaua, said the three officials, who all worked for the embassy's consular section, had 48 hours to leave the country.

Mr. Jaua said that the officials had been visiting universities under the pretext of granting visas to students. He charged that “at bottom that is a cover to establish contacts with leaders who they recruit for training, for financing and the creation of youth organizations through which violence is promoted in Venezuela.”

The State Department denied the accusations.

“The allegations that the United States is helping to organize protesters in Venezuela is baseless and false,” a State Department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, said in a written statement. “Venezuela's political future is for the Venezuelan people to decide.”

Mr. Jaua said the activities of the consular officials were part of a longstanding pattern of meddling by the United States government in Venezuelan politics. To make his point, he read from three diplomatic cables sent from the American Embassy to the State Department.

Mr. Jaua said the cables were among several documents that either were released by the antisecrecy group WikiLeaks or were unearthed by Venezuelan intelligence services. But a search of WikiLeaks documents obtained by The

New York Times appeared to show that all of the cables read by Mr. Jaua were among a collection of documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010.

There are dozens of WikiLeaks cables from the American Embassy that include references to the financing of civil society groups and some refer to accusations by the Venezuelan government that the activity represented improper meddling in Venezuelan politics.

But Mr. Jaua appeared to frequently misrepresent the content of the cables he quoted by inserting references to student or youth groups or saying that the embassy acknowledged that financing was meant to support partisan groups, when the cables said the opposite. He also exaggerated the financial support the United States gave to such groups and tried to suggest the activity was more recent than the cables indicated.

He said that the three cables he cited were from 2009 to 2011, but the document search revealed that the cables he appeared to be quoting dated instead from 2006 to early 2009. Two were from the time that George W. Bush was president and the United States maintained a more openly hostile posture toward Venezuela's government, while the most recent one was from March 2009, less than three months after President Obama took office.

Mr. Jaua quoted one cable that he said was from 2011, which he said referred to an annual budget of \$57 million for programs to "strengthen youth organizations," and a request for an additional \$30 million to increase those efforts ahead of Venezuela's presidential election in 2012.

But the WikiLeaks cables end in early 2010, and a cable with almost the exact language as that quoted by Mr. Jaua — with some key differences — is dated March 27, 2009. It talks about annual spending of \$7 million to support local governments and civil society groups and asks for an additional \$3 million to increase outreach efforts and "to continue programs to strengthen civil society and prepare for the next round of elections in 2010."

While the numbers are different, some of the language quoted by Mr. Jaua is almost identical, including a passage he emphasized that said that the American Embassy "helped create" some of the organizations that it was continuing to finance, and that those groups "arguably represent the best hope for a more open democratic system in Venezuela."

Mr. Jaua also read from another cable, which he said was from 2010, in which he said an American official told student leaders "that while all embassy programs are directed at strengthening civil society and stimulating participation in the opposition process, these actions should be perceived as being close to the embassy to send a clear message to the government."

But the reference appears to come instead from a 2008 WikiLeaks cable that quotes the official saying something quite different. "While all embassy programs are directed at strengthening civil society and encouraging participation in the democratic process, not partisan politics, perceived proximity to the em-

bassy may lead to BRV harassment,” he was quoted as saying, using an abbreviation for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

A Foreign Ministry official refused to provide copies of the documents cited by Mr. Jaua.

Mr. Maduro, who was elected in April, ordered the expulsion of the American chargé d'affaires and two other American diplomats in September. In March, on the same day that his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, died, he said he was expelling two American military attachés. In both cases, he said the officials were plotting against his government.

Appendix 6: Venezuelan Opposition Chief Surrenders But Not Without a Rally

[William Neuman, 18th Feb. 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — A prominent Venezuelan opposition leader surrendered to the authorities on Tuesday in the midst of a large crowd of supporters who tried to block his arrest on accusations that he was responsible for violence that erupted during recent antigovernment protests.

Before giving himself up, the opposition politician, Leopoldo López, walked through a sea of thousands of supporters in the largest rally in more than two weeks of growing protests fueled by discontent over runaway violent crime, a stalled economy, government pressure on the news media and other issues.

“We are living in a dark time when criminals are rewarded and they want to imprison the Venezuelans who want peaceful, democratic change,” Mr. López said, standing on the base of a statue of the 19th-century Cuban independence hero José Martí. Clutching a Venezuelan flag, he spoke through a megaphone, and although the large crowd fell into a hush, only those nearby were able to hear him.

The drama played out a day after the government of President Nicolás Maduro ordered three American diplomats to leave the country, saying they had been recruiting students to take part in violent demonstrations, an accusation the State Department denied. On Saturday, Secretary of State John Kerry issued a statement of concern over the recent violence and the possible arrest of Mr. López, saying it would have a chilling effect on Venezuelans’ ability to express their grievances.

Mr. López, 42, a former mayor of a well-off section of Caracas, has helped promote the recent protests against Mr. Maduro’s 10-month-old government.

But after a march here last Wednesday, a group of a few hundred youths threw rocks at the police, broke windows in government buildings and set some police vehicles on fire. Two protesters and a government supporter were shot to death.

The government quickly accused Mr. López of being responsible for the unrest and the deaths, claiming he had trained activists to unleash a campaign of violence that was part of a coup attempt against Mr. Maduro. They have provided no evidence for the charges but have demonized Mr. López in speeches and in programs on government-controlled television and radio.

Mr. López, who left the rally last week before the violence started, has denied he had anything to do with the unrest. He has routinely called for peaceful protests.

An investigation published in a local newspaper, *Últimas Noticias*, which examined photographs and videos taken at the scene of the shooting of one of the protesters, said it appeared that shots had been fired into a crowd of demonstrators by a group that included uniformed security officers and men accompanying them in civilian clothes.

Local news media reported the day after the rally that a judge had issued an arrest warrant for Mr. López, saying that he was wanted on charges that included murder and terrorism.

At first Mr. López challenged the authorities to arrest him, but later he went into hiding. A cat-and-mouse game began as heavily armed officials looked for him at his home and his parents' home. Meanwhile, he taunted Mr. Maduro through Twitter posts, calling him a coward, and Mr. Maduro railed against him in speeches and television appearances, calling him a "fascist coward" and a "fugitive from justice."

The tension built on Monday when security forces raided the offices of Mr. López's political party, Popular Will, kicking down an office door and drawing guns on startled workers.

Mr. López told followers in an online video and in Twitter posts that he would turn himself in after a rally and march on Tuesday.

City officials said that he did not have a permit and vowed to prevent the event. Masses of police officers and national guardsmen, many in riot gear, were in position on Tuesday morning around the plaza designated by Mr. López for his rally, keeping crowds out.

Instead, thousands of his supporters filled a long city avenue nearby.

Suddenly a shout went up from the crowd and Mr. López appeared in the midst of the throng, wearing bluejeans and a long-sleeve T-shirt with a connect-the-dots map of Venezuela on the front. Supporters jammed around him, and he made his way to the Martí statue. After a short speech, he climbed down, and in a press of supporters and news photographers, reporters and camera operators, he made his way to a waiting line of riot police officers, holding four white daisies above his head.

But the crowd surged through and carried Mr. López for several more blocks, until he finally arrived at a white armored police vehicle. After turning to the crowd and holding the flowers and a small Venezuelan flag over his head in a gesture of defiance, he climbed into the vehicle.

On a building behind him were posters from last year's presidential election, with Mr. Maduro's mustached face looking placidly down on the scene.

Hundreds of people surged around the vehicle, shouting "Freedom!" and "Let him go!" There was pushing and shoving, and the heavy back door to the vehicle was pulled from its hinges. Other protesters sat or stood in front of the vehicle, blocking it.

Finally, Mr. López, who had declared his intention to surrender peacefully, spoke over a loudspeaker, urging the members of crowd to let the vehicle pass. Eventually they did, but his supporters still crowded around and accompanied it. At one point, when the crowd again refused to let the vehicle pass, he got out and boarded a black Jeep to continue the trip. The crowd around the car eventually swelled into the thousands, and Mr. López's trip to prison took on a paradelike air.

In a televised speech at an oil workers' rally, Mr. Maduro said Mr. López was being taken to a jail outside Caracas "to answer to justice."

At the rally for Mr. López, Garcelis Montilla, 53, a merchant, said she hoped that public reaction to his arrest would bring about change. "Leopoldo's arrest for crimes that he didn't commit is the drop that caused the glass to overflow," she said, using a local saying.

Appendix 7: Protests Swell in Venezuela as Places to Rally Disappear

[William Neumann, Feb. 20th 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — The only television station that relentlessly broadcast voices critical of the government was sold last year, and the new owners have softened its news coverage. Last week, President Nicolás Maduro banned a foreign cable news channel after it showed images of a young protester shot to death here.

Opposition legislators have been barred from debates and stripped of committee posts in the National Assembly. And when an opposition leader called for a protest this week, Mr. Maduro scheduled his own march to start at the same spot and dispatched the National Guard to try to block protesters from rallying elsewhere.

Venezuela is being convulsed by the biggest protests since the country's long-time president, the charismatic Hugo Chávez, died nearly a year ago.

And while the demonstrators condemn a wide range of perennial problems, including rampant crime, high inflation and shortages of basic goods like sugar and toilet paper, the intensity of the protests has been fueled by something more subtle and perhaps stronger — a sense that the spaces to voice disagreement with the government are shrinking and disappearing.

“You have a government that increasingly, since the time of Chávez but even more with Maduro, has practically closed the channels of communication,” said Margarita López Maya, a historian who studies protest movements. “If you have a society that has no institutional channels to raise its complaints, make demands, form policy, the tradition in Venezuela and in Latin America and I think throughout the world is to take to the streets.”

Of the opposition she said, “They feel choked, penned in.”

Since last week, four people have been shot to death in protests, dozens have been wounded and scores have been arrested. A local newspaper said some of the shots fired in one killing appeared to have come from a group that included uniformed security officers and men accompanying them in civilian clothes.

In the most recent death, a beauty queen, Génesis Carmona, 22, a student who was crowned Miss Tourism 2013 for the state of Carabobo, died Wednesday, a day after being shot in the head during a march in Valencia, the country's third-largest city. Protesters said attackers on motorcycles had fired on the march.

But the government has been quick to blame protesters for the worst violence, and on Thursday the interior minister, Miguel Rodríguez Torres, said that one

of her fellow demonstrators fired the shot that killed Ms. Carmona. “This girl died from a bullet that came from her own ranks,” he said.

Many protesters are calling for Mr. Maduro to resign, but beyond that, the rallies seem to be general expressions of outrage, often with few specific demands. Even some opposition activists admit to being bewildered about how to direct the anger into concrete political objectives.

So far, Mr. Maduro’s response has been to crack down, but that has only fanned the flames. This week, he expelled three American diplomats, accusing them of recruiting students to take part in violent demonstrations. Then he arrested an opposition politician, Leopoldo López, saying that he had trained gangs of youths to sow violence in the country as part of a coup to overthrow the government.

Thousands of people turned out in Caracas on Tuesday to accompany Mr. López as he surrendered to the authorities. And on Wednesday night, as demonstrators in several cities clashed with the riot police, Mr. Maduro threatened to declare a form of martial law known as a “state of exception” in the western state of Táchira, on the border with Colombia, a traditional opposition stronghold where protests have been particularly intense.

“If I have to declare a state of exception in Táchira, I’m ready to declare it and send in the tanks, the troops, planes, all of the military force of the country,” the president said. He also threatened to jail other opposition politicians and protest leaders.

Parts of the capital, Caracas, and some other cities have become battlegrounds. National Guard soldiers on motorcycles patrol Caracas at night, using tear gas and rubber bullets to drive off protesters who block streets with barricades of burning trash.

On one night, a group of soldiers fired rubber bullets at apartment buildings where people were banging pots to protest the crackdown. During a melee after a rally in downtown Caracas on Feb. 12, the police, enraged that some of their vehicles were set on fire, beat and kicked protesters, news photographers and cameramen.

Mr. Maduro belittles the protesters and has largely ignored their complaints, trying to focus attention on smaller groups involved in violent clashes. “These aren’t students. They’re fascist vandals,” he said on Thursday.

The United States has voiced concern.

“In Venezuela, rather than trying to distract from its own failings by making up false accusations against diplomats from the United States, the government ought to focus on addressing the legitimate grievances of the Venezuelan people,” President Obama said on Wednesday during a meeting in Mexico. He called for Mr. Maduro’s government to release jailed protesters and engage in dialogue.

The current round of protests began this month when students in Táchira and other cities demonstrated against violent crime. Several students were arrested and a march was called in Caracas to demand their release. After that march ended peacefully, a few hundred youths rioted, throwing rocks at the police and breaking windows in a government building. A protester and a government supporter were shot to death, and another protester was gunned down that night.

Venezuela became a bitterly divided country during the 14 years of Mr. Chávez's presidency, which ended with his death in March. He fostered a cult of personality and dominated all aspects of political life, pushing the country, which has the world's largest oil reserves, toward his vision of socialist revolution.

Mr. Chávez reviled and insulted the opposition, but since his death, there is a sense that there is even less room for criticism — despite Mr. Maduro's promises that he is open to dialogue.

In a psychological blow to many in the opposition, a stridently antigovernment television station, Globovision, was sold last year to investors believed to be close to the government. Since then, the station has toned down its programming and ceased to be a counterweight to the relentlessly pro-government tone of several government-run television stations.

Last week Mr. Maduro ordered a Colombian news channel, NTN24, removed from cable because of its coverage of the demonstrations.

Now, there has been little live news coverage of the wave of protests, while government television has relentlessly vilified the demonstrators.

"There are very few outlets where the opposition can make itself heard," said Cedomir Mimia, 27, a lawyer at a recent protest, who said his top concern was "the information blackout."

Many protesters say they are simply fed up with the country's bitter divide. "I'm here because I'm tired of the crime, of the shortages, tired of having to stand on line to buy anything," said María Luchón, 21, at a recent rally. "I'm tired of the politicians of both sides."

Correction: February 28, 2014

An article last Friday about concerns by opponents of President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela that they have fewer and fewer locations in which to demonstrate and express their discontent referred incorrectly to Globovision, a Venezuela TV station. Before its sale last year, it broadcast more voices critical of the Venezuelan government than other television stations, but it was not the only one to regularly feature government critics.

Appendix 8: Response from Latin American Leaders is Muted

[William Neuman, 21st Feb. 2014]

MEXICO CITY — When President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela arrived in Havana for a regional summit meeting last month, Latin American and Caribbean solidarity seemed triumphant. The United States was not invited, and in speech after speech, the region's leaders expressed confidence in a shared, unified future.

Mr. Maduro in particular, often smiling beside President Raúl Castro of Cuba, emphasized that Latin America would continue on its own path of peace separate from the “imperial interests” of the United States.

“With their dinosaur vision they're not going to understand what's happening and what's going to happen in our economic, social and political life in the coming years,” he said.

But now, as Venezuela reels from the biggest street protests since the death of former President Hugo Chávez, it is the region that seems uncertain and divided about how to respond.

Most statements coming from Latin American governments and regional bodies lament the deaths of at least four people in the recent demonstrations and call for dialogue. But strong criticism of either side, blame, threats and demands — once common reactions in previous crises, like the heavy-handed rule of Alberto Fujimori in Peru in the '90s, analysts contend — have generally been rare.

“Now it's, ‘We're focused on democracy in our own country, but if something happens with a neighbor we are not going to say anything,’ ” said Michael Shifter, president of Inter-American Dialogue, a policy forum. “That's a change.”

Many experts argue that the muted response reflects major shifts in power and government. Latin American politics used to be more polarized and volatile. For much of the 20th century, civil wars and repressive governments cast long shadows over the region. The United States played an overbearing role as well, choosing leaders and backing coups, usually over fears of Communism.

There were deeper ideological divides, and for the most part, two kinds of Latin American governments: military led or democratically elected. The goal for the region, as articulated in the 2001 Inter-American Charter from the Organization of American States, seemed to be a journey from the former to the latter, a transformation the region has accomplished to a remarkable degree.

Now, however, the challenges in many countries are often less about achieving democracy than about delivering on the expectations democracy creates.

The United States is still a common object of scorn and blame: Mr. Maduro expelled three American diplomats from Venezuela this week, accusing them of recruiting students for violent demonstrations; and on Friday he revoked the press credentials of journalists from CNN. But regional and internal dynamics are increasingly drifting away from Washington.

The United States may finance civil society groups in the region, but it would be a stretch to attribute last year's huge street protests in Brazil, the indigenous protests in Bolivia or the police uprising in Ecuador in recent years to American "imperial interests."

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, or Celac, and other regional bodies represent an attempt at solidarity, separate from the United States, and Latin American nations have at times been unified about intervention in some domestic disputes, particularly when presidents are summarily removed. In 2009, the hemisphere, including the United States, pulled together to condemn the ouster of President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras. More recently, South American nations punished Paraguay for removing President Fernando Lugo in 2012.

But short of the removal of a president — as with the restrictions on the press in Ecuador, the many human rights abuses by the Mexican military or, this week, Venezuela's arrest of an opposition leader — countries in the region often seem tentative about wading into their neighbors' affairs.

"The real challenge in the region now is how they are going to deal with each other on these things," said Joy Olson, executive director of the Washington Office on Latin America, an advocacy group. "When you have democratically-elected governments that end up eroding democratic rights and civil liberties — and you can throw a lot of countries in that pot, including the U.S. — how should that be handled? That's what's all being renegotiated."

Increased economic integration seems to be playing an important role. Brazil's president, Dilma Rousseff, has not commented on the crisis in Venezuela, and with Brazilian corporations reaping rewards of making a push into Venezuela, her government has tacitly supported Mr. Maduro in statements from South America's main regional organizations, Unasur and Mercosur, the latter a trade organization in which Brazil plays a prominent role. The statements' criticism was directed not at Mr. Maduro, but rather at "attempts to destabilize the democratic order."

Brazil's foreign minister, Luiz Alberto Figueiredo, has also sidestepped any Maduro critique.

Other countries that have benefited from Venezuela's "petro-politics" — with favorable energy deals doled out across Central America and the Caribbean — have been silent or have backed Mr. Maduro. President Evo Morales of Bolivia, a close ally who is allowed to buy Venezuelan oil on favorable terms, has

spoken publicly several times to support Mr. Maduro and to accuse the United States of trying to destabilize Venezuela.

Indeed, the traditional politics of the region have not exactly been exorcised. The presidents who have come closest to criticizing Mr. Maduro are Ricardo Martinelli of Panama, Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia and Sebastián Piñera of Chile, leaders of countries that have embraced more market-oriented policies than others in the region have.

The United States has stepped up its critique, too. On Wednesday, President Obama called on Venezuela to release jailed protesters and rejected claims of American meddling. “Rather than trying to distract from its own failings by making up false accusations against diplomats from the United States, the government ought to focus on addressing the legitimate grievances of the Venezuelan people,” he said.

Still, analysts note that there has been far less saber rattling than in previous years, and not much diplomacy either. Seeing leaders from 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries come together in Cuba for the Celac meeting, without the United States or Canada even invited, typifies the declining influence of American diplomacy in the region. That decline contributes to what Mr. Shifter described as an American attitude of, “Fine, let’s see how they do without us.”

Hovering in the background of all this, he added, is Cuba.

“Whatever criticism one might have of Venezuela,” Mr. Shifter said, “it remains Cuba’s main benefactor and, as we witnessed at the Celac meeting, if there is one issue all Latin American and Caribbean countries can agree on, it’s solidarity with Cuba in the face of the U.S. embargo. If Latin American governments stand up to Maduro and say, ‘You have to stop the repression,’ they would be seen as weakening a government that supplies and sustains Cuba. The politics of this are very, very complicated.”

Appendix 9: Kerry Says Venezuela Crackdown is Unacceptable

[William Neuman, 22nd Feb. 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — Secretary of State John Kerry has markedly stepped up his criticism of Venezuela over its response to more than two weeks of antigovernment demonstrations, as the protests continued to grow this weekend.

“I am watching with increasing concern the situation in Venezuela,” Mr. Kerry said in a statement on Friday night. “The government’s use of force and judicial intimidation against citizens and political figures, who are exercising a legitimate right to protest, is unacceptable and will only increase the likelihood of violence.”

Last week the government arrested a prominent opposition leader, Leopoldo López, whom it charged with inciting protesters to violence. Mr. Kerry did not name Mr. López in his statement, but he called on the government to release jailed opposition members. On Saturday, thousands of people in Caracas, the capital, attended one of the largest opposition rallies yet, a sign that the protests, which began this month with isolated student demonstrations against high crime, may continue to gain strength.

The protesters filled many blocks of one of Caracas’s main avenues, many of them wearing white shirts to symbolize peace. The protests are expressing the widespread discontent with the government of President Nicolás Maduro, a socialist who has vowed to carry on the revolution of the country’s charismatic longtime president, Hugo Chávez, who died last year.

“The one who is responsible for all this is Maduro, for his incendiary discourse,” said Derek Redman, 77, who attended the march. His son, Roberto Redman, 31, was shot to death during a protest on Feb. 12. “I will not stop marching now that my son is dead. This situation can change if we don’t lower the pressure.”

Demonstrations were held in several other cities as well. The government continues to ignore the vast majority of demonstrators, who have acted peacefully, and instead focuses attention on acts of violence and property damage that have been associated with some of the protests. At least four people have been shot to death.

In a speech in Caracas after a march organized by the government that was billed as a rally of women for peace, Mr. Maduro held up a small explosive filled with nails that he said was seized by security forces and could have been used by opponents of his government to attack soldiers.

“This is terrorism,” he said. “Fascist, spoiled, rich kids!”

Appendix 10: Venezuela is Divided Even on its Death Toll

[William Neuman, 23rd Feb. 2014]

SAN CRISTÓBAL, Venezuela — At least 11 people have died in more than two weeks of antigovernment protests, according to government and news media reports, and there are no signs of anything calming down. But even the death toll was a cause for argument on Sunday in this bitterly divided country, as officials disagreed over whether the latest death was related to the protests.

President Nicolás Maduro said during a television broadcast on Sunday that the latest victim was a young man who was stabbed to death the previous night near this city in western Táchira State, which borders Colombia. The protests started here in early February before sweeping the nation. Last week, Mr. Maduro ordered hundreds of soldiers into the state to restore order, leading to further tension with demonstrators.

Mr. Maduro, speaking in Caracas, the capital, said the victim of Saturday's stabbing, Danny Vargas, was not a protester but was mistaken for one by the man who killed him. The attacker, he said, had been humiliated by demonstrators in an earlier incident and stabbed Mr. Vargas when he passed by a barricade the protesters had built to block a street.

On Monday, traffic came to a halt in parts of the Venezuelan capital as opposition protesters set up barricades. Unrest has roiled the country for nearly two weeks.

“Two victims,” Mr. Maduro said. “A humiliated man, a victim of rage, and a boy, a victim of the aggression of the protesters, and then a situation of uncontrolled violence, thanks to who? Thanks to the protesters, thanks to the coup plotters.”

Mr. Maduro charges that the protesters are fascists trying to stage a coup. He has sought to focus on acts of violence and property damage tied to some of the protests, while largely ignoring the demands of many protesters who have engaged in peaceful demonstrations fueled by anger over rampant violent crime and deep economic problems.

But the mayor of San Cristóbal, Daniel Ceballos, on Sunday disputed Mr. Maduro's account and said that Mr. Vargas was killed during an attempt to steal a motorcycle.

Mr. Ceballos, who was elected in December, said that Mr. Maduro wanted to associate a death with the protests in San Cristóbal “to justify his repression, to justify his militarization” of the state.

“Maduro is looking for a death here, but the murder is the result of crime, which is also his responsibility,” Mr. Ceballos said, a reference to the high crime rate. “It was a robbery,” he said.

Another version offered by local police was that the killing occurred after an argument at a social gathering.

Mr. Ceballos is a member of a party led by the opposition politician Leopoldo López, who was arrested last week and charged with instigating violence during the protests. Mr. Maduro has also threatened to jail Mr. Ceballos for supporting the protesters.

The back and forth over the death toll illustrated the deep divide that is fueling the protests, nearly a year after the death of the country’s long time president, Hugo Chávez, a socialist who was Mr. Maduro’s mentor. Mr. Maduro has vowed to continue Mr. Chávez’s socialist revolution.

On Friday, the national prosecutor, Luisa Ortega, said that eight people had died and 137 people had been injured so far in the unrest. But after her announcement, a man was killed that night in Caracas when he rode his motorcycle through a barricade that included a heavy wire or cable strung across the street. Local news media reported that he was decapitated.

Then on Saturday, according to local news reports, a 23-year-old woman died from wounds she received several days earlier when she was shot in the face with buckshot, apparently at close range, by a National Guard soldier. The National Guard has been using buckshot to disperse crowds. The shot is often made of plastic pellets, but it was not clear from reports whether that was the case in this episode.

The first deaths occurred after a peaceful march on Feb. 12 in the center of Caracas. The march was followed by rioting and scattered protests. Two protesters and a government supporter were shot to death in separate episodes on that day. A Caracas newspaper, Últimas Noticias, has reported that photographs and video showed that, at the time of one of those shootings, men in uniforms and others in civilian clothes who appeared to be with them, fired on protesters.

On Saturday, thousands of people in Caracas attended the largest demonstration yet in the protests, filling one of the city’s major avenues for many blocks.

On Sunday, smaller protests continued around the country.

During his television appearance on Sunday, Mr. Maduro attended an event for the elderly, where he danced with his wife, Cilia Flores, whom he refers to as the country’s First Combatant.

Mr. Maduro has called for a national peace conference to be held on Wednesday. On Monday, he was scheduled to meet with state governors in Caracas. A main opposition leader, Henrique Capriles, who ran against him for president, is expected to attend.

Appendix 11: Rash Repression in Venezuela

[Francisco Toro, 24th Feb. 2014]

PROTESTS have rocked Venezuela in recent weeks, but no one seems to agree on why huge numbers of people have suddenly taken to the streets. Some observers see the demonstrations as a verdict on food and medicine shortages, inflation and economic stagnation. Others see them as the tantrum of a retrograde former elite bent on nullifying the results of the last election. The government, for its part, is sticking to the old script: Venezuela is falling victim to a fascist conspiracy cooked up by American officials who are terrified of its revolutionary aspirations.

Yet none of these competing explanations capture what's unique about this latest outpouring of anger. Venezuela's protests are, in a way, self-referential: Faced with a government that systematically equates protest with treason, people have been protesting in defense of the very right to protest.

The crisis started on Feb. 4, when a group of student activists in the Andean city of San Cristóbal took to the streets to protest the crime wave ravaging their campus. The Police Department's failure to respond to the sexual assault of a first-year student sent students out en masse to demand that the state protect them.

The government's response was a brutal police crackdown, not against the rape suspect, but against the student protesters. The security forces sprayed the protesters with tear gas; two students were arrested. The next day, a larger demonstration hit the streets of San Cristóbal to protest the previous day's violence, and student activists in a second city, Maracaibo, joined them in solidarity, only to be harshly beaten and tear-gassed by the National Guard in return. Fifty students were wounded on Day 2.

As the cycle of protests, repression and protests-against-repression spread, the focus of protest began to morph. What was at stake, the students realized, was the right to free assembly.

Repression, in Venezuela, comes not only in the form of tear gas and rubber bullets. The government has also mobilized its sprawling propaganda apparatus — newspapers and radio stations, half a dozen TV stations, hundreds of websites — in a concerted campaign of vilification to demonize the protest leaders as a shadowy fascist cabal in cahoots with American imperialists.

The claim is outlandish, yet its ceaseless repetition reveals that to the Venezuelan government, all dissent is treason. Such a regime has little trouble justifying the use of violence against its opponents.

It's striking that the government has now settled on "fascists" as the favored epithet to attack dissenters. It seems as if President Nicolás Maduro can't finish a sentence without denouncing a fascist. The irony appears to be lost on Mr.

Maduro, who seems to have forgotten that one of the cornerstones of actual fascism is the refusal to recognize the legitimacy of dissenting opinions.

It's this intolerance of opposing views, and violent repression, that Venezuela's students are now mobilized against. Today, after 13 deaths, 18 alleged cases of torture and over 500 arrests, the protest movement has snowballed into a nationwide paroxysm of anger that puts the government's stability in question.

The protests' lack of structure has given them resilience, but also an anarchic edge. There is no single leader in a position to give the movement strategic direction. Its favored protest tactic — the improvised barricade to isolate given neighborhoods from the outside world — appears self-defeating at best, as some of these barricades have led to violence.

The government's response, however, has been grossly disproportionate — ranging from an almost inexhaustible supply of tear gas and plastic bullets to the use of armored personnel carriers, tanks and paramilitary shock troops on motorcycles. At one point, the Venezuelan Air Force had its Russian-built Sukhoi fighter jets circle above San Cristóbal to cow rock-throwing kids.

The challenge now is to mold the great indignation of the last few weeks into a coherent, nimble, organized political organization able to stand up for all Venezuelans' basic rights. Henrique Capriles, the leader of Venezuela's moderate opposition, has made his pitch. In a speech to a large rally in Caracas last Saturday, Mr. Capriles, flanked by high-profile student leaders, made an impassioned call for an end to nighttime protests, roadblocks and other tactics liable to court violence.

Few outside the rally heard him, however, because government pressure ensured that no broadcast media carried coverage of the event: one more reason to believe the government is invested in a strategy of escalation.

Hugo Chávez was never shy about goading the opposition into a fight. He understood that confrontation was the best way to rally his hard-core supporters while consolidating autocratic control over society. Mr. Maduro, his chosen successor, certainly absorbed that lesson.

But Mr. Chávez also had an instinctive feel for the limits of such tactics and never engaged in repression on this scale. It's that politician's grasp of the pitfalls of going too far, too fast that seems lacking in Mr. Maduro. What's clear, though, is that Venezuela's students will not stand by passively while basic human rights are flouted. As their protest chant has it:

"No way! No way!

I'm not going to take

The Cuban-style dictatorship

You're shoving in my face."

Appendix 12: In Venezuela Protest Ranks Go Broader

[William Neuman, 24th Feb. 2014]

SAN CRISTÓBAL, Venezuela — As dawn broke, the residents of a quiet neighborhood here readied for battle. Some piled rocks to be used as projectiles. Others built barricades. A pair of teenagers made firebombs as the adults looked on.

These were not your ordinary urban guerrillas. They included a manicurist, a medical supplies saleswoman, a schoolteacher, a businessman and a hardware store worker.

As the National Guard roared around the corner on motorcycles and in an armored riot vehicle, the people in this tightly knit middle-class neighborhood, who on any other Monday morning would have been heading to work or taking their children to school, rushed into the street, hurling rocks and shouting obscenities. The guardsmen responded with tear gas and shotgun fire, leaving a man bleeding in a doorway.

“We’re normal people, but we’re all affected by what’s happening,” said Carlos Alvarez, 39, who seemed vaguely bewildered to find himself in the middle of the street where the whiff of tear gas lingered. “Look. I’ve got a rock in my hand and I’m the distributor for Adidas eyewear in Venezuela.”

The biggest protests since the death of the longtime leader Hugo Chávez nearly a year ago are sweeping Venezuela, rapidly expanding from the student protests that began this month on a campus in this western city into a much broader array of people across the country. On Monday, residents in Caracas, the capital, and other Venezuelan cities piled furniture, tree limbs, chain-link fence, sewer grates and washing machines to block roads in a coordinated action against the government.

Behind the outpouring is more than the litany of problems that have long bedeviled Venezuela, a country with the world’s largest oil reserves but also one of the highest inflation rates. Adding to the perennial frustrations over violent crime and chronic shortages of basic goods like milk and toilet paper, the outrage is being fueled by President Nicolás Maduro’s aggressive response to public dissent, including deploying hundreds of soldiers here and sending fighter jets to make low, threatening passes over the city.

On Monday, the state governor, who belongs to Mr. Maduro’s party, broke ranks and challenged the president’s tactics, defending the right of students to protest and criticizing the flyovers, a rare dissent from within the government.

Polarization is a touchstone of Venezuelan politics, which was bitterly divided during the 14-year presidency of Mr. Chávez, Mr. Maduro’s mentor. But while Mr. Chávez would excoriate and punish opponents, he had keen political in-

instincts and often seemed to know when to back off just enough to keep things from boiling over.

Now Mr. Maduro, his chosen successor, who is less charismatic and is struggling to contend with a deeply troubled economy, has taken a hard line on expressions of discontent, squeezing the news media, arresting a prominent opposition politician and sending the National Guard into residential areas to quash the protests.

Two people were killed on Monday, including a man here in San Cristóbal who, according to his family, fell from a roof after guardsmen shot tear gas at him. There is disagreement on whether all the deaths nationwide cited by the government are directly associated with the protests, but the death toll is probably at least a dozen.

In the neighborhood of Barrio Sucre, residents said they were outraged last week when a guardsman fired a shotgun at a woman and her adult son, sending both to the hospital with serious wounds. In response, the residents built barricades to keep the guardsmen out. On Monday, after guardsmen made an early sortie into the neighborhood, firing tear gas and buckshot at people's homes, the inflamed and sometimes terrified residents prepared to drive them back.

Across town, Isbeth Zambrano, 39, a mother of two, still fumed about the time two days earlier when the National Guard drove onto the street, where children were playing, and fired tear gas at residents. Now she sat in front of her apartment building, casually guarding a beer crate full of firebombs.

"We want this government to go away," she said. "We want freedom, no more crime, we want medicine." Around her neck, like a scarf, she wore a diaper printed with small teddy bears. It was soaked in vinegar, to ward off the effects of tear gas, in case of another attack.

Unlike the protests in neighboring Brazil last year, when the government tried to defuse anger by promising to fix ailing services and make changes to the political system, Mr. Maduro says the protesters are fascists conducting a coup against his government. He has largely refused to acknowledge their complaints, focusing instead on violence linked to the unrest. Here in Táchira State, he says the protests are infiltrated by right-wing Colombian paramilitary groups, and he has threatened to arrest the mayor of San Cristóbal.

Mr. Maduro's stance is mirrored by the intensity among the protesters. While he has called for a national conference on Wednesday and some opposition politicians have urged dialogue, a majority of protesters here, most of them long time government opponents, rejected that option.

"They've been mocking us for 15 years, sacking the country," said Ramón Arellano, 54, a government worker, while a burning refrigerator in the street behind him blotted out the sky with a cone of black smoke. "A dialogue from one side while the other turns a deaf ear, that's not fair."

Like most of the protesters here, Mr. Arellano said he wanted a change of government. Protesters say that could be achieved by having Mr. Maduro resign, or be removed through a recall election or changes to the Constitution.

Mr. Maduro says he will not leave office, and he continues to have wide support among those loyal to Mr. Chávez's legacy.

Táchira State, and especially San Cristóbal, the state capital, are longtime opposition strongholds. The opposition presidential candidate, Henrique Capriles, received 73 percent of the vote in San Cristóbal when he ran against Mr. Maduro last April.

A city of 260,000, San Cristóbal was almost completely shut down on Monday. Residents had set up dozens of barricades all around town. In many areas, residents set out nails or drove pieces of rebar into the pavement, leaving them partly exposed, to puncture tires.

In Barrio Sucre, Escarlet Pedraza, 19, showed two motorcycles that she said had been crushed by National Guard troops, who drove armored vehicles over them. She recorded the event on her cellphone camera.

Later, residents burned tires and threw rocks at guardsmen, who advanced and entered a side street, firing tear gas and shotguns directly at the houses.

The guardsmen broke open a garage door in one house and smashed the windshield of a car inside. The house next door filled with tear gas and the family inside, including two young children, choked in the fumes. "I'm indignant," said Victoria Pérez, the mother, weeping. "This is getting out of hand. It's arrogance, it's a desire for power."

A student, his face covered with a cloth, kicked angrily at a house where a pro-government family lives, shouting at them to join the protest. Other residents rushed in to stop him.

Nearby, a neighbor, Teresa Contreras, 53, flipped through the channels on her television, showing that there was no coverage of the violence, a sign, she said, of the government control over the news media.

Earlier, Andrea Altuve, 38, a teacher, watched the preparations for the coming battle, with people adding to barricades and children pouring gasoline into beer bottles for makeshift bombs.

"It looks like a civil war," she said. "They are sending the National Guard into the neighborhoods out of fear."

Appendix 13: Crude Weapons Help Fuel Unrest in Bastion of Venezuelan Opposition

[William Neuman, 25th Feb. 2014]

SAN CRISTÓBAL, Venezuela — No one here is hiding the heavy artillery, such as it is. Students camping out on an intersection of this city, which has become a battleground between the authorities and antigovernment protesters, have a variety of homemade weapons — mortars to lob small, noisy explosives, miniature firebombs, slingshots, clubs and nasty-looking things called Miguelitos made from hoses festooned with nails.

“We’re not peaceful here,” said Andryth Niño, 19, toying with a two-and-a-half-foot-long Miguelito one night this week as she sat with companions on the curb near the students’ ragtag camp, which had been rebuilt after being flattened a few nights earlier by National Guard troops. “You can’t be peaceful when they’re always attacking you.”

Opposition political leaders and protest organizers in Caracas, the capital, have been urging demonstrators to use nonviolent means to confront the government, and most of the large marches and rallies around the country, including here, have been carried out peacefully.

Yet the appeal to nonviolence had little echo among some of the most determined protesters in this western city, where the rallies started this month and where confrontations with government troops have been most intense. About a dozen people have died around the country in violence associated with the protests. Several were fatally shot, and many more have been wounded. Security forces have been implicated in some of the deaths.

Last week, President Nicolás Maduro sent extra troops to contain the unrest in this bastion of the political opposition, and in recent days National Guard soldiers have swept through residential neighborhoods, firing tear gas and plastic buckshot at residents, menacing or detaining protesters and destroying motorcycles and other property.

Pointing to the casualties around the country and the aggressive tactics, many protesters said they saw no choice but to do what was needed to act in self-defence.

“We don’t attack; we defend ourselves,” said Daniel Tinoco, 23, a student leader at the encampment, who wears gloves during confrontations with troops to protect his hands while throwing rocks and hurling back tear gas canisters. The protests started with students but have spread to other sectors of society. Last weekend, in middle-class neighborhoods around this city, residents threw rocks at National Guard troops whom they saw as invaders and prepared firebombs as they guarded barricades made of heaps of junk, tree limbs and other materials.

On Sunday, a 34-year-old protester was killed when he fell from a rooftop where he had been hiding from troops who were firing tear gas in the neighborhood. At a memorial service that night for the protester, Jimmy Vargas, friends said his death would make them more aggressive in their fight with government forces. Someone hung a sign on a fence near the spot where Mr. Vargas fell, his blood still staining the ground.

“Jimmy, you didn’t go away,” the sign said. “You are here in every rock that is thrown in your name.”

The protests have fed tensions with the United States, which expelled three midlevel Venezuelan diplomats on Tuesday. The move was in retaliation for the expulsion last week by Mr. Maduro of three American consular officials who the Venezuelan government claimed had been fomenting violent student protests, a charge Washington denied.

Even though Venezuela is a major oil supplier to the United States, the two countries have long been at odds politically and have not had ambassadors in each other’s capitals since 2010. On Tuesday, however, the foreign minister, Elías Jaua, said Venezuela would nominate a new ambassador to Washington, after Mr. Maduro said he wanted someone to explain to Americans what was going on in his country.

The protests have given voice to a host of complaints, transforming into a prolonged howl of frustrated rage by opponents of the country’s socialist-inspired government. Demonstrators denounce soaring crime, high inflation and long lines to buy food and other basic goods that are in chronically short supply. Now the demands also include the release of jailed protesters and a halt to the tactics used against demonstrators.

Violent protests, especially among students, have a lengthy history in Venezuela, to the point where the more radical student demonstrators have long been referred to as “rock throwers” — a term that applied to no small number of officials in the current government in their university days.

As the current round of protests has spread, young demonstrators in Caracas have frequently engaged in battles with the police that have often seemed choreographed — generally, a brief thrust and counterthrust that ends with the rock throwers fleeing tear gas and plastic buckshot, only to regroup later.

The subject of violence is a delicate one, and most demonstrations in recent weeks have been peaceful. Nonetheless, Mr. Maduro has focused attention on acts of violence and vandalism. He has repeatedly labeled the protesters as fascists who are part of a wider plot to topple him. And as for the demonstrators in Táchira, the border state of which San Cristóbal is the capital, Mr. Maduro claims their ranks have been infiltrated by right-wing Colombian paramilitary fighters sent by his enemies. He has jailed a prominent opposition leader, Leopoldo López, accusing him on television of seeking to cause a coup by training youths to spread violence at demonstrations. Mr. López, the former mayor of a wealthy part of Caracas, denies the charge and has repeatedly called for demonstrators to act peacefully.

Appendix 14: Venezuela Accuses Intelligence Officers of Murdering 2

[William Neuman, 26th Feb. 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — Seven members of the intelligence service have been charged with murder in the shooting deaths of a demonstrator and a government supporter after a major protest march here, the authorities said on Wednesday.

The announcement of the charges appeared to contrast with repeated claims by top government officials that the political opposition was responsible for violence accompanying a wave of protests that has swept the country.

Yet the charges also appeared to be part of growing intrigue swirling around the intelligence service and possible maneuvers within the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

The national prosecutor's office said in a statement that the seven members of the intelligence force, known as the National Bolivarian Intelligence Service, or Sebin, had been charged in the deaths on Feb. 12 of Bassil Da Costa, the protester, and Juan Montoya, the government supporter.

The statement said five of the intelligence officers were arrested on Monday, but it was not clear when they were formally charged. Two others were charged previously, it said.

All seven were being held in jail, as well as an eighth member of the service who was charged with lesser crimes.

The deaths of Mr. Da Costa and Mr. Montoya were the first of about a dozen associated with protests that began early this month and gained momentum after the killings.

The deaths occurred after a march through the center of Caracas that was called to protest the arrest of several students in earlier demonstrations. After the peaceful march, a few hundred young protesters threw rocks at the police, broke windows in a government building and burned several police vehicles.

The two men were shot during the chaos. Another protester was killed later that day when, according to witnesses, a man on a motorcycle fired on a group of demonstrators. Mr. Maduro immediately blamed a prominent opposition leader, Leopoldo López, for the violence and ordered him arrested, saying that he had trained young people to spread violence during the protests as part of a conspiracy to topple his government. Mr. López turned himself in last week, and he was charged with inciting violence. He has denied the accusations and called for peaceful protests.

The protests, fueled by economic problems, high crime and dissatisfaction with the government's socialist-inspired policies, continued on Wednesday. Government supporters also marched in several cities.

But the arrests announced on Wednesday appeared also to be linked to broader questions around the intelligence service.

Within days of the killings, Mr. Maduro announced that members of the service had disobeyed an order to stay off the streets during the protest. He also said that men in Sebin uniforms had been seen lurking around Mr. López's home, although there was no order for them to go there, and he warned of a plot to murder Mr. López.

Soon after that, he reassigned the head of the service, who had been on the job only a few weeks. He also hinted that if members of the intelligence service had been present at the march, they might have been part of a conspiracy against the government.

All that has watchers of the conspiracy-minded Mr. Maduro alert to possible hidden meanings in the prosecutor's moves.

"This is going to be a novel in installments," said José Vicente Haro, a constitutional lawyer close to the opposition. "We get one chapter today, another the next day, another the next day and so on until we can decipher the answer to the mystery, in the best style of Agatha Christie."

Appendix 15: Slum Dwellers in Caracas Ask, What Protests?

[William Neuman, 28th Feb. 2014]

CARACAS, Venezuela — On the east side of this capital city, where the rich people tend to live, most children have stayed home from school for more than a week, protest bonfires burn in the streets at night, stores shut early and carnival celebrations have been cancelled.

But on the west side, where many of the poor people live under tin roofs, you would hardly know that the country has been stirred by weeks of unrest. Schools operate normally, restaurants serve up arepas, and residents, enjoying the extra days off that President Nicolás Maduro has given the country, prepare to crown their carnival queens.

Both sides of this city, the better off and the poorer, are dealing with many of the same frustrations: one of the world's worst inflation rates, hours spent in line to buy food and other basic goods in short supply, and rampant violent crime.

But while the poor are often hit especially hard by these troubles, the protests shaking the capital this month have been dominated by the city's middle- and upper-class residents. They have poured into the streets of their neighborhoods en masse, turning them into barricaded redoubts. Yet in the city's poorer sections, life has mostly gone on as usual.

The split personality in this city mirrors the deep divide that cleaves this oil-rich nation into supporters and opponents of the socialist-inspired revolution begun by Hugo Chávez, who was president for 14 years until he died nearly a year ago.

Tensions from that longstanding rift have exploded in protests sweeping the country against the government of Mr. Chávez's successor, Mr. Maduro, resulting in violent clashes between civilians and National Guard soldiers. More than a dozen people have been killed, with security forces implicated in several cases. Mr. Maduro, speaking at a conference called to promote dialogue, said a soldier was killed on Friday in Valencia, the country's third-largest city.

For all the upheaval, the disconnect between wealthier and poorer areas could seriously limit the impact of the protest movement, a weakness that some of its leaders seem keenly aware of.

“Change is not possible in Venezuela if the slums are not involved,” Henrique Capriles, the opposition politician who narrowly lost to Mr. Maduro in an election last year, said recently at a large rally that took place — once again — on the wealthy side of town.

Election after election has shown that this country is sharply divided, but the political divisions here are not as simple as a split between rich and poor — though it may seem that way based on where the protests are happening and how the government portrays them.

Many of the city's poorer residents wholeheartedly support the government, and aside from some gatherings in poor neighborhoods where residents bang pots in anger, the major protests have not taken place in the slums or drawn noticeably large contingents from them. Mr. Maduro has seized on this repeatedly, and has dismissively depicted the demonstrators as “fascist, spoiled, rich kids.”

But many in the capital's slums have sincere doubts about the government, or flatly oppose it. Some have joined the protests in other parts of the city. Still, many say they have deliberately kept clear of the demonstrations because of the threat of violence or because they do not trust the opposition. Others reject its central demand that Mr. Maduro be pushed from office, saying he was elected and that it would subvert democracy to oust him.

“I'm a Chavista but things are going badly,” said Estefanía Medina, 26, a restaurant worker who lives in a slum in a tiny brick hut perched precariously on a hillside. “Maduro is doing things badly. But I don't support the violence of the opposition either. They are full of hate.”

As the protests continued, Mr. Maduro added several extra days off for the traditional pre-Lent carnival holiday this weekend, including one on March 5, the anniversary of the death of Mr. Chávez.

Critics called the move an effort to dampen the protest movement, and some opposition-heavy cities and sections of the capital canceled carnival festivities, saying that with people dying in the protests, it was no time for celebration. Mr. Maduro criticized the cancellations and then played on the stereotype of a fat-cat government opponent traveling abroad for the holiday.

Saying that all flights out of the country were booked solid, Mr. Maduro said this week, “They leave the country and they take away or try to take away from the farmer, the worker, the student, the humble Venezuelan man and woman who live from their work, try to take away carnival, life, culture, music. I won't permit it.”

As his opponent, Mr. Capriles, spoke at the recent rally, one person in the crowd that stretched for many blocks said he felt compelled to encourage other residents from poorer areas to come out as well. The protester, Jorge Lisboa, 24, a computer support worker, carried a sign referring to one of the capital's most radically pro-government slums, known as 23 de Enero.

Corn flour and other staples are only available at a store in San Cristóbal, Venezuela, on certain days of the month. Credit Meridith Kohut for The New York Times

“I’m from 23 de Enero,” the sign said. “I’m not bourgeois, before all I’m Venezuelan and I’m in the opposition.”

His wife, Francis Bosch, an unemployed teacher, who is from the working class area of Catia, where the couple lives now, said: “The idea is to make people realize we’re all together in the same fight, we’re all going through the same things. If there’s crime, there’s crime everywhere.”

But while conditions are often tough in poor neighborhoods like Hornos de Cal and La Televisora, which cascade down the sides of a steep hill near the center of Caracas, things are far better than they were 15 years ago, before Mr. Chávez was president and before oil prices soared, bringing greater prosperity after years of hard times.

There is improved water and electrical service, and many homes now have telephone lines with broadband Internet provided by the government phone company. And there is a low-cost, government-built cable car that carries residents to and from the city center in minutes, a life-changing transformation from the past, when they had to slog up the hill or often pay taxis to drive them. That has made many people reluctant to demonstrate against the government, even if they are unhappy with Mr. Maduro.

“Who will protest if every day they can ride the cable car and be glad to have that as a form of transport?” said Ms. Medina, the restaurant worker.

The complaints on both sides of town respond to the same conditions, but with a different tone. In the wealthier neighborhoods, opponents bemoan shortages and long lines at stores. In the slums, where many now consider themselves middle class, some fear slipping back into poverty and feel a sense of betrayal — Mr. Chávez would not have let things get this bad, they say again and again.

Many poorer residents also felt weary of the endless, bitter division, saying that leaders on both sides were more interested in defending their personal interests or ambitions than in working for the good of the country.

“What we need in this country is a new political leadership,” said Dorian Cartagena, 22, a student who voted for Mr. Maduro but is now critical of the government. “We need a new political ideology. When Chávez died, Chavismo died with him.”

Mr. Cartagena and his brother, Jhonny Cartagena, 18, both sympathized with the protesters but said they had not gone to protest, fearing violence. They said that rising prices and long lines had made life much more difficult for their families, and that if things got worse, people from the poorer west side of town might join those on the wealthier east side in greater numbers.

“When this blows up, when they join in the commotion,” Jhonny Cartagena said, referring to those living on the poorer side of town, “nothing will stop it.”

