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The Platformed Activism Paradox: Flexible Engagement and Personal Costs in Established Adulthood

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Abstract

Digital platforms have been associated with lower barriers to political participation, yet their role in making activism compatible with work and care responsibilities during established adulthood remains underexplored. Focusing on No más AFP ("No More Pension Fund Administrators"), a Chilean movement that combines platform-based organizing with mass protest against the privatized pension system, this article examines how platforms accommodate engagement amid limited biographical availability and the personal costs that accompany this flexibility. Drawing primarily on semi-structured interviews with 15 activists aged 30–45, complemented by Facebook-based digital ethnography (2016–2017), the study used iterative coding to examine how platformed activist practices intersected with biographical constraints, competencies, and everyday life. Platforms enabled remote, asynchronous, and task-specific participation, allowing participants to translate professional and digital competencies into activist contributions. Yet embedding activist work within the same devices and routines used for employment, family communication, and leisure blurred the boundaries between life domains and was associated with persistent availability and encroachment on rest and family life. The article conceptualizes this as the platformed activism paradox: the same media infrastructures that help sustain collective action by making involvement practicable under limited biographical availability also shift participation costs onto activists' time and private lives.

Keywords: digital activism; platformed activism; digital media; biographical availability; established adulthood; social movements; boundary management; No más AFP

1. Introduction

Participation in social movements depends not only on political commitments but also on the circumstances in which people can act on them. Employment, family responsibilities, and other everyday obligations shape the time and resources available for involvement. The concept of biographical availability highlights these constraints and their implications for participation (McAdam, 1986). Their significance also varies across activities: involvement in the same movement can entail different demands, with biographical availability particularly relevant to the time participants devote to activism (Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991). Subsequent research has qualified a purely individual reading of these constraints, emphasizing that opportunities to participate also depend on how movements make involvement accessible (Reed, 2022), while recent protest research shows that the effects of biographical availability vary across forms and contexts of participation (Saunders & Hayes, 2025). Evidence from Chile likewise illustrates this contextual contingency: during the COVID-19 pandemic, the predictive relevance of biographical availability weakened,

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while pandemic-related grievances became more salient for participation in street protests (Donoso et al., 2022).

Understanding engagement, therefore, requires attention to both the desire to participate and the practical arrangements that enable participation. Given the polysemy of engagement in communication research (Bastos et al., 2021), engagement is understood here in practical terms, referring to how activists become and remain involved in movement activity within the constraints of everyday life, rather than to political commitment alone.

Digital media have expanded how participation can be organized around such constraints. Earl and Kimport (2011) identify reduced costs and less need for physical co-presence as key affordances of digitally enabled activism. These possibilities, however, do not make participation equally accessible or inexpensive. Schradie (2018) demonstrates that organizational resources and individual differences in access, skills, and time generate substantial inequalities in digital activism. Pierri (2022) likewise challenges the assumption that digital campaigning requires little organizational effort, stressing the labor and material conditions that sustain it. Research on social-movement volunteering also shows that personal digital technologies can support organizational responsiveness while relying on individualized forms of digital volunteer work (Gantt-Shafer, 2025). In Mexican digital activism, a highly visible digital direct-action campaign similarly depended on activists' affective labor and performance-maintenance practices (Rovira-Sancho, 2023). Together, these studies suggest that assessing digital participation requires moving beyond the question of whether digital media reduce or increase the costs of activism, and instead examining which demands are reduced, which remain, which new demands emerge, and who can accommodate them.

Research on sustained activist communication further shows that digital engagement can coexist with considerable personal demands. Studying Occupy Gezi, Mercea et al. (2018) examine biographical availability, social ties, and the costs of persistent communication on Twitter, including tensions with work and family relationships. Supa et al. (2024) document challenges to well-being associated with digital media use among youth climate activists, as well as the practices they employ to address these challenges. These contributions establish that remote engagement need not be low-effort and that its consequences extend beyond the immediate act of posting or sharing content. They also caution against treating the pressures of digital participation as distinctive to a single age group.

A life-course perspective provides a framework for situating these constraints. Arnett's work on emerging adulthood conceptualizes the late teens and twenties as a period characterized by exploration and relative independence from enduring social roles and normative expectations (Arnett, 2000). If emerging adulthood is characterized by openness and exploration, the years that follow often involve a denser intersection of work, relational, and care commitments. Mehta et al. (2020) subsequently conceptualize approximately ages 30 to 45 as "established adulthood," stressing the intersecting demands of career development, intimate relationships, and care, the "career-and-care crunch." Established adulthood is used here as a perspective for examining participants' circumstances, rather than as an assumption that adults of the same age share identical roles or responsibilities. Conceptually, established adulthood situates the life-course context in which relevant commitments may cluster, whereas biographical availability captures how such commitments shape the practical capacity to participate.

These circumstances are also relational. Stoker and Jennings (1995) show that the relationship between marriage and political participation depends partly on the partner's participation and on activities that draw on shared resources. Household relationships thus warrant consideration as part of the setting in which political commitments are accommodated.

Alongside these biographical and relational circumstances, digital media shape when and where activists can engage. Milan (2015) argues that social media extend collective experience into everyday and private life, while asynchronous interactions allow collective action to persist beyond physical co-presence. Research on digitally mediated activism in everyday life further shows how engagement becomes embedded in daily routines, requiring activists to negotiate connections, disconnections, and boundaries between activism and other domains of life (Caldeira et al., 2025; Ting, 2019). What remains less clear is how these enabling and demanding dimensions can emerge from the same everyday arrangements: whether the arrangements that make engagement possible within restricted schedules can also make activist demands harder to contain.

The analysis follows three connected dimensions: the biographical constraints shaping participants' availability; the platform-mediated and organizational arrangements that could sustain collective participation despite those constraints; and the consequences for the boundaries between activism and other domains of everyday life. Professional and digital competencies are treated as resources within this process, enabling differentiated contributions despite limited availability. Bringing a life-course perspective to everyday activist communication, the analysis considers platform-mediated flexibility and personal costs within the same accounts of participation under conditions of limited biographical availability in established adulthood. For mediated contentious politics, the question is not simply whether digital media facilitate participation, but how media infrastructures can make continued involvement practicable by shaping when, where, and how people contribute, and at what personal cost.

The article asks: How do activists in established adulthood accommodate platform-mediated engagement alongside work and family responsibilities, and how do they experience and negotiate its demands on everyday life? It addresses this question through No más AFP ("No More Pension Fund Administrators"; AFP stands for "Administradoras de Fondos de Pensiones"), a Chilean movement opposing the country's privately administered pension system that combines platform-mediated organizing with mass protest. The analysis focuses on participants associated with its indignado (indignant, outraged) activist culture, a citizen-oriented strand of the wider movement whose participants organized extensively through online social networks and interacted with the movement's longer-standing trade-union actors. This articulation became particularly visible in the mass mobilization of 24 July 2016, a key moment in the movement's transition to large-scale protest, when digitally coordinated citizen activism converged with longer-standing trade-union activism (Miranda, 2021, 2023b). Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 activists aged 30–45 and complementary Facebook-based digital ethnography, the study examines how platform-mediated practices intersected with participants' responsibilities, competencies, and everyday routines.

Collected in 2016–2017, the data situate the findings within the platform context of that period. Regulating digital connectivity across everyday life domains remains a challenge in recent research on digital disconnection and boundary blurring (Vanden Abeele et al., 2024). Revisiting this material can inform the analysis of how flexible involvement and boundary control interact in contemporary platform environments, without assuming continuity in the practices observed in this case.

The findings identify a paradox of platformed activism. Remote coordination and contributions organized around specific tasks enabled participants to remain involved despite restricted availability, while also allowing collective work to be distributed across people who could not be continuously or physically present. Yet incorporating activist work into everyday devices and routines also allowed its demands to extend into time devoted to employment, rest, and family relationships. Here, flexibility refers to when, where,

and through which tasks activists can contribute, while boundary control refers to their capacity to regulate when and how activist demands enter other domains of life. The article contributes by tracing how the same arrangements could support flexible involvement while also constraining participants' boundary control. This distinction directs attention to the everyday arrangements through which participation is made possible, and its costs are absorbed.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design and Case Context

This article presents a focused analysis of qualitative material collected as part of a broader study. Previous publications based on this study have examined the movement's activist cultures and their convergences (Miranda, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2025). Although the empirical material was originally collected during doctoral research, the analysis developed here results from a focused reanalysis conducted within the framework of an ongoing postdoctoral project. It addresses a distinct analytical question and refocuses the analysis on a subsample of activists.

The case examined is No más AFP, a Chilean social movement opposing the country's privately administered pension system. The movement originated in the trade-union sector in 2008, and the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores No más AFP (National Coordination of Workers for No más AFP) consolidated these efforts organizationally from 2013 (Miranda, 2023b; Rozas-Bugueño & Maillet, 2024).

The movement entered a phase of mass mobilization in 2016, when large national demonstrations coincided with the expansion of citizen-led organizing on Facebook and other social media platforms. The 24 July mobilization brought together longer-standing trade-union activism and digitally coordinated citizen activism (Miranda, 2023b). Other studies on the movement similarly document the contribution of digital media to supporting offline mobilization (Sola-Morales, 2020) and the circulation of calls to protest (Knipp et al., 2019). Comparative protest-survey evidence from the same period similarly characterizes Chilean protest participation as fragmented and weakly mediated by formal organizations, with online social networks playing an important informational role (Rossi et al., 2025). More broadly, a recent diachronic analysis situates these developments within a longer transformation of contentious repertoires in Chile, tracing the growing integration of digital technologies across the Mapuche movement, the student movement (2006–2011), and the 2019 social uprising (Olivares et al., 2026). This combination of mass street mobilization and platform-mediated coordination makes No más AFP a fruitful case for examining how digitally mediated participation operated alongside face-to-face activism.

The broader study conceptualized this citizen-oriented constellation as an indignado activist culture (Miranda, 2021, 2023b). It was characterized by more citizen-centered and flexible forms of involvement than the movement's longer-standing trade-union sector, with social media playing a central role in coordination, communication, and mobilization. Rather than constituting a separate movement, it interacted with unionists within the broader No más AFP mobilization. The research adopted a qualitative case-study design to examine activists' practices, interpretations, and experiences during the 2016–2017 cycle of platform-based organization and mass mobilization.

The larger study comprised 50 interview sessions with 55 participants and approximately five months of fieldwork, conducted in two periods: July–September 2016 and October–December 2017. The difference between the number of interview sessions and the number of participants reflects that some interviews involved more than one participant. It included activists from different organizational sectors and cities across Chile.

The present article restricts the analysis to participants associated with the movement's indignado activist culture and aged 30–45 at the time of fieldwork.

2.2. Analytical Sample and Recruitment

Of the 55 participants originally recruited, 25 were part of the indignado activist culture. Fifteen of these participants were aged 30–45 at the time of data collection, and all 15 were included in the present analysis. The sub-sample was defined by association with the indignado culture and age, with no other selection criteria based on activity, employment, family, or reported costs. The focus on ages 30–45 follows Mehta et al.'s (2020) conceptualization of established adulthood, a life phase often characterized by intersecting commitments to career development, intimate relationships, household responsibilities, and care. This focus provides a life-course context for examining how activists accommodate participation alongside these commitments, while allowing for differences in participants' employment, family, and care circumstances.

The selected participants included 11 men and 4 women. Of these, 8 lived in Santiago (the capital city), while 7 lived in other Chilean cities. At the time of fieldwork, 14 were employed or self-employed, and 1 was unemployed. Participants occupied heterogeneous professional, technical, administrative, service, and independent-work positions; the sample was not designed to represent a particular social-class category. Among the 15 participants from the indignado activist culture included in the present analysis, most entered No más AFP without an established trajectory of organized activism. Prior activist experience was not a selection criterion; it was considered alongside other biographical circumstances when interpreting participants' accounts. Because most participants lacked an established activist trajectory, the analysis does not identify systematic differences by prior activist experience. Their organizational involvement included "Movimiento Indignados", "Agrupación Indignados", and independent participation in the broader indignado network.

Participants in the original study were recruited through theoretically informed purposive sampling. Initial key informants were identified through Facebook groups associated with the movement, followed by snowball recruitment based on referrals from previously interviewed activists. The sample included both publicly visible organizers and less visible participants who performed relevant organizational and communicative work.

2.3. Interviews and Fieldwork

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in locations selected by participants, including homes, workplaces, cafés, and restaurants. The present analysis includes 15 participants interviewed across 14 sessions: 13 individual interviews and 1 group interview involving 3 participants. Two participants in the group interview met the age criterion and were included in the analysis. The third participant fell outside the 30–45 age range, so their contributions were not used as analytical or contextual material for this article. Both the 2016 and 2017 fieldwork periods are represented in this subsample. The 14 audio recordings averaged approximately 81 min (range: 19–127 min). Interviews explored participants' political trajectories, entry into No más AFP, organizational practices, platform use, relationships with other activists, and the effects of activism on everyday life. Participants were encouraged to share specific examples and narratives rather than general assessments of their involvement.

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Spanish. The excerpts quoted in the article were translated from Spanish into English for publication. The translations remained as close as possible to the original wording while preserving participants' intended meaning, tone, and contextual sense in English. All final English renderings were checked against the original Spanish transcripts, with clarifications added in square brackets where

necessary for comprehensibility. Field notes were used to document contextual information, preliminary interpretations, and non-verbal aspects of the encounters. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed before audio recording began of the study's purpose, the confidential handling of the information provided, and the anonymized use of interview material. Participants are identified throughout the article using article-specific pseudonymous codes (A01–A15). These codes do not correspond to interview order or to identifiers used in the broader study. Identifying combinations of personal information are omitted.

The fieldwork was conducted as part of doctoral research. We made our academic role and research interest explicit during recruitment and interviews. Close engagement with activists was balanced with critical analytical distance, supported by field notes and analytical memos.

2.4. Complementary Facebook-Based Digital Ethnography

The interviews were complemented by Facebook-based digital ethnography conducted across the same two fieldwork periods in 2016–2017 (Mare, 2017; Postill & Pink, 2012). This combination of platform-based observation and face-to-face encounters is consistent with a hybrid ethnographic approach in which online and offline settings are treated as interconnected components of the ethnographic field (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2013). The observation focused on Facebook groups whose names included variations in the term "Indignados."

The digital ethnography involved five overlapping routines: (1) joining these groups as a participant-observer with membership requests requiring administrators' acceptance in closed groups; (2) following the direction and intensity of discussions, particularly around mobilizations and relevant public events, and identifying participants who initiated or sustained these exchanges; (3) sending friend requests to activists from our personal profile to facilitate contact; (4) making our research role explicit in these private exchanges, explaining the purpose of the study, and inviting potential participants to take part in face-to-face interviews; private messages were also used, when necessary, to clarify information provided during these encounters; and (5) using the groups' search functions to locate discussions and activities related to events mentioned by interviewees. These routines supported participant recruitment and provided contextual knowledge of the movement's platform-based organization.

The Facebook material was not treated as a systematic corpus of posts. Due to the closed groups, the digital material was used selectively rather than subjected to systematic post-analysis. Specific conversations, debates, and shared materials were revisited as traces to contextualize and triangulate participants' accounts. Specifically, events and processes described in interviews were cross-checked against group discussions and activities, helping to verify dates, reconstruct events, and match interview accounts with digital records. No posts, messages, screenshots, usernames, profile images, or identifying details are quoted or reproduced in this article; the digital material provides context and evidence rather than a standalone corpus.

2.5. Analytical Procedure

In the original study, interview transcripts were organized and coded using MAXQDA 2018. That analysis drew on grounded theory techniques, including open and axial coding, constant comparison, analytical memo writing, and the iterative integration of categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These procedures were applied iteratively, with repeated movement between interview material, provisional concepts and categories, and emerging interpretations.

Open coding involved close reading of the transcripts and the assignment of initial codes to passages describing participants' experiences, practices, and meanings. Field notes and reflections developed during transcription informed this process, providing provisional points of attention that were reconsidered through subsequent readings. Codes were revised as their fit with the interview material was examined. Axial coding explored relationships among codes and brought them together into broader categories. The subsequent integration of categories further developed the connections among them, constructing an interpretation of the material. Throughout the process, analytical memos recorded questions, possible relationships, and revisions to the developing analysis.

For this article, interview material from 15 participants aged 30–45 was reread in full. Original codes, excerpts, categories, and analytical memos were reviewed to reassess their relevance to biographical availability, platform-mediated participation, and boundary management. Accounts were compared with attention to differences in age, occupation, work schedules, family circumstances, children's presence and ages, commuting, leisure time, location, and prior political experience. These comparisons informed interpretations of similarities, differences, and tensions. Constant comparison, an analytic technique drawn from grounded theory, was used to revisit this existing corpus. Comparing accounts and coded excerpts supported reconsidering relationships among categories, making this technique appropriate for examining how biographical circumstances, platform-mediated participation, and boundary management connected in participants' experiences. This focused reanalysis did not involve new theoretical sampling.

3. Results

3.1. Making Room for Activism in Everyday Life

Work schedules, commuting, and family responsibilities shaped when and how participants could become involved in the No más AFP movement. These commitments restricted opportunities to attend meetings and sustain face-to-face coordination. As A01 explained: "In Indignados, everyone works and has schedules to meet; almost all of us are fathers or mothers, so it's complicated; it's complicated to keep a movement like this going."

Limited time did not necessarily indicate limited interest in the movement. A02 explicitly distinguished his desire to participate from his capacity to attend its activities:

> "I can't participate more actively because of my job. It's not that I don't want to... if I want to participate in the group, I'll have to make room in the brief moments I have free, as I've done so far." (A02)

He therefore fitted participation into the intervals available to him. Rather than setting aside a stable period for activism, he sought opportunities to contribute around work.

The scarcity of time was also apparent during fieldwork. A03 described his time as "basically gold." His interview took place during a brief break after lunch at his workplace, while we walked outside the premises. The conditions of the encounter reflected the constraints he described: attending meetings was difficult, but he remained involved through online contributions. His experience illustrates how the ability to contribute digitally could extend participation beyond those who are physically present.

Another participant articulated this distinction in terms of availability itself: "I'm almost always more available [online] than physically. So, my role was mainly on social media" (A04). Here, being unable to attend in person did not mean being unavailable: he could remain reachable and contribute through platforms. Digital participation did not provide him with additional time, but it allowed involvement to continue without requiring physical co-presence.

Platform-based coordination also involved collective adjustments to working schedules. A05 described meetings conducted through WhatsApp: "Meetings were held between 22:00 and midnight, because that's when people got home from work. During the day, our phones buzzed nonstop. On the bus ride home, we checked messages, and once home, we held the meeting" (A05). Remote coordination allowed for both asynchronous exchanges and scheduled discussions. It reduced the need to gather in a single physical location while retaining a shared timetable for collective deliberation.

Activist engagement was therefore fitted into brief intervals, online contributions, and coordination after working hours. This made participation practicable without requiring participants to reorganize their entire daily lives around the movement. But these were not empty periods: evenings, journeys home, and breaks at work became additional settings for activist activity. The same arrangements that enabled involvement also created overlap between activism and other parts of everyday life.

3.2. Contributing Through Specialized Tasks

The accommodation of activism involved decisions about what participants could contribute and when they could participate. Professional and digital competencies accumulated through participants' education, occupational trajectories, and everyday platform use provided ways to undertake specific tasks, allowing involvement to be organized around differentiated contributions.

A03's work as a graphic designer illustrates this connection. Although he had difficulty attending meetings, he produced posters, logos, and other visual materials for circulation through social media. As he explained: "Since I'm a [graphic] designer, I know how to communicate through social media." His employment constrained his schedule, but his professional knowledge and access to digital tools also provided resources for participation.

A03 also described the circulation of one of the posters he produced for the 24 July mobilization. As he recalled, "Within one hour it had 100 shares; the next day, 10,000; after three days, around 100,000" (A03). The circulation and reach figures reported here and below are participants' recollections rather than independently verified platform analytics. The example suggests that limited physical availability did not necessarily imply a marginal contribution: a task performed individually around a restricted schedule could become part of the communicative work surrounding a mass mobilization.

Thinking about his role, he distinguished his contribution from the activities performed by other members: "I've kept my participation very low-profile... it has still been important because nobody else does the work I do. The others focus on spreading information, meetings, and so on, but nobody else was doing what I was doing" (A03).

In his account, limited visibility did not diminish the value of his contribution. Designing materials offered a way to participate without attending every meeting or assuming a public role. It also located his work within a division of activities: producing content, circulating it, and attending meetings were related contributions undertaken by different people.

A04, an engineer with a background in information technology, similarly drew on professionally developed skills. In his professional work, he had previously gained experience recovering hacked social media accounts, including while assisting a prior political campaign. This experience later became relevant to the movement, and he was invited to collaborate with indignado activists in part because of these capabilities. His contribution involved a form of digital troubleshooting: technical skills developed through his education and professional trajectory were redirected toward the practical needs of platform-based organizing.

Occupational experience could also become an activist resource beyond explicitly technical forms of work. Another participant, who had spent much of her career in sales,

identified specific skills that could contribute to the movement. Recalling disagreements over the tasks she should perform, she explained: "I've worked in sales all my life, so my skills are in public relations... I can't be handing out flyers if I have skills for bringing people together" (A06). Her account shows that differentiated participation could involve actively matching prior occupational competencies to movement needs, rather than simply performing whatever task was available.

A02 similarly described the group's formation through the combination of different capacities: "We brought several parts together, several of the parts needed to put something together, almost without meaning to" (A02). His own contribution drew on familiarity with social media acquired through everyday use. He helped supply a Facebook page with movement-related content, putting that familiarity to use in a communicative role. Across these cases, specialized participation drew on heterogeneous resources accumulated across participants' biographies: formal training, occupational experience, technical knowledge, and familiarity with digital platforms could all be redirected toward movement activity.

Importantly, these capacities did not necessarily derive from previous activist experience. Reflecting on the group's early organization, A06 recalled that "none of us had prior experience; it really was a citizens' movement." In this sense, limited activist experience did not imply a lack of resources for participation: participants could instead draw on competencies accumulated in professional and everyday life.

The recognition of such contributions mattered for accommodating limited availability. A02 explained that fellow activists understood the restrictions imposed by his work and valued what he was able to do: "They know that, in the role I'm contributing from, I'm doing quite well. The guys are very clear about that" (A02). For him, fulfilling a specific function provided a recognized basis for participation, even when attendance at other activities was restricted. Belonging to the collective effort did not require equal involvement in every part of its organization.

Digital competence was nevertheless uneven and platform-specific. As A02 distinguished: "Now I'm getting more into Twitter, because I've had a Twitter account for years but don't use it very well. I do use Facebook quite well" (A02). This distinction qualifies any characterization of participants as uniformly skilled digital activists. Familiarity with one platform did not automatically extend to another, and participation involved learning while drawing on existing knowledge.

Participants also experimented with ways to increase the visibility of movement content. As A07 indicated: "We've even put money into it so that a post gets seen more and circulates more widely." The account shows practical experimentation with paid visibility and the use of personal resources to expand circulation, as opposed to mere publication. A15 similarly pointed out the unequal material resources available to citizen activists compared with established organizations: "As trade-unions, they had material and financial resources, which were necessary for all the activities that were carried out [like] marches and others, whereas for us as private individuals it was much more difficult." Platform-mediated participation could therefore reduce some coordination requirements without eliminating the material resources needed to sustain collective action. Such practices were not necessarily based on pre-existing expertise; some were developed through use, adjustment, and collective experimentation on the go.

Another participant described this learning process directly: "We started publishing it, we started sharing it, so we learned it in the moment. It started like that; it was a snowball. It was a pretty strange thing" (A08). Participants also developed informal benchmarks for assessing the circulation of movement content. One activist explained: "A good reach is usually between 20,000 and 100,000 [people]. We maintained a reach of 1 million people, and we didn't understand what we had. The maximum reach was 3.5 million people"

(A08). Participants were therefore not simply users of social media; some developed practical, situated know-how for circulating activist content through repeated use, feedback, experimentation, and paid promotion.

Specialized participation connected individual capacities to collective organizational needs. Different forms of work could be distributed according to participants' capacities and constraints, allowing the movement to incorporate contributions without requiring continuous physical presence. This participation still involved learning, coordination, and the investment of personal resources. The flexibility lay in how participants could contribute, not in how little effort their contributions required.

3.3. When Participation Goes Beyond Available Time

The possibility of participating through everyday devices also made activist activity accessible beyond the intervals participants could readily devote to it. The accounts reveal tensions between fitting activism around existing responsibilities and remaining attentive to communications that continued throughout the day.

Persistent communication was not confined to scheduled meetings. Another participant recalled: "When I was involved in this, I was in three WhatsApp groups that were buzzing all day" (A10). The multiplication of parallel communication channels increased the number of moments when movement activity could capture participants' attention, even while they were engaged in work or other everyday routines.

Some participants attempted to manage this continual accessibility through the platforms themselves. One participant explained: "This phone rings all day. I've already muted all the groups" (A07). This did not reduce her involvement, but it represented an attempt to regain some control over when activist communication entered her attention. Similarly, A05's account of late-night WhatsApp meetings illustrates both sides of this arrangement. Scheduling discussions after work made collective coordination possible, but his description also included a phone that buzzed continuously throughout the working day. Elsewhere in the interview, he described the intensity of this involvement: "I've gone more than a month without sleep, I mean glued to the phone... because the phone was ringing all day, all day, so I was collecting phone numbers, linking things up, coordinating" (A05). He also described the resulting attachment to the devices and communications through which he participated: "You're constantly keeping an eye on this. It's incredible how you end up chained to it" (A05).

Demands on attention were also present in more specialized forms of contribution. A03, whose design work allowed him to participate despite limited time for meetings, identified another demanding aspect of involvement: "The discussions with people, responding to people who ask you things on Facebook [constantly]" (A03). This adds an interpersonal dimension to the time required for digital activism. Participation included producing material and engaging with responses and questions circulating on the platform. Undertaking a specific task did not necessarily delimit all the interactions associated with involvement.

The extension of activism into everyday settings was not, however, uniformly experienced as an unwanted intrusion. A11 described deliberately using informal leisure gatherings as opportunities for political outreach: "Whenever I go somewhere, to barbecues, for example, I try to bring up No más AFP, and many people have no idea... just as I didn't before, they don't know either, so I try to give them some information" (A11). His account shows that permeability between activism and other domains of everyday life could also be actively used and valued. The difficulty, therefore, was not boundary crossing per se, but the extent to which participants could regulate when and how activist demands entered other parts of their lives.

For A02, the extension of activism into everyday life was particularly apparent after returning home from work:

> "I get so little time with them [my family] that coming home and continuing with this is difficult. So yes, that makes things a bit complicated for me... At first, of course, you're on your phone all day, this and that. And it's still like that today, but those are the costs of getting involved in something like this, which is what I've tried to explain to her [my wife]. But yes, she also supports me, and I feel her full support." (A02)

Earlier, this participant had described making room for activism in brief periods of free time. Here, the same involvement competed with limited family time. His reference to explaining these costs to his wife, who nevertheless supported his involvement, shows that accommodation extended past individual scheduling to negotiation within shared domestic life.

Across these experiences, flexible participation and personal costs were connected through concrete practices. Reviewing messages, attending remote meetings, producing content, and responding to others made involvement possible despite constraints. Activism could consequently extend into journeys, evenings, rest, family interactions, and leisure settings. This permeability could operate in different ways: for A11, it enabled informal outreach in everyday situations, while for A02, A03, and A05, it also created circumstances in which activist demands became harder to contain.

4. Discussion

The platformed activism paradox captures a distinction between flexibility and boundary control. Its paradoxical character lies not simply in the coexistence of enabling and demanding effects, but in their connection: arrangements that made participation easier to accommodate could also make its demands harder to contain. The study adds a Latin American case to broader debates on platform-mediated activism by showing how these dynamics played out within a Chilean movement that combined digital organizing with mass street mobilization. Research in Chile has documented associations between social media use and protest participation (Scherman et al., 2015) and, more broadly, identified what such participation implies organizationally as an unresolved question (Saavedra, 2023). The present analysis extends this discussion by examining the everyday arrangements through which platform-mediated involvement becomes practicable under competing commitments. At the same time, the analysis uses this case to develop the platformed activism paradox rather than treating Latin America solely as a setting in which existing frameworks are applied, in line with calls for greater conceptual development in research on digital activism in the region (Treré & Harlow, 2023).

Biographical availability shapes not only whether participation is practicable but also the forms it can take. Building on McAdam (1986) and Wiltfang and McAdam (1991), the findings show how employment and family constraints interacted with platform-mediated and organizational arrangements that allowed participants to contribute remotely or through differentiated tasks. The reduced requirement for physical co-presence identified by Earl and Kimport (2011) did not create additional time; it made existing time usable in different ways. Flexibility therefore depended not only on platforms but also on organizational arrangements that made room for differentiated contributions without requiring equal attendance across activities. At both levels, these arrangements enabled individuals to remain involved while sustaining collective work among participants with uneven and restricted availability.

Established adulthood situates these negotiations within intersecting career and care commitments (Mehta et al., 2020). The incorporation of activist communication into everyday routines resonates with Milan's (2015) account of how digitally mediated collective experience extends into private life and with research on WhatsApp-based organizing (Treré, 2020). This overlap between activism and other commitments is also consistent with Gómez Cruz and Harindranath's (2020) characterization of WhatsApp as a "technology of life" embedded across domains such as work and family life.

Research on volunteering identifies context-dependent strategies for managing volunteer roles alongside work and home demands (Cruz & Meisenbach, 2018). Work–family research likewise shows how communication technologies can increase the porosity of temporal, spatial, and relational boundaries (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019). Participants in our study described a related overlap: using the same phones and routines for activism, work, and family life made involvement practicable but also kept activist communication present during time devoted to other commitments.

This does not imply a uniform experience among adults aged 30–45, nor prove that these arrangements are distinctive to that age group. Because most participants entered No más AFP without an established trajectory of organized activism, the results primarily concern accommodation near the beginning of an activist trajectory.

Professional and platform-specific competencies supported specialized contributions despite limited attendance. These findings complement Schradie's (2018) analysis of inequalities in digital resources and skills, showing how participants used these resources to get involved. This practical platform competence should be distinguished from algorithmic expertise. Participants acquired practical know-how through experimentation, feedback, monitoring reach, and paid promotion. However, the data do not yield a detailed understanding of the mechanisms controlling visibility; this differs from the more intentional algorithmic amplification described in other studies (Treré & Bonini, 2024).

Employment constrained time for activism, but occupational trajectories and personal resources could also support participation. Life-course research likewise shows that entering employment can provide financial and social capital and skills relevant to engagement, while parenthood can reduce time available for participation (Stanojević & Gvozdanović, 2022). Biographical availability should therefore be distinguished from accumulated resources, whose distribution cannot be assumed to be equal.

At the same time, participants had to negotiate the boundaries of this involvement. A05's and A02's accounts show that arrangements that accommodated activism alongside other commitments also sustained reachability during work, rest, and family time. A11, however, deliberately used leisure gatherings for outreach, indicating that boundary crossing was not uniformly unwelcome. This contrast highlights the difference between deliberately integrating activism into everyday activities and experiencing difficulties in containing its demands across other domains of life.

Similar tensions appear in Mercea et al.'s (2018) study of persistent activist communication in Occupy Gezi, which links digital engagement to biographical availability and documents costs involving work, rest, and personal relationships. Building on this work, the present analysis connects participants' accounts of when and how they could contribute under limited biographical availability with their experiences of regulating activist demands across work, rest, and family life, showing how the arrangements that enabled flexible involvement could also constrain boundary control.

The accommodation of activist work was also relational. In line with Pierri's (2022) emphasis on the labor that sustains digital campaigning, these accounts locate some of that work in commutes, evenings, and shared family time. For instance, A02's difficulty setting

activist communication aside at home coexisted with his wife's support, connecting the findings to research on partners' participation and shared resources (Stoker & Jennings, 1995).

Pressures around rest and family time link these findings to research on digital media use and well-being among youth climate activists (Supa et al., 2024). In our case, the accounts indicate strained boundaries around work, family life, and rest, without establishing evidence of burnout or subsequent withdrawal from activism.

Overall, these findings clarify the platformed activism paradox: platform-mediated flexibility did not simply reduce requirements for physical presence; it also redistributed when, where, and through whom activist work was carried out. These arrangements could sustain participation under restricted biographical availability while shifting some of the work required to sustain collective action into activists' everyday routines and relationships. Although our case is set in 2016–2017, it offers an analytical lens for examining the blurring of boundaries among activism, work, care, rest, and personal relationships in contemporary platform environments. Whether the same relationship operates across other movements and platforms today remains an empirical question.

5. Limitations and Future Research

This study offers a situated account of how platform-mediated participation was accommodated within everyday life, drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 activists aged 30–45 and complementary digital ethnography conducted in 2016–2017. Its contribution lies in interpreting the relationship between flexible engagement and personal costs, rather than in establishing their prevalence across the movement or whether the same patterns characterize contemporary platform environments. Nor does the study assess whether platform use increased protest turnout, movement effectiveness, or broader political effects; the analysis concerns how participants organized and experienced their involvement through these infrastructures. Platform affordances and patterns of social media use have evolved substantially since the fieldwork was conducted. The study therefore does not assume continuity in particular platform practices. Its contemporary relevance instead lies in the broader problem of maintaining temporal and relational boundaries under conditions of persistent connectivity (Vanden Abeele et al., 2024).

The transferability of the platformed activism paradox remains an empirical question. Comparative research across movements, regions, political contexts, platform ecologies, and age groups could test whether these tensions take different forms across contexts and whether they are particularly salient during established adulthood or characterize platform-mediated activism more broadly. Longitudinal research could examine whether difficulties in containing platform-mediated demands eventually lead participants to reduce, suspend, or discontinue their involvement (Eklöf et al., 2025), as well as when persistent platform-mediated availability becomes physically or emotionally unsustainable and how activists respond to such pressures (Chen & Gorski, 2015).

Subsequent research should examine inequalities in who can benefit from platform-mediated flexibility. Because the present sample was not designed to compare social-class positions, it cannot determine how uneven access to time, skills, organizational resources, and material infrastructures shaped participants' capacity to absorb its costs (Pierri, 2022; Schradie, 2018). Employment conditions, control over working time, household arrangements, and care responsibilities may therefore be central to who can practically use such flexibility. Gender is particularly relevant given the predominance of men in the sample. A02's account of spousal support raises the possibility that some of the adjustments enabling participation are absorbed within households (Lai, 2024), while movement-maintenance work may likewise be unevenly distributed along gendered and age-related lines (Gardner

et al., 2024). Future research incorporating partners' perspectives could examine how these costs and adjustments are distributed within households and movements.

Territorial and biographical differences also warrant attention. Although the sample includes participants from Santiago and other Chilean cities, it does not systematically compare local conditions; future research could examine how commuting, connectivity, and access to organizational spaces interact with employment and care responsibilities, since online coordination does not eliminate the importance of place and locally embedded relations (Nicholls, 2009).

Prior political trajectories may likewise matter for how activists manage platform-mediated demands, a possibility that future research could examine. An activist-career perspective situates participation within biographical trajectories (Fillieule, 2010), while research on activist human capital links experience and organizational context to skills that can promote sustained commitment (Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013). Since most participants in the current sample joined No más AFP without a history of organized activism, this study cannot establish whether the noted patterns differ from those of activists with longer organizational trajectories. Comparative work could therefore examine whether prior organizational socialization shapes expectations of responsiveness, task allocation, and legitimate limits on continual availability.

6. Conclusions

This article examined how activists in established adulthood accommodated participation in the Chilean No más AFP movement alongside employment and family responsibilities during 2016–2017. Remote coordination and task-specific contributions enabled participants to remain involved despite limited biographical availability, drawing on professional knowledge and everyday digital competencies. At the collective level, these arrangements distributed activist work across people with uneven availability and allowed specialized contributions to remain organizationally relevant despite limited physical presence.

The platformed activism paradox lies in a distinction between flexibility and boundary control: the same practices that made participation easier to accommodate could also make activist demands harder to contain within work, rest, and family life. This distinction is the study's central conceptual contribution.

Understanding platform-mediated participation therefore requires attention to where and by whom its everyday costs are absorbed. These costs are shaped through individual decisions about time and negotiations within shared relationships and routines. These everyday arrangements constitute one layer of mediated contentious politics: they help explain how platform infrastructures can support continued activist involvement under competing everyday commitments, while clarifying why such continued involvement should not be equated with political change itself.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Formal ethics committee approval was not obtained before data collection. The study was conducted in 2016–2017 as part of doctoral research in political and social sciences at the Université catholique de Louvain (UC Louvain, Belgium) and involved non-interventional qualitative social science research with adult participants in Chile. At the time of data collection, doctoral social science research of this type at the Université catholique de Louvain was not subject to mandatory prior ethics committee review; instead, compliance with ethical requirements was overseen by the doctoral supervisor and supervisory committee. Interview participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from interview participants before audio recording, and measures were taken to protect confidentiality and participant anonymity.

Informed Consent Statement: Verbal informed consent was obtained from all interview participants before audio recording. Verbal rather than written consent was integrated into the introductory procedure for this non-interventional qualitative fieldwork. Participants were informed about the academic purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidential handling of the information provided, and the anonymized use of interview material. Potential interview participants were informed of the researcher's identity and the purpose of the study when they were contacted individually for recruitment. No identifiable Facebook posts or private messages, screenshots, usernames, profile images, or other potentially identifying material from the Facebook groups are quoted or reproduced in this article.

Data Availability Statement: The interview transcripts and digital ethnographic materials are not publicly available due to confidentiality and the risk of participant re-identification. Anonymized excerpts supporting the analysis are included in the article. The corresponding author may provide methodological information about the dataset and analytical procedures upon reasonable request, but no identifiable or potentially re-identifying participant data will be shared.

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