

From connected multitudes to digital activism Collective action repertoires in a digital Chile¹

De multidões conectadas ao ativismo digital: repertórios de ação coletiva em um Chile digital

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Abstract: This article analyzes the transformation of collective action repertoires in Chile in the context

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- 1 Esta pesquisa contou com o apoio financeiro da Agência Nacional de Investigação y Desarrollo (ANID), mediante os grants FONDECYT Regular N° 1241123 e FONDECYT Regular N° 1251893.
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of digitalization and social mobilization. Building on classical approaches by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, it explores how digital technologies have accelerated the emergence of new forms of collective and connective action, challenging the notion that such changes occur slowly. Through a diachronic qualitative analysis of three emblematic cycles of mobilization – the Mapuche movement, the student movement (2006–2011), and the 2019 social uprising – the study examines how digital platforms have redefined organization, communication, and visibility in contentious politics. The findings reveal that while digital tools have expanded opportunities for participation and visibility, persistent inequalities in access and digital skills limit their democratizing potential. The article contributes to the debate on the evolving nature of social movements and the interplay between technology, participation, and democracy in Latin America.

Keywords: collective action; digital activism; repertoires of contention; Chile; social movements.

Resumo: O artigo analisa a transformação dos repertórios de ação coletiva no Chile no contexto da digitalização e da mobilização social. A partir das abordagens clássicas de Charles Tilly e Sidney Tarrow, examina-se como as tecnologias digitais aceleraram o surgimento de novas formas de ação coletiva e conectiva, desafiando a ideia de que tais mudanças ocorrem lentamente. Com base em uma análise qualitativa diacrônica de três ciclos emblemáticos de mobilização – o movimento Mapuche, o movimento estudantil (2006–2011) e o estalido social de 2019 –, o estudo mostra como as plataformas digitais redefiniram a organização, a comunicação e a visibilidade da política contestatória. Os resultados indicam que, embora as ferramentas

digitais ampliem as oportunidades de participação e visibilidade, as desigualdades persistentes de acesso e habilidades digitais limitam seu potencial democratizador. O artigo contribui para o debate sobre a natureza em transformação dos movimentos sociais e sobre a relação entre tecnologia, participação e democracia na América Latina.

Palavras-chave: ação coletiva; ativismo digital; repertórios de contenção; Chile; movimentos sociais.

1. Introduction

Social media and new digital technologies have evidently and undeniably impacted social mobilization and collective action since the beginning of the century. During the XX century, from the literature of social movements, that potential capacity for change or evolution of collective action repertoires was stated as difficult or slow to achieve, being this change possible “but only glacially”⁵. The reality of the repertoires of contention changes; until then, the latter was based on the collective memory or history of the mobilized groups, using collective action known culturally that may change or evolve, but slowly.

At the very least, this statement has been nuanced in the last decades. At the dawn of 1994, the Zapatistas’ claims for indigenous rights caught the world’s attention. Today, 30 years have passed, and the evolution of digital technologies and their influence on politics has moved far beyond what anybody could have imagined then. Instant and wireless connection, widespread access to information, the everyday use of disinformation, targeted audience, digital governance,

5 TARRROW, 1998, p. 31.

artificial intelligence, and the development of algorithms with different objectives that go from marketing to even interfering in elections.

Social movements and collective action have not been immune to this evolving context. Using new technologies has a direct, radical, and overall influential impact on how social movements organize, make public and visible their demands, and collaborate in their collective action repertoires. Conforming to this globalized world, the networks constructed around the Internet and the different social media platforms are part of a new, ever-growing digital world that has rapidly become a new territory of dispute for social movements and organizations across the globe, with opportunities for them. The correlation of this rapid growth with quick changes in the collective action repertoires is one of the focuses of this article, questioning the current literature that states that these changes are always slow and challenging. These assertions have been questioned by the overwhelming speed of the evolution of new technologies and how they have affected social mobilization and collective action.

Chile has not been an exception to these changes. We will be using it as a case study to showcase the latter in a context in which the first decades of the XXI century Chilean politics have been characterized by its changing and volatile landscape with the emergence of new political parties, changes in the political elite, polarization, and even three attempts of changing the country's political constitution. These decades have also been characterized by several cycles of mobilization with massive street demonstrations that have shaken the Chilean political system, impacting different public policies⁶.

6 ALBALA, TRICOT, 2020, p. 131-149; BIDEGAIN, MAILLET, 2021, p. 1057-1075, MAILLET, *et al*, 2020; OLIVARES, CARRASCO, TRICOT, 2022.

This mentioned political context makes Chile an interesting case in which to analyze the evolution, consolidation, and changes, or new repertoires of contention used in this context. We are questioning ourselves about the development, potential, and challenges that social media and this digital landscape represent for social movements and collective action, particularly looking at the changes in the repertoires of collective action. Following this introduction, the paper proceeds in five sections. The first section describes the concept of repertoires of contention and traces its theoretical evolution. The second outlines the methodological approach. The third examines how social media and digital technologies have transformed collective and connective action. The fourth applies this framework to Chile as a case study, analyzing three emblematic cycles of mobilization: the Mapuche movement, the student movement (2006–2011), and the social uprising of 2019. The fifth section synthesizes the findings before the concluding remarks.

2. Repertoires of contention. What are we talking about?

In the late 1970s, the sociologist Charles Tilly theorized how people carry out collective action. On how social movements intervene in politics, analyzing how they act, and the variations or changes that may be identified in what he called repertoires of collective action. Tilly understood these as a limited set of routines learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice, adding that they are learned cultural creations that emerge from the collective struggle.⁷ Each group has its history, memory of collective

7 TILLY, 2005.

action, and a pool of known familiar collaboration methods. The group's repertoire to struggle for demands directly relates to its experience. With this in mind, repertoire can be understood as "scripted interactions in the improvisatory manner of jazz"⁸ How people collaborate, the repertoires of contention they use are never wholly original, created out of a void; they are, as stated before, built over known scripts, which usually are directly related to a group's particular history, being mnemonic expressions of these groups and their political culture. A repertoire may be accepted or not based on these experiences and variances in geographical locations, generational differences, or even the efficiency they may have⁹. A social movement's resources are directly related to the repertoires of contention it could use¹⁰. One of its most significant potential resources is its capacity for collective action, which may be conventional, relatively accepted, nonconventional, or even more disruptive forms of action, or they can even be violent.

These repertoires communicate and transmit social movement demands because they exteriorize them. They generate solidarity and identity among members and link them to leaders. They convince the participants of their strength and generate symbolism from which identity will emerge. They defy adversaries and generate uncertainty through their actions¹¹. All the above may be empowered and catalyzed by the multiplying and outstretched effect of the Internet and participating online.

How social movements act, and the organization's part in carrying out collective action, is relevant because it is

8 MCADAM, TARROW, TILLY, 2001, p. 49.

9 ROMANOS, LOPEZ, 2024, p. a223–a223.

10 DISI, 2021, p. e011,

11 MARTÍ I PUIG, 2004, p. 79–100.

how they present themselves to society. “An action is worth a thousand words,” and collective action is directly related to the meaning given to it¹². How collective action is implemented, and social movements are related to the collective’s identity, organization, history, and context, constituting the essence of the movement¹³.

Focusing our analysis on the repertoires of contention makes us pay attention to macro and microstructures and processes to discover how changes in these may influence collective action or not¹⁴. According to the literature, these collective action repertoires change or evolve slowly, “very seldom,” even glacially¹⁵. However, as we will see, this statement is questioned due to the swift change and emergence of new repertoires of contention in the context of new technology, digital media, protest, and activism. As we will see in the next part, becoming the latter is one of Latin America’s most relevant forms of political participation and action, particularly in Chile in the last decade.

Protests and social mobilization have been and are core elements of understanding Latin American politics; in these last decades, one can observe their emergence and proliferation. Protest is no longer related to any specific collective, ideology, or demand. It has become a common way of participating in politics, showing discontent, and demanding rights, liberties, or common goods¹⁶.

The reasons why people decide to protest are diverse. They may have to do with issues related to identity, such as the Indigenous peoples, protection of the environment,

12 MCADAM, 1999, p. 475–496.

13 IBARRA, 2010.

14 AUYERO, 2003.

15 TARROW, 1998.

16 MARTÍ I PUIG, TRICOT, 2023.

against feelings of, or actual insecurity, gender, identity or sexual rights, precarity, and cost of living, among others¹⁷ being possible to assert based on this, that it is imperative to understand what is happening, what is going on in the “streets” to understand Latin-American politics completely¹⁸.

Social movements and protests are not new to Latin American politics and have been part of the political arena for decades¹⁹. However, it is possible to argue that in the last year, we can see at least two main changes regarding these historical mobilization trends and collective action that are relevant to discuss in this article. First, protest and collective action are more univocally related to a specific collective group, any ideology, or even a particular demand. In recent years, it has become common for citizens to struggle with issues that affect them in a way that confronts conflicts usually neglected by conventional politics.

Second, due to the emergence and proliferation of new communication technologies and social networks, protest and social mobilization have acquired an extraterritorial dimension that adds to their more classic localized dimension in recent decades. With the latter in mind, social movements can range from grassroots-based organizations enrooted in specific communities to a transnational scale of organized networks. We will look deeper into the latter in the following part of the article.

17 BARRAGÁN, *et al*, 2020, p. 205-241.

18 MARTÍ I PUIG, 2018, p. 55-64.

19 MUNCK, 2020; ROSSI, BÜLOW, 2015; STAHLER-SHOLK, VENDEN, BECKER, 2008.

3. Methodological Approach

This article assumes a qualitative and interpretive approach to social movement studies and the political sociology tradition. The analysis is structured around a diachronic case study centered on Chile, a country selected due to its high social mobilization frequency and accelerated digital transformation during the last three decades. This analysis examines how the evolution of digital technologies has influenced collective action repertoires visible and used by key social actors in the country.

The methodological design is constructed based on an intra-case comparative analysis focused on three emblematic cycles of mobilization: The Mapuche movement, the student movement (2006–2011), and the social Outburst or revolt of 2019. These cases were selected due to their analytic representativeness, helping us observe the persistence and the transformation of contentious practices and offering empirical evidence relevant to digital appropriation in protest dynamics. A substantial corpus of secondary sources supports the research, digital media archives, and previous studies about social movements. Descriptive statistics are also incorporated into the analysis, together with public data such as the internet penetration rate and patterns of digital use, to contextualize the expansion of technological infrastructure and the intersection with political participation. Even though there is no original fieldwork, the analysis is grounded on a systematic synthesis of existing empirical evidence and consolidated theoretical frames such as those proposed by scholars such as Tilly, Tarrow, Bennett, and Segerberg. This approach allows us to analyze the relationship between technology and contentious politics, examining the transformation of collective action repertoires in the current digital context. The secondary sources were selected fol-

lowing three explicit criteria. Peer-reviewed academic works published between 1990 and 2024 that directly address social movements, digital activism, or collective action in Chile or comparable Latin American contexts. Official statistical sources – primarily the Chilean Telecommunications Subsecretary (SUBTEL) and the World Bank – for connectivity and digital infrastructure data; and grey literature and digital media archives from civil society organizations directly involved in the movements analyzed. Sources that did not meet these criteria were excluded. This selection protocol, while not exhaustive, ensures the analytical grounding of interpretations and allows for partial replication of comparative exercise by future researchers.

4. Protest, collective, and connective action

The story of collective action is the story of how new forms of collective action are included as part of the repertoires of contention²⁰ and the form in which social media or information communication technologies have impacted politics, collective action, and the way social movements organize, act or even develop their discourses has been addressed by literature. A comprehensive narrative of all this is beyond the scope of this article. However, some landmarks are relevant to understanding digital politics' evolution and current state related to social mobilization in Latin America and Chile.

Regarding collective mobilization, a diachronic look cannot provide an overview of the beginning of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) at the dawn of 1994 in Chiapas, México. From the least imagined place emerged a revolutionary movement that would quickly learn the impor-

20 IBARRA, MARTÍ, GOMÀ, (Orgs.), 2002.

tance and relevance of using new technologies, positioning the claims of the indigenous of Chiapas all over the world in this way. The Internet would play a key role in forming reticular relationships across the planet, stating from then that the Internet is more than a means²¹. This almost embryonic form of electronic networking ignited support that was fundamental in the survival and resistance of the Zapatistas, a transnational network of defense that was not entirely new but that in Latin America became iconic in expanding indigenous demands across the continent. Being reductionist, it is possible to argue that social movements since then can range from grassroots-based organizations enrooted in specific communities to organized networks of a transnational nature. In other words, the Zapatista emergence started a new century for the world's social movements²².

Tarrow is not entirely convinced of the novelty of these transnational networks, particularly due to the similar networks he identified during the 19th century in Europe. However, he recognizes the qualitative increase in this kind of phenomenon, as it is possible to observe a strong relation between globalization and the increase in transnational advocacy campaigns²³. These advocacy networks of defense are organized by actors that work at an international level around a particular issue, having as a core matter the pressure and action of communication strategies and their intense use of symbols and values²⁴. Ergo, the potential for communication, creating networks, and establishing transnational alliances becomes a relevant asset for social movements. The study of national and international activism networks shows

21 ROVIRA-SANCHO, 2005, p. 7.

22 PLEYERS, 2018.

23 ALMEIDA, 2019.

24 KECK, SIKKINK, 2000.

how these interact. It may condition the context influencing the opportunity structure and threats that movements, organizations, and activists may confront²⁵

At the end of the 1990s, the focus was on the rise of these different kinds of transnational advocacy organizations. The beginning of the new century brought the emergence of new forms of collective action repertoires that came hand in hand with the creation of new mobile technology.

Rheingold²⁶ was visionary, not only coining the term smart mobs but identifying different kinds of collective actions organized through mobile phones and the use of the Internet and wireless technology. Qualitatively differentiating these mobilizations from other information and communication technology (ICTs) organized collective behaviors, such as flashmobs, that are neither social nor politically motivated, however, by identifying the relevance of these new technologies in the foreseeable future. This vision was probably very accurate, but with the resources available then, it was impossible to predict the rapidity with which these technologies would evolve, becoming, to some extent, these kinds of smart mobs obsolete very fast.

Despite the latter, it is interesting to see how, in that context, the use of mobile technology and, by extension, smart mobs became an efficient repertoire of contention, communicating, generating solidarity and identity, and incentivizing participation. Examples of how these repertoires worked in practice can be seen in different parts of the globe, such as the embryonic gathering of young people to contest the organization of international forums in cities such as Seattle, Davos, Washington, or Prague²⁷.

25 MARTÍ I PUIG, SILVA, 2014, p. 7-18.

26 RHEINGOLD, 2003.

27 IBARRA; MARTÍ; GOMÀ (Orgs.), 2002

From these initial contentious political demonstrations organized electronically, we observe a subsequent evolution that advanced significantly in less than a decade. If text messages served as the primary resource at the end of the twentieth century, the development of social media and wireless connectivity provided considerably greater opportunities for social movements to organize and amplify their messages. The onset of the second decade of the 2000s initiated an extensive cycle of mobilization, wherein social mobilizations and collective actions could be witnessed in countries such as Spain, Greece, the United States, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Colombia, Chile, and numerous others—demonstrations aimed at democratization, opposing austerity measures, and advocating for improved public services, among various other motivations. These movements effectively used new information and communication technologies (ICTs), successfully expressing their positions globally and amplifying their message in previously impossible spaces.

Just an example, the so-called Arab Spring, which confronted different autocratic regimes in the region with massive demonstrations in the streets, was motivated by many reasons but was catalyzed by social media. The latter's role may have been exaggerated to a certain point ²⁸. However, it is also difficult to argue that social media such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, YouTube, or others did not play a significant role in communicating what was happening, transmitting the messages of these movements, or being part of a chain to show what happened in other countries inspiring, for instance, young people in Morocco to take part in the protests of February 20th and to voice their desire for freedom, dignity, and social justice ²⁹.

28 JOFFÉ, 2011, p. 507-532.

29 BELGHAZI, MOUDDEN, 2016, p. 37-49.

We can see similar dynamics of collective action, for instance, in the same year in other parts of the world, in the context of the anti-austerity measures in Europe. In Spain, we saw the emergence of the Indignados or 15M movement³⁰ that appeared autonomous, distanced from political parties, and as a response from the streets to austerity measures carried out in the context of the economic crisis. The indignation “called for dignity against the deterioration of society brought about by neoliberalism”³¹

In this context, the young people became protagonists of the mobilization because they were “digital natives,” and social media was essential when communicating and expanding their message³². Young people, women, and citizens without previous mobilization experience used social networks, relying on ICTs for gathering and organizing, becoming one of the biggest self-mobilization or social networked formats organized through the Internet³³. The start of that decade was prolific with social mobilizations. Together with the mentioned ones, it was also possible to see the Occupy movement in the US and UK, student movements in Chile or México, and several others around the globe—all with the common denominator of networks and social media becoming fundamental when organizing and communicating. The ICTs helped demands become widespread and visible, and the efficient use of social media allowed distant supporters to engage in the issues, emulate tactics, and provide support³⁴.

30 FLESHER FOMINAYA, 2015; MARTÍ I PUIG, 2011.

31 DELLA PORTA, 2015.

32 PASTOR, 2012.

33 MORELL, 2012, p. 386–392.

34 MEYER, 2024.

With some of these movements in mind, Castells reflects on and develops his idea of networks of hope to characterize these movements. Identifying some commonalities, such as that these are all connected networks, but this connection is not always of the same kind, being, as he states, multimodal; these movements are global and local at the same time; these movements are viral; there is in them a more horizontal political dynamic; they are self-reflective movements; and they are rarely programmatic, with several demands³⁵.

This use of the Internet and social media as assets for social mobilization has skyrocketed, as we can see, from initial modest or timid uses to becoming integral collective action repertoires for most contemporary social movements. From now on, we will find from the literature a myriad of different approaches towards and analysis of what has been identified as contentious politics of data, which is understood as “the multiplicity of bottom-up transformative initiatives interfering with/ or hijacking dominant, top-down processes of datafication by contesting existing power relations and narratives and/ or by reappropriating data practices and infrastructure”³⁶. The latter allows us to step away from other novelty processes concerning new technologies and politics, such as the intention of influencing politics or elections, the use of ICTs and the Internet, such as big data, the use of algorithms in a political context by traditional or institutional political actors, or even expressions of discrimination in this regard, in what has been identified as “institutional politics of data”³⁷. We will focus on the use of contentious politics of data in the context of social and collective mobilization

35 CASTELLS, 2015.

36 BERALDO, MILAN, 2019.

37 BERALDO, MILAN, 2019.

confronted with power from below, specifically concentrating on the Chilean case.

Using the Internet and social media permits more presence and visibility for social movements. This new logic of connective action is enabled by digital media, which reduces communication costs and opens up a particular – and still evolving – arena of power contestation³⁸. As stated by several authors, online resources lower the cost of political participation³⁹. It is possible to argue the existence of two kinds of political participation, a simple distinction between what is considered ‘real’ actions supported and facilitated by the Internet and ‘virtual’ actions Internet-based⁴⁰.

As mentioned, this influence is also encountered in institutional politics. However, we can also progressively see this influence in bureaucratic frameworks and infrastructure of the state, where we can observe digital vertical and horizontal intermediaries or brokers that link citizens and the state, processes that raise fundamental questions about digital democracy and the continuous evaluation of public policies⁴¹. In other words, datafication increasingly permeates state functions and mediates state-citizen relations. Neologisms have permeated political analysis and discussion, giving names or trying to make sense of the overwhelming number of changes datafication and digitalization are affecting collective action and actors. Terms such as digital protest and activism, hacktivism, cyberactivism⁴², hashtag politics⁴³,

38 BENNETT, SEGERBERG, 2012.

39 GIL DE ZÚÑIGA, MATEOS, INGUANZO, 2022.

40 VAN LAER, VAN AELST, 2010.

41 FREITAS; TEIXEIRA, 2019. TORO □ MAUREIRA, *et al*, 2026.

42 GEORGE, LEIDNER, 2019; SIERRA-CABALLERO, 2018.

43 FRIDMAN, 2022.

algorithmic politics⁴⁴, or connected crowds or Multitudes⁴⁵.

The idea of contentious politics of data allows us to frame the study about Chile in the next section, focusing on how data mediates social mobilization and collective action, the influence of ICTs on the country's politics, and the changes in the repertoires of contention in recent years.

5. Connected action and digital activism in Chile, from the student movement to the social revolt

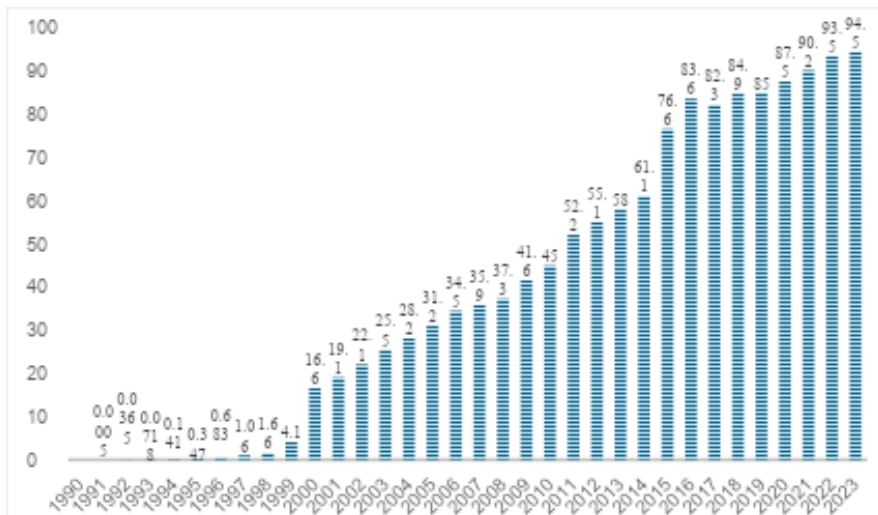
Thus far, we have delineated the evolution of what Bennett and Segerberg characterize as the logic of connected action and its association with social mobilization and collective action⁴⁶. This evolution is not linear or uniform. The overview illustrates the central argument: the accelerating transformation of collective action repertoires driven by digital technology advancements. We examine Chile as a case study to explore these processes' implications on mobilization, collective engagement, and political dynamics. The Chilean case shows how digital affordances create new action repertoires and structural participation opportunities. Figure 1 shows data on internet use in Chile, where nearly 95% have internet access. However, this does not imply that all connections are equal or that everyone has the skills for online procedures. While 89% of public services are online, limited digital skills and infrastructure pose barriers to access, especially for low-income and rural populations⁴⁷.

44 TRERÉ, BONINI, 2024.

45 ROVIRA-SANCHO, 2023.

46 BENNETT, SEGERBERG, 2012.

47 GARRIDO, LAVIN, RODRÍGUEZ-PEÑA, 2014.

Figure 1: Individuals who use the Internet in Chile.

Own elaboration based on data from the World Bank.

The absence of public policies and insufficient investment in digital inclusion has contributed to the perpetuation of this inequality — a pattern extensively documented in the comparative literature on digital divides in the Global South and observable in the Chilean case through the structural gaps identified by SUBTEL's own data.⁴⁸, particularly among vulnerable sectors that depend almost exclusively on mobile phones for Internet access—an approach that restricts usability and indicates lower levels of digital skills⁴⁹. In response to these obstacles, various studies emphasize the role of intermediaries, such as youth, community agents, or local leaders, who facilitate the connection between users and digital services⁵⁰. These intermediaries, whether they are

48 NDULU, CHAKRABORTI, 2007; NEDUNGADI, 2018; WILLIAMS, *et al*, 2011. MINISTERIO DE TRANSPORTES Y TELECOMUNICACIONES, 2023.

49 CORREA, VALENZUELA, PAVEZ, 2024.

50 CORREA PAVEZ, 2016; TORO-MAUREIRA, *et al*, 2026.

close (family, friends, neighbors) or hierarchical (authorities, officials, community leaders), hold particular significance in rural areas, where connectivity limitations and structural inequalities impede equitable participation in the digital modernization of the state.

Significant progress has been made in Chile's digital connectivity in recent years. 94.3% of households have their own paid access to the Internet through fixed, mobile, or satellite technologies⁵¹. However, it is noted that while 86% of people over 16 years of age regularly use the Internet, their activity is mainly limited to communication (76%) and entertainment (63%), reflecting a lag in productive uses compared to OECD countries, particularly about digital government services, online banking, and information retrieval.

These challenges are further intensified by unequal fiber-optic coverage, affecting around 5.6 million people, and limited digital skills, especially in low-income and rural sectors⁵². Such findings underscore the urgency of strengthening public policies aimed at digital literacy, capacity building, and infrastructure development in the most disadvantaged areas, aligning with the objectives of the state agency Telecommunications Subsecretary of Chile (SUBTEL)

A critical dimension that the analysis of Chilean digital activism must also address is the structural dependency of social movements on privately owned digital infrastructure. Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, and WhatsApp are not neutral conduits for collective action: they are platforms governed by corporate algorithms that shape content visibility, amplify certain messages, and suppress others according to logics that prioritize engagement and monetization over political deliberation. Chilean social movements, like their

51 MINISTERIO DE TRANSPORTES Y TELECOMUNICACIONES, 2023.

52 EL MOSTRADOR, 2023.

counterparts elsewhere, have appropriated these spaces creatively and strategically. However, this appropriation entails a fundamental vulnerability: the possibility that platform operators may restrict, censor, or modify the rules of participation unilaterally, as documented in comparative studies of social movement communication⁵³. The 2019 social outburst illustrated this tension acutely, as activists simultaneously used and contested the affordances of commercial platforms to make visible both their demands and the state repression they faced.

Equally significant, though largely absent from existing accounts of Chilean contentious politics, is the dimension of state digital surveillance. The expansion of digital mobilization has been paralleled by an expansion of state capacity to monitor, track, and anticipate collective action through the analysis of social media data, geolocation, and network metadata. While systematic evidence of large-scale surveillance of Chilean social movements remains fragmentary, the legal and institutional framework enabling such practices has been in place since at least the 2010s, and its use during the 2019 outburst has been reported by human rights organizations. This counterpart to digital activism—the datafication of protest from above—constitutes a structural constraint on the democratizing potential of digital technologies that future research should address more systematically.

The legal and institutional dimensions of digital activism constitute an indispensable analytical frontier. The new repertoires of digital contention identified in this study challenge existing legal frameworks in at least three connected ways. First, the pervasiveness of online organizing and communication raises pressing questions about the effective scope of constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression

53 TRERÉ, BONINI, 2024.

and peaceful assembly in digital environments, particularly when states and corporate platforms act to restrict or monitor such activity. Second, the structural dependence of social movements on privately governed platforms underscores the urgency of platform regulation. As the Brazilian context demonstrates⁵⁴, surveillance capitalism systematically erodes citizens' informational self-determination rights, a dynamic equally operative in Chile's digital activism landscape. Third, the documented expansion of state surveillance capacities over contentious actors demands renewed attention from legal scholars and political scientists alike, as the datafication of protest from above reconfigures the opportunity structure available to social movements operating within democratic systems.

However, the advance of democracy and the development of public policies linked to the free market generated growing discontent in different sectors, which initiated various mobilization strategies. This mobilization cycle finished with the return to democracy when the political system normalized, and most political issues were conducted via existing institutionalization, depletion of civil society, and social movements⁵⁵.

This dynamic is quite accurate. Nevertheless, collective actions have not entirely disappeared, making it possible to see the mobilization of different kinds every year since 1990. During the first years of democracy, we can observe a dynamic of continuity where the most relevant and active social movement on the streets was related to human rights.⁵⁶ This influence slowly decreased, becoming other kinds of demands part of the country's political mobiliza-

54 MOLINA, BARRETO JUNIOR, 2022.

55 SALAZAR, 2012.

56 TRICOT, ALBALA, 2018, p. 55-72.

tion landscape. LGBTQ groups, students, women, feminist organizations, and indigenous communities found the opportunity in this newly achieved democracy to put their demands forward. Despite the above, it is possible to say that in the first decade of democracy, social mobilization was still reorganizing and adapting to the new free context. A similar reality is verified with the use of the Internet and ICTs, which were still relatively recent and not part of the unconventional political scenery or the collective action used by social movements in the country. This context begins to change, and the evolution of digital connectivity impacts the mobilization's outreach and influence.

Since the early 2010s, digital technologies have been progressively incorporated into collective action repertoires, enlightening us about the transformative power of these tools in the evolution of collective action. Since then, there have been many kinds of relevant movements. However, we will focus on three characteristics that allow us to observe evolutions in their repertoire due to their presence and constant mobilization over the last decades, as well as their capacity to mobilize people in the Mapuche movement. The student movement is a case that will allow us to observe this evolution. Leaving the social Outburst of 2019 for a final case to analyze, that will allow us to see that the current widespread use of social media and TICs is consubstantial to social mobilization in current Chile, evidencing the rapid evolution and change in the repertoires of collective action visible in the country's nonconventional political participation.

5.1 The Mapuche movement and the emergence of digital activism are significant topics that underscore their importance in our understanding of collective action.

The Mapuche are the largest indigenous people present today in Chile. According to the 2017 census, they represent 79,8% of the indigenous population and 9,9% of the country's total population. Despite their historical territory being in the south of Chile, they are currently mainly situated in the country's center due to migration and the loss of their territory. Since the end of the military dictatorship, it is possible to see the emergence of Mapuche mobilization and demands in Chilean politics. This movement has sustained collective action for over 3 decades, demanding cultural, territorial, legal, and political rights. This, of course, does not mean that before that, the Mapuche did not mobilize. However, since the beginning of the nineties, it is possible to identify the emergence of a reticular movement organized by various organizations that generally have similar demands about autonomy, self-determination, and a different relationship with the Chilean state. Mapuche communities and organizations have used different collective action repertoires in their struggle for these demands. These repertoires include protests, demonstrations, land recoveries, and more conventional ones like participating in elections or building a political party⁵⁷. Among the former, we can see since the second half of the nineties, the growth, consolidation, and strengthening of different kinds of networks of advocacy that have contributed to indigenous movements in Latin America and Chile; this transnational activism has been used to pressure the different governments, but also make visible

57 TRICOT, 2023, p. 181-199.

in the international arena the human rights violations that they are subject to⁵⁸.

During the initial years of the transition to democracy, the establishment of alternative means of communication, including community radio stations, small-scale newspapers, and electronic web pages, served as the mechanism through which the movement countered the dominant narrative surrounding the conflict. The swift advancement and enhancement of the Internet within the nation have facilitated the rise of diverse forms of digital activism, thereby amplifying, disseminating, and reinforcing preexisting networks and identities⁵⁹.

This new context was appropriate for creating various digital media related to the Mapuche demands and movement, which have been tasked with visualizing, hopefully massively, the conflict and demands from a subjective Indigenous perspective. The vision does not usually find its place in the Chilean media. This work done by these micro media outlets is usually free or very cheap, giving organizations a platform for constructing a counternarrative to criminalize the movement and its hegemonic demands in the media⁶⁰. These are the circumstances in which many of these media emerge, live, and disappear. Little media such as Colectivo Lientur of kontrainformación; Mapuexpress, Informativo Mapuche; or Azkintuwe, among others, are examples of the latter that try to position their objectives, identity strengthening, demands, and struggle on the political agenda. The digital world has become a new arena of expression of conflict and a new instance of cultural resistance⁶¹.

58 HABERSANG, YDÍGORÁS, 2015.

59 MILLALEO, VELASCO, 2013.

60 VALLE ROJAS, 2005.

61 MALDONADO, VALLE, 2013.

This digital world does not end in the development of these news outlets or web pages; these go hand in hand with the proliferation in social media of these and other Mapuche-related content created with the same objectives; they have an amplifying effect⁶², but also offer a space for discussion and for connection among activist that otherwise could interact on a daily base. Finally, when analyzing this case, we can also observe how, in the last decade, WhatsApp has become a widely used tool by the country's population in general. In the context of the Mapuche movement, it has been used to communicate, organize, and show human rights violations suffered in real time, especially in communities. This tool is one of the features of contemporary digital activism⁶³.

There are differences depending on the kind of organization or even the objectives and demands that these may have; however, either it is a more confrontational organization with the core of their repertoires being nonconventional or organizations that navigate more comfortably among formal and institutional politics, how the development of technologies of communications has become an essential part of Mapuche mobilization is evident over a very short period. In the span of two decades, we can see how this new tool has become central in the way the participants of this movement organize, connect, inform, and make visible issues. It is part of their collective action repertoire and a constant opportunity.

62 MILLALEO; VELASCO, 2013.

63 MILAN, BARBOSA, 2020.

5.2 Student movement at the forefront of digital activism

Until the 2019 social outburst, the movements related to students and education had been the most relevant, widespread, and visible in the country ⁶⁴. First, in 2006, in the so-called “penguin revolution,” high school students took to the streets to demand improvements in the educational system that until then had been completely integrated into the Chilean neoliberal model. These massive protests surprised the government and the political system, putting education on the agenda and setting the students down at a negotiating table with the government and politicians to reform the educational law, which was finally modified in 2009. These mobilizations from 2006 were a milestone where we can see the visible start of the use of the Internet in the context of a massive social movement, becoming part of their repertoire with more traditional forms of mobilization. Emails, text messages, and webpages were used, but photologs were the most utilized resources for organization and collective action ⁶⁵. This embryonic social network helped these secondary students organize and take by surprise a whole political system from below.

However, it was in 2011 that the streets of Chile were flooded with thousands of students from universities and schools who organized, protested, and demanded an education that should be free and of quality. This was called the “Chilean Spring” as it was the starting point of education reforms and the political system. What started as protests against its educational and financing system, installed dur-

64 OLIVARES; CARRASCO; TRICOT, 2022; VON BÜLOW, BIDEGAIN, 2015, p. 179–194.

65 TORRES, Rodrigo; COSTA, Paola, 2012.

ing the dictatorship but modified later to amplify access to university education, was successful in doing so. However, they neglected quality and return on investment, putting thousands of students in unmanageable debt. The protest lasted for a month, ignited by the harsh repression, our statements of former president Piñera saying that education was not a right but a “consumer good.” The 2011 student movement was, due to its length, magnitude, and support it had the most significant expression of nonconventional politics in the country since the end of the dictatorship, from which many of its leaders became professional politicians and representatives in the Parliament, ministers or even President, which is the case of the current Chilean President, Gabriel Boric, former student leader himself.

In this context, we can see how, in just a few short years, ICTs have become a regular part of life for many Chileans, especially regarding social mobilization and political engagement. One of the standout features of the student protests was their ability to use creativity and performative acts as part of the repertoires of protest, moving away from more traditional forms of protest. The demonstrations were colorful, energetic, and creative, using music, dances, and other forms of artistic and performative expressions as creative tools for protest, tools that amplify the student demands. In this context, we can see, for instance, the resignification of flashmobs. Using new technologies convened in public spaces, the Chilean students morph a usually nonpolitical activity into a powerful political statement.

Various types of gatherings were organized through online platforms, including a mock beach (“playa para Lavín”) that ridiculed the Minister of Education for proposing holidays to conclude the protests, a “genkidama” orchestrated through Facebook by a student inspired by a Japanese anime; and the “1800 hour run for education,”

wherein students demonstrated against the backdrop of Moneda Palace for 1800 hours to symbolize the necessity of 1.8 billion dollars required to fund free education in the nation. Indeed, the most popular was the “Thriller for Education,” where students gathered and performed the classic choreography from Micheal Jackson’s music video in front of the presidential palace dressed as zombies ⁶⁶.

All of these forms of protest connected and helped the student organization. Thanks to the immediateness of social media and the Internet, they also helped them expand their message beyond only the students, achieving a much wider audience, effectively breaking away from the unidirectional information coming from traditional media.

If, as we saw before, at some point, text messages were relevant calling to the streets and participation, the ICTS has developed this even more, becoming a repertoire that not only helps in this but also is part of how social movements develop and position their discourse, identity, political discussions as well as its potential organization efficiency.

5.3 The Social Outburst of 2019

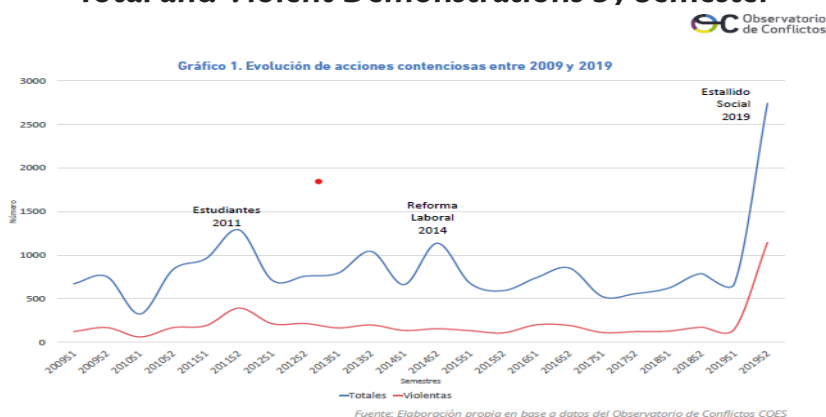
Finally, 2019 will be remembered for the coming years as a critical juncture of contemporary Chilean politics, a failed juncture, probably, but relevant anyhow. For months, the government had to confront unprecedented massive social mobilization. At the beginning of October 2019, A high school student organization called for a protest the rise in the Santiago subway fare ⁶⁷. The plan was to jump the metro gate and get in without paying, protesting, and demanding the annulment of the ticket raise. Little did they know that this

⁶⁶ PONCE LARA, MIRANDA, 2016.

⁶⁷ ESCUDERO, OLIVARES, 2021, p. 173–192.

small action of civil disobedience would ignite a cycle of mobilization that would last for months throughout the country⁶⁸. These months took millions to the streets to protest, take cultural actions, and organize territorial or neighborhood assemblies. There were also barricades, confrontations with the police, riots, and widespread and indiscriminate repression by the Chilean police. In mid-November, the government and almost all the parties in Parliament agreed to hold a Plebiscite to consult Chileans about their willingness to change the ruling constitution. This agreement and the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic ended the movement's momentum. As seen in the graphic below, the increase in contentious collective action during 2019 is quite visible and meaningful.

Figure 2:
Evolution of Social Protests in Chile (2009–2019):
Total and Violent Demonstrations by Semester



Source: Conflict Observatory, COES (Center for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies, Chile)

68 BARRAGÁN *et al*, 2019; PALACIOS-VALLADARES, 2020; TRICOT, 2021.

Since that first call for jumping the metro gates, we can see the protagonism of ICTs because that gathering was organized via social media and mobile phones. The politics of hashtags, for instance, is present all along the period, being probably the most massive and relevant ones #chiledespertó (Chile Woke up) a frame behind this is attractive and straightforward, stating that the citizens are no longer going to take the injustice of the system, they were no longer be silent and that this will show in the streets or wherever else the congregated to protest. Also, the #noestamosenguerra (we are not at war) hashtag became viral in the context of the declarations made by the President, Sebastian Piñera, who stated, "We are at war against a powerful and implacable enemy that does respect nothing or no one and is willing to use violence and crime without limit." Incendiary declarations ignited even more mobilization in the streets of the country. These demonstrations had their peak the following Friday with #lamarchamasgrandedechile (The most significant demonstration of Chile), which makes references to the massive demonstration organized on October 26th all over the country, but that in Santiago, the capital, gathered more than a million people, being the images of this moment made visible on social media.

The above examples show how social media and ICTs became integral to the contention during the 2019 social outbreak. The demands and collectives differed significantly, from students to Indigenous, feminists, and workers. However, they all shared a common characteristic: the Internet and social media became an empowering resource; YouTube, Vimeo, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp were places to meet virtually, denounce issues, report violence or repression, or organize⁶⁹

69 JIMENEZ-YAÑEZ, 2020.

To end this short description, it is important to state that the latter would be difficult to understand if we did not consider the Chilean context. In the 2019 outburst, more than 80% of Chileans used some social media network to communicate, particularly WhatsApp, which became relevant. This use was even more prevalent among those who supported the demonstrations⁷⁰.

Finally, during COVID-19, the mobilizations subsided due to the context, of course, and the institutionalization of the political process through a constitutional process. However, arguably, we can also state that despite the relevance of digital protest or activism, longstanding social movements still need people in the streets to persist.

6. Catching up with repertoire changes

The fast-paced changes in information and communication technologies have impacted society and politics worldwide. Our analysis of the Chilean social mobilization of the last decades allows us to verify this pattern in the country. The several social mobilizations visible in the last decades make Chile an excellent case study to showcase this evolution and how they have become an integral part of the collective action repertoires of mobilized organizations or citizens in the country. Digital change represents a constant opportunity for social movements to adapt and expand their action repertoire.

In the three cases we describe, we can see how the Internet and social media increased their message reach and how the discourse they wanted to communicate was visible to an audience otherwise unimaginable a few decades

70 GRASSAU, *et al*, 2018.

ago. The sempiternal claim of biased media coverage was partially mitigated by this new technological context where, for instance, the Mapuche movement was able to make their historical demands known publicly, becoming territorial and autonomic demands part of the agenda; the students could make visible the shortcomings of the educational system, the lack of funding and necessity for reform; and the social Outburst became known worldwide due to the exposure they achieved through these networks. Focusing on how digital tools shaped organizational capacity, we can see that facilitating the evolution in ICTs correlated with the capacity of movements, organizations, and citizens to get together and gather, either due to some specific demands, such as Indigenous peoples or students, or concerning more diffuse issues, such as the ones upheld during the 2019 uprising.

In terms of visibility, the impact is manifest; all social movements of the organization now have the individual or collective potential to not only make public their demands and discourse but also put on the agenda issues of abuse and repression that they may be suffering in the hand of their antagonist, usually the state, but sometimes, private corporations. This possibility is evident in the Mapuche movement, which first did it by organizing media outlets, later through social media use, and finally, through their communities that now, almost in real-time, can stream the abuses they suffer. The student movement, in its way, was a vanguard about this, using the Internet and social media for the promotion of their demands and, of course, showing the repression that they suffered at the hands of the police. We can see the same use in the Outburst context, where, despite the issues, an agenda was more fluid and diffuse. The one thing that gathered the people together was the anger against the repression of the police and, later, the struggle to change the

constitution. So, from the very first day, the repression that the high school girls suffered when jumping the metro gate became viral on social media and later started the hashtag #evade to call for protesting in the metro, igniting the most significant social unrest seen in the country in decades.

Intrinsically related to the visibility is the solidarity and support of the movement, which all three cases have been able to achieve with different levels of success, using it to their advantage, with the students being probably the most notable, as they were able to get almost 80% of public support at some points of their mobilization. Also, in this movement, where social media became so relevant, the image of public figures aroused public attention, with some of these figures becoming active and known political actors in the country since then.

These findings do not disregard classical literature about collective action repertoires, but revisiting the timing stated in some of these is relevant. The changes and evolution of these repertoires have been at a rate that makes it even more challenging to assess their impacts on different societal levels. However, as we have seen before, the changes in ICTs have been influencing, potentiating, and becoming a constant opportunity for social mobilization and collective action.

7. Final remarks

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that social movements and organizations in Chile have responded to recent technological transformations and have actively appropriated digital technologies to redefine and reshape collective action and create new avenues for political contestation. Following the literature, we believe that ICTs can be understood as strategic tools to reduce the transac-

tion costs associated with traditional mobilization. They enable actors from diverse geographic and social contexts to express solidarity and engage collectively, even through purely online participation, thereby broadening the reach of political demands. This transformation does not displace traditional forms of contention; rather, it supplements and reconfigures them, giving rise to hybrid repertoires that combine territorial and digital action in mutually reinforcing ways. However, this expansion is neither uniform nor unconditional: it is systematically shaped by inequalities in connectivity, disparities in digital skills, and structural asymmetries in the organizational capacities of different social actors.

Based on the analysis of three key collective action experiences in Chile—the Mapuche movement, the student movement, and the social uprising of 2019—the article reveals a structural tension between ICTs’ democratizing potential and the material and social limitations that condition their practical use. Understanding this, the article offers three main contributions to studying social movements and collective action in Latin America.

This article contributes to revisiting the temporal assumptions embedded in classical theories of collective action repertoires, demonstrating that the pace of change can be considerably faster than Tarrow’s “glacial” formulation anticipated, particularly when driven by rapid technological disruption. By integrating Tilly and Tarrow’s foundational frameworks with Bennett and Segerberg’s logic of connective action and the emerging literature on contentious data politics, the article shows that digital repertoires do not operate in a vacuum—they reflect and amplify pre-existing social tensions and structural inequalities. Understanding these hybrid and digitally mediated forms of collective

action is essential for rethinking democratic participation, political identity formation, and the conditions of possibility for social change in the twenty-first century. This challenge is not merely analytical but also normative⁷¹ the tension between transformative popular mobilization and conservative legal-institutional frameworks demands new democratic paradigms capable of incorporating the claims expressed through digitally mediated contentious politics.

The patterns documented for Chile, resonate with important contextual differences across Latin America. Brazil offers the most instructive comparative reference. The country experienced a decade of political turbulence that included massive protest cycles, a presidential impeachment, a global pandemic, and four years of a far-right presidency, a trajectory that transformed digital platforms into indispensable arenas of political contention⁷². The Jornadas de Junho of 2013 (a massive cycle of urban protests triggered by a bus-fare increase in São Paulo, rapidly encompassing demands for public services, anti-corruption, and democratic accountability) displayed similar dynamics to those identified in Chile: rapid diffusion of protest frames through social media, the organizational role of WhatsApp and Twitter, and the horizontal, leaderless character of mobilization. These cycles created new forms of intermediation between social movements and the existing political system a formulation that applies with equal force to the Chilean cases examined in this article. The differences between the two cases are equally instructive. Brazil's much larger population, deeper structural inequalities in digital infrastructure, and the subsequent process of political polarization illustrate how the democratizing potential of digital repertoires is condi-

71 LUNARDI, 2019.

72 AVRITZER, VON BÜLOW, SANTANA 2024.

tioned by national structural factors. The asymmetry of the digital field systematically favored right-wing actors over progressive forces⁷³ a dynamic with no direct parallel in the Chilean cases but which underscores that digital repertoires are structurally embedded rather than ideologically neutral. This contrast is further sharpened by the legal-institutional dimension: the Brazilian legislature's failure to approve regulation of disinformation on digital platforms demonstrates that the democratizing potential of digital activism remains hostage to the capacity of political systems to translate contentious demands into binding institutional arrangements a challenge equally relevant for Chile's post-outburst institutional landscape. The tension between transformative popular mobilization and conservative legal-institutional frameworks demand new democratic paradigms capable of incorporating the claims expressed through digitally mediated contentious politics⁷⁴. Future comparative research across Southern Cone democracies should systematically examine how structural variables (digital inequality, party system fragmentation, and platform regulation frameworks) mediate the democratic trajectory of digital activism.

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73 VON BÜLOW, AVRITZER & SANTANA, 2024.

74 LUNARDI, 2019

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Recebido em: 07/11/2025

Aprovado em: 04/05/2026

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