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ARTICLE

#Resistencia: Indigenous Movements, Social Media, and Mobilization in Latin America

Pascal Lupien[1], Adriana Rincón[2], Andrés Lalama Vargas[3], Soledad Machaca[4] and Gabriel Chiriboga[5]

[1]Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, [2]University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, [3]University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, [4]Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, La Paz, Bolivia, and [5]Universidad Técnica del Norte, Ibarra, Ecuador

Corresponding author: Pascal Lupien; Email: plupien@brocku.ca

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Abstract

Indigenous peoples in Latin America have produced some of the region's strongest and most enduring social movements, drawing on a diverse repertoire of contention to pursue their goals. In the twenty-first century, social media have transformed the landscape of collective action, compelling Indigenous movements to navigate the evolving dynamics of digital platforms. There is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding the role of social media in mobilization. But we know relatively little about how social media fit into the tactical repertoires of Indigenous actors and what tasks these platforms are used for. This article addresses this gap through an examination of how Indigenous actors use social media during protest events. We conducted a comparative analysis of social media content produced by Indigenous social movement organizations during major protest events in three countries from 2018 to 2019. We find that the most common functions include activating supporters and exposing state violence. These functions support several of the organizations' core mobilization tasks by providing actors with tools to complement collection action.

Keywords: protest; social media; mobilization; Indigenous peoples; social movements; Latin America

Resumen

Los pueblos indígenas en América Latina han dado lugar a algunos de los movimientos sociales más fuertes y perdurables de la región, aprovechando un repertorio diverso de tácticas para alcanzar sus objetivos. En el siglo XXI, las redes sociales han transformado el panorama de la acción colectiva, obligando a los movimientos indígenas a navegar por las dinámicas en evolución de las plataformas digitales. Existe un debate en la literatura sobre el papel de las redes sociales en la movilización. Sin embargo, sabemos relativamente poco acerca de cómo encajan las redes sociales en los repertorios tácticos de los actores indígenas y para qué tareas se utilizan estas plataformas. Este artículo aborda esta brecha a través de un análisis de cómo los actores indígenas utilizan las redes sociales durante eventos de protesta. Realizamos un análisis comparativo del contenido de redes sociales producido por Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil Indígena durante importantes eventos de protesta en tres países entre 2018 y 2019. Encontramos que las funciones más comunes incluyen activar a los seguidores y exponer la violencia estatal. Estas funciones respaldan varias tareas fundamentales de movilización de las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil Indígena al proporcionar a los actores herramientas para complementar la acción colectiva.

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Palabras clave: Protesta; redes sociales; movilización; pueblos indígenas; movimientos sociales; América Latina

Indigenous peoples in Latin America have produced some of the region's strongest and most enduring social movements (Lucero 2008; Postero 2007; Yashar 2005; Van Cott 2005; Brysk 2000). In the twenty-first century, the transformative power of social media has reshaped the terrain of collective action. Scholars argue that the ubiquity, reach, and low cost of such tools should support the mobilization efforts of marginalized actors (Tufekci 2017; Carlson et al. 2017; Castells 2015). Indigenous social movement organizations (SMOs) are using social media for a variety of purposes, including self-representation, cultural promotion, and reclaiming voice (Pace 2018; Carlson and Dreher 2018; Raynauld, Richez, and Boudreau Morris 2018; Carlson et al. 2017; Ginsburg 2016, 2008). Yet there is less research into the use of social media by Indigenous SMOs for political action and mobilization (Lupien 2023; Raynauld, Richez, and Boudreau Morris 2018; Carlson and Frazer 2016). We know relatively little about how social media fit into the collective action strategies of Indigenous SMOs. There is also a lack of comparative work that examines and contrasts how Indigenous actors use social media across different jurisdictions (Lalancette and Raynauld 2020).

This study begins to fill these gaps in our knowledge. We ask the following: How do Indigenous SMOs use social media during protest events? How do those uses integrate into the core activities of SMOs? In what ways do social media transform how SMOs engage in collective action? We seek to answer these questions through a comparative analysis of social media content produced by Indigenous SMOs in three countries. From late 2018 to 2020, communities across Latin America erupted in protest. In Bolivia, Ecuador, and Chile, the uprisings were the most significant in a generation. For Indigenous SMOs, they also represent the first large-scale protests of the social media era. These events and their immediate aftermath therefore provide an excellent opportunity to consider these questions.

We find that social media were used for similar purposes across the three jurisdictions and that the most common functions include activating supporters and exposing state violence. Other uses include information dissemination, identity promotion, criticism of opponents and deflection of criticism, and issuing threats. These uses of social media facilitate various organizing and mobilization tasks by providing SMOs with inexpensive tools to reach domestic and international audiences on their own terms. Notable variations exist between larger and smaller organizations and across countries; some SMOs have greater access to infrastructure and expertise to utilize these platforms effectively.

The results enhance our understanding of how social media are used for political organizing and how the tools fit into traditional repertoires of contention. They go beyond conventional assumptions that primarily associate social media with activating supporters or promoting group identity. The research reveals a much broader spectrum of activities that social movements engage in, mirroring the diverse repertoires of contention that SMOs employ. Furthermore, the study enriches our understanding of the advantages and limitations associated with social media use and offers insights into effective framing techniques, such as using social media to link demands to those of other social groups. Additionally, the findings underscore the need for more nuanced debates on the impact of social media in mobilizing marginalized actors. They demonstrate that while social media can complement traditional social movement strategies, they do not necessarily replace them, highlighting the evolving and complex dynamics of contemporary political activism.

The findings also invite us to bridge the gap between connective and collective action theories. While the frameworks are often applied independently, our research suggests the need for greater convergence between theories that examine "traditional" social

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movements and networked movements. Theory on the use of social media in protest, such as the connective action and networked movement frameworks (Castells 2015; Bennett and Segerberg 2013), was developed without considering Indigenous SMOs, which continue to rely on centralized coordination, established leadership, and face-to-face community organizing while using social media to enhance, but not necessary replace, the conventional repertoires of contention. Theory tends to present a dichotomy between "new" and "old" movements (Bennett 2014)—and Indigenous SMOs generally fall into the latter category—but our findings highlight the need for a more integrated theoretical approach at the intersection of these two paradigms.

Social movements: Activities and tasks

Mobilization refers to the process through which a group transitions from a state of passivity to becoming actively engaged participants in public life (Tilly 1987). Social movement mobilization encompasses a broad spectrum of collective tasks aimed at bringing about social, political, or cultural change (Della Porta 2013; Tarrow 2011; Tilly 2008). These may include institutional forms of political participation such as advocacy and lobbying or disruptive action, whether peaceful marches or civil disobedience (Della Porta and Diani 2020; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). These "repertoires of contention" are not fixed but evolve over time as movements innovate, adapt, and respond to changing circumstances (Tarrow 2011).

Indigenous leaders in Latin America have identified a number of core mobilization activities that their SMOs engage in: political participation, resource mobilization, communication and public relations, identity promotion, and disruptive action (Lupien 2023). The latter is the form of collective action with which Indigenous movements are most closely associated; by the end of the twentieth century, disruptive action had become a defining characteristic of Indigenous identity. The literature produced on the 1990–2005 protest cycle in the Andes demonstrates that Indigenous movements achieved significant outcomes through land occupations, marches, and other forms of civil disobedience (Paige 2020; Yashar 2005). But Indigenous SMOs combine diverse forms of action, engaging in formal institutions while contesting the same structures from the outside (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Tapia 2007).

Political participation can include advocacy and lobbying activities to influence policy decisions and shape public opinion, legal strategies to challenge existing laws or seek legal remedies for perceived injustices, and engagement in electoral politics. Indigenous movements in the region have extensively participated in all those activities, achieving significant victories in terms of recognition, constitutional reform, and in some countries, the electing of prominent Indigenous leaders to office (Fontana 2023; Van Cott 2005). Resource mobilization is the process by which social movements acquire and deploy resources to support their organizational infrastructure, activities, and collective action. Resources can include material (funding, equipment, and physical spaces), human (activists, volunteers, and organizers), social (networks, alliances, and support from sympathetic actors), and moral (shared values and ethical appeals) (Edwards, McCarthy, and Mataic 2019).

For Indigenous SMOs, communication and public relations are ultimately about contesting hegemonic narratives and asserting agency (Turner 1995, 2002; Ginsburg 2016, 2008). Organizations strive to maintain ongoing, bidirectional channels of communication by holding regular meetings with communities and individual members to discuss problems and solutions (Picq 2018; Van Cott 2005). But they must also develop broader public relations campaigns that engage with domestic and international audiences. These efforts involve garnering support for policy preferences or protest, making emotional

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appeals, and exposing violence committed by state or other powerful actors (Richez, Raynauld, and Kartolo 2020; Raynauld, Richez, and Boudreau Morris 2018; Brysk 2000).

Finally, SMOs must promote a sense of collective identity among their constituents. Collective identity plays a crucial role in fostering solidarity and cohesion among individuals who share common goals, beliefs, and values in a social movement (Hunt and Benford 2004; Melucci 1989). Indigenous SMOs' leaders understand that identity is key to activating otherwise disparate Indigenous groups under a single movement; the ability to do so successfully contributed to the emergence of Indigenous SMOs in Ecuador and Bolivia as the region's most powerful social movements in this period (Rice 2012; Yashar 2005; Lucero 2008).

All collective action tasks require SMOs and leaders to engage in strategic framing, which involves the selection, emphasis, and presentation of specific aspects of an issue, as well as the utilization of language, symbols, and metaphors to convey a particular perspective (Entman 1993; Snow and Benford 1988). Framing plays a vital role in social movements, as it helps define the meaning and significance of social issues, influence how individuals interpret events, and mobilize support for specific causes or actions (Oliver and Johnston 2000). By framing an issue in a particular way, activists can shape public understanding and generate support for their goals and opposition to those of their opponents (Benford and Snow 2000).

Collective action in the social media age

According to some scholars, collective action in the twenty-first century has evolved into what Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have termed *connective action*. Unlike traditional forms of collective action, which rely on hierarchical structures and recognized leaders, connective action and "networked" movements are characterized by their decentralized nature and dependence on digital technologies. Bennett (2014) labels collective action that relies on centralized coordination and community organizing as "old-fashioned," while Castells (2015) and Tufekci (2017) distinguish between "new" (networked) movements and "old" organization-based collective action.

But what is the role of technologies such as social media in the repertoires of contention that Indigenous SMOs have used in decades past? How do such tools fit into the various activities they perform, and what does that mean for the future of Indigenous collective action? Authors have argued that digital technologies support the mobilization efforts of resource-poor actors (Tufekci 2017; Castells 2015; Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Hussein and Howard 2013; Loader and Mercea 2011). According to this perspective, social media have become a powerful tool for enabling the types of actions SMOs engage in, including political participation, communication, identity promotion, and galvanizing supporters (Bloom and Frampton 2020; Hon 2016; Hamdy and Gomaa 2012). Social media also play a central role in resource mobilization, as they facilitate and accelerate the accumulation and dissemination of human, material, social, cultural, and moral resources (Calderaro and Kavada 2013; Garrett 2006). They provide a platform for bottom-up political expression and allow those who do not control traditional media or the state the ability to develop and disseminate their own frames to a broad demographic (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska 2017; Van der Meer and Verhoeven 2014; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). For Castells (2015), the ability to reach a wide audience at a low cost creates sites of counterpower where actors can challenge hierarchies and freely engage in the collective action tasks they need to accomplish. These technologies create a space for collaborative efforts that were previously impeded by financial constraints, time limitations, or geographical obstacles (Medrado, Cabral, and Souza 2020; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Della Porta and Mosca 2005).

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But others are less optimistic. Von Bülow (2018) highlights how social media can create a digital illusion of activism, where individuals feel that simply engaging with social media is enough to create change without taking more tangible action. This can lead to a lack of long-term political strategy and organization, which can ultimately undermine the effectiveness of social movements. Tufekci (2017) acknowledges that social media enable movements to experience rapid growth, but they often fail to establish the necessary formal and informal organizing systems and collective capabilities to adequately equip them for the inevitable challenges they face. Access issues remain a problem for Indigenous communities in Latin America at the dawn of the third decade of the twenty-first century (Millaleo Hernández 2020; Lupien 2020). Black and Indigenous protesters are more likely to be counterattacked by traditional media and other powerful actors in the online world, who frame them as a threat to society (Banks 2018; Wilkes, Corrigall-Brown, and Ricard 2010; Richards 2010). This produces additional challenges in using social media to support collective action tasks.

Indigenous SMOs, collective action, and social media

At the height of the Indigenous protest cycle in Latin America in the 1990s and early 2000s, movements in countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia achieved notable victories, drawing on the traditional strengths of Indigenous civil society: strong organizations, community decision-making, experienced leaders, in-person relationships, and collective identity (Brysk 2000; Lucero 2008; Postero 2007; Rice 2012; Yashar 2005). In the twenty-first century, Indigenous peoples have actively appropriated technologies for new forms of cultural resistance and revitalization in support of self-representation (Pace 2018; Carlson and Dreher 2018; Raynauld, Richez, and Boudreau Morris 2018; Ginsburg 2016); communicating independently of the mainstream media to challenge dominant stereotypes (Berglund 2017; Duarte 2017; Carlson, Wilson, and Sciascia 2017; Basanta 2013; Soriano 2012); interacting with other Indigenous groups (Virtanen 2015); creating new forms of cultural expression (Landzelius 2006); and producing news and information (Carlson, Wilson and Sciascia 2017). Yet the use of social media by Indigenous SMOs for political action remains understudied (Raynauld, Richez, and Boudreau Morris 2018; Carlson and Frazer 2016; Grundberg and Lindgren 2014). And with few exceptions, the research that does exist involves single case studies that focus on specific movements or political action in a single jurisdiction (Lalancette and Raynauld 2020). Furthermore, most of the studies of networked movements describe activists as young, urban, educated, and technologically savvy individuals (Tufekci 2017; Castells 2015; Hussein and Howard 2013). This rather narrow demographic does not fit the profile of many Indigenous SMOs. It also raises important questions about where digital technologies fit in the repertoire of collective action tasks that they relied on in the past. If social media have begun to take the place of "on the ground" organizing, if personalized action is replacing collective identity and common goals (the strengths of the Indigenous movements in the 1980s and 1990s), and if their access to technology is limited, what does that mean for the ability of Indigenous communities to engage in collective action tasks?

Methods

We chose Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile for this study because recent large-scale protests led by Indigenous actors provide three important cases for analysis. While Indigenous SMOs have a long history of resistance in these countries, the 2018–2020 events were the most significant in a generation. In Latin America, they constitute the largest Indigenous

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Table 1. Country comparisons

	Bolivia	Ecuador	Chile
Human Development Index	.718	.759	.851
Percentage of population with internet[a]	39%	57%	82%

[a]Statistics, Country ICT Data (until 2018), https://www.itu.int/.

protests on this scale of the social media age. As depicted in Table 1, the three countries also provide variation with respect to human development and Internet access.

Cases (protest events)

Case selection was driven by several considerations. All protest events involved Indigenous SMOs, either as organizers or as key actors. We focused on the most recent protest events in each country during the two years that preceded data collection (2018–2019). Our decision to narrow our case selection to a specific two-year period was driven by a desire to capture a snapshot of technology use at a particular point in time; advancements occur at a pace that could significantly affect the dynamics of comparative research over a longer period. Crucially, our selection was predicated on the national impact of those events. In terms of numbers of participants, media coverage, response from the state, and outcomes, these were the most significant protests in a decade in the respective countries.

Our Bolivian event revolves around the removal of President Evo Morales and other senior MAS officials on November 10, 2019. Elected in 2005, Bolivia's first Indigenous president stepped down under pressure from the country's top military officer following a contested election. Conservative opposition senator Jeanine Áñez declared herself president on November 15, and tens of thousands of Indigenous citizens took to the streets of Bolivian cities, blocking roads throughout the country and occupying public spaces. Protesters were violently repressed for several months but eventually forced Áñez to hold fresh elections in which the MAS returned to power.

In Ecuador, we examined the nationwide uprisings that took place in October 2019. Led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and other Indigenous SMOs, Ecuadorians occupied the streets of major cities, blocked roads, and engaged in skirmishes with police in response to an economic austerity package introduced by the government of President Lenín Moreno (2017–2021). Moreno stood his ground at first, stating that his government would not back down, but the uprisings became so widespread and disruptive that the government fled the capital and later withdrew the unpopular measures following negotiations with Indigenous leaders.

For Chile, we studied the reaction to the murder of an unarmed Mapuche activist named Camilo Catrillanca by agents of a tactical reaction unit of the Carabineros (Chilean National Police). Mass demonstrations broke out in the Araucanía and elsewhere in the country in November 2018 as Mapuche communities and their allies demanded justice. The government of President Sebastián Piñera (2018–2022) was forced to apologize, acknowledge the extrajudicial killing, and punish officers and officials involved in Catrillanca's death.

Data and analysis

Our data include social media publications collected during the three protest events. We analyzed 469 discreet publications (tweets and Facebook posts; Table 2 provides a breakdown). The data were collected from ninety Indigenous SMOs that had social media

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Table 2. Cases and data

Cases (data collection dates)	SMOs studied	Publications analyzed	Facebook	Twitter
Bolivia				
Election aftermath (10/20/2019–11/20/2019)	32	65	53	12
Ecuador				
October uprising (10/01/2019–11/01/2019)	36	230	201	29
Chile				
Catrillanca protests (11/14/2018–12/31/2018)	22	174	159	15
Totals	90	469	413	56

accounts at the time of this research (Annex 1). We focused on Twitter and Facebook content, as these are the platforms Indigenous SMOs in South America use most frequently (Lupien 2020).

The online data collection and analysis involved a three-step process. First, we developed a representative sample of Indigenous SMOs in each country by selecting cases according to a diverse case method, which involves the purposive selection of cases to represent a range of important variables (Seawright and Gerring 2008). We were supported in this task by an advisory council of Indigenous knowledge holders (six to eight in each country) who participated in the larger project as part of our community-based participatory research approach. Drawing on their knowledge of the social movement landscape in their respective regions, they helped us to establish a representative sample representing variation on key dimensions: size (large-national, medium-regional, small-local), geography (main regions of each country), primary function (political, service provision, cultural, cooperative), cultural differences, urban versus rural, relationship with the state, and local infrastructure. They also confirmed our choice to focus on Facebook and Twitter.

Second, we collected the data by using Netlytic software. Netlytic is a cloud-based social network analysis tool developed by Toronto Metropolitan University's Social Media Lab. It allows us to automatically collect and analyze large amounts of online content.[1] We set up the data collection using the dates indicated in Table 2 and key search terms (in Spanish) such as *Indigenous* and *protest*, as well as country-specific search terms such as *Catrillanca* in the case of Chile (see Annex 2). We collected and analyzed the textual content of Twitter and Facebook posts (conversations), images, videos, and hashtags. The numbers presented in Table 2 reflect all of the posts retrieved, minus duplicates. In other words, we analyzed all the publications retrieved through the searches detailed in Annex 2 and removed only duplicates.

Third, following Raynauld, Richez, and Boudreau Morris (2018), Raynauld, Lalancette, and Tourigny-Koné (2016), and Theocharis and colleagues (2015), we conducted a comparative qualitative analysis of the content retrieved to determine how Indigenous SMOs used social media during the protests. Three of the authors separately scanned the content of each post to identify its primary purpose and created initial (inductive) thematic categories for the data. We then reviewed the analysis to reduce the amount of redundancy by merging the thematic categories and disputing different interpretations of the primary purpose of the social media publications. Through this process, we developed an inductive coding scheme establishing a set of distinct categories regarding how Indigenous actors used social media during the protests. We coded posts on the basis of our assessment of their primary purpose. We created a detailed codebook that allowed for

[1] At the time of writing Netlytic was no longer able to capture Facebook posts but can still be used with Twitter, YouTube and other sites. See https://netlytic.org.

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comparisons across the three cases (events) and the countries. Two different authors reviewed the codebook and analysis to ensure reliability of the coding. Data presented in the article are translated into English from Spanish by the authors.

Finally, we considered how the categories fit into the types of actions that Indigenous SMOs have typically engaged in: political participation and influencing policy, resource mobilization, communication and public relations, identity promotion, and disruptive action. We elaborate on these reflections later in this article.

The analysis of these data is primarily qualitative (content analysis) but includes a quantitative component in that we report on and compare the frequency of the uses identified. The qualitative content analysis was intended to gain insight into the use of social media as a framing tool by Indigenous SMOs, and the quantitative component enabled us to examine the frequency of various framing techniques employed on social media platforms, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns of usage.

Uses of social media in the 2018–2019 protests in Latin America

We identified seven broad categories of social media use, most of which fit into one or more of the SMO activities discussed earlier. Some of those uses align with the categories that emerged from previous studies (mobilization of supporters, information, criticism; Raynauld, Lalancette, and Tourigny-Koné 2016; Theocharis et al. 2015), but others do not and emerged from our data set and inductive process. "Activating supporters" includes posts that seek to rally, assemble, or organize people (e.g., calling on them to participate in a march or roadblock) or obtain supporters' resources. "Exposing violence" involves making visible and condemning acts of repression committed by state security forces against protesters. Taken together, these two categories make up over 60 percent of the social media posts we analyzed. "Informational" posts shared information about current events, policies, or the actions of particular actors. Posts were also coded as "Informational" when actors declared their intention to work through institutional channels rather than protest or when they announced legal action. "Identity" publications seek to promote collective identity, from the ethnic (Indigenous) to broader appeals intended to construct a cross-sectoral solidarity. "Criticism" involves critiques of policy, positions, and politicians, as well as behavior or statements of individuals or groups. "Responding to criticism" includes posts that contest or deny any of the latter. "Threats" includes messages that warn opponents of consequences. For SMOs, threats are often framed around further disruptive action or promising consequences for state actors who commit human rights violations. Of course, there is overlap between the categories; many of the posts intended to activate supporters also expressed criticism of the government, and so forth. Posts that served more than one function were coded according to the authors' qualitative assessment of their primary purpose.

There is variation with respect to the number of posts and frequency for each type of use category (Table 3). Larger organizations, such as Ecuador's CONAIE and the Mapuche collective Mapuexpress, were far more likely to produce regular content and a coordinated communications campaign. We also noted differences between the three countries; mobilization was the most common use in Ecuador and Chile, whereas Bolivian activists were less likely to use social media for this purpose. The two platforms we collected data from, Facebook and Twitter, were also used for different tasks. We explore this variation in the discussion section. Most of the posts cited in this article were chosen as "typical" examples of content produced by SMOs because they were repeated across multiple organizations. Citations are provided when the original post can be attributed to a particular organization.

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Table 3. Uses of social media, % and examples

Posts ($n = 469$)	Bolivia ($n = 65$)	Ecuador ($n = 230$)	Chile ($n = 174$)	Examples
Activating supporters 31% ($n = 145$)	12% ($n = 8$)	35% ($n = 81$)	33% ($n = 56$)	"Call for a Great Mobilization, October 8, 2019. Long live the struggle, long live our organization"[a] "Call for protests to protest the murder of Camilo Catrillanca, Nov. 15, 2018" (followed by a list of times and locations).[b]
Exposing violence 30% ($n = 141$)	45% ($n = 29$)	27% ($n = 62$)	29% ($n = 50$)	"We denounce wave of racist, violent attacks by state"[c] "Urgent: strong repression of peaceful protesters, including children and women" (accompanied by images)
Informational 14% ($n = 66$)	18% ($n = 14$)	10% ($n = 29$)	10% ($n = 23$)	"A (prisoner) exchange was made between Indigenous comrades detained by @PoliciaEcuador and infiltrators detained by the #Mobilización"[d] "@ IACHR we send a report of cases documented by the CONAIE team on the violation of #HumanRights of hundreds of cases among the injured, deceased, detained, criminalized."[e]
Identity 10% ($n = 49$)	11% ($n = 7$)	7% ($n = 23$)	11% ($n = 19$)	"We represent the Indigenous peoples of the country, their culture and institutions, especially against the exclusion and discrimination of politicians and the state" "The #DaysOfResistance reveal a common identity and solidarity between First Peoples and humble working people, all suppressed by the #TerroristState"
Criticism 8% ($n = 38$)	8% ($n = 5$)	8% ($n = 19$)	8% ($n = 14$)	"The Government has not fulfilled the mandate of the people, it benefits a few and not the majority" (Decree 833)
Threats 4% ($n = 19$)	3% ($n = 2$)	7% ($n = 10$)	4% ($n = 7$)	"Let the oligarchy tremble … we are going to radicalize the resistance"[f] "The state and its agents will be held accountable for their crimes"
Responding to criticism 2% ($n = 11$)	0	3% ($n = 6$)	2% ($n = 5$)	"We are not 'angry' (*indignados*) or 'mobs,' we are an organized political organization with a cultural and social agenda" "We are students, not terrorists"

[a]Movimiento Indígena y Campesino de Cotopaxi. "La historia nos ha enseñado que la lucha es el camino para la transformación de la sociedad," Facebook, October 7, 2019.
[b]Mapuzuguletuaiñ, "Concentraciones por el asesinato de Camilo Catrillanca," Facebook, November 15, 2018.
[c]Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia Bartolina Sisa, Facebook, November 7, 2019.
[d]CONAIE, "Se realiza canje," Facebook, October 27, 2019.
[e]CONAIE, "Entrega a la @CIDH el informe de casos documentados por el equipo Conaie," Twitter, October 29, 2019.
[f]ECUARUNARI, "Que tiemble la oligarquía," Twitter, October 9, 2019.

Activating supporters to participate in protest

In Ecuador and Chile, social media were most often used to rally supporters by encouraging people to participate in specific protest events and by requesting assistance and resources from allies. Facebook was used to coordinate protests across large distances and dispersed populations. For example, we were able to trace a series of messages used to plan a march from Imbabura (in northern Ecuador) to Quito. Posts include information about the date, place, and time of protest events, marches, or roadblocks, often supplemented with hashtags such as #DaysOfResistance and #WeAreMillions.

Many posts sought to remind people of why they were protesting, and content is therefore country specific. Mapuche organizations focused on Camilo Catrillanca, often including pictures of the young man and asking people to take to the streets in his name. Some took to Facebook: “Call to action in Temuco today, Nov. 22. Take to the streets, occupy public spaces to support #JusticeForCatrillanca.” This post was accompanied by a link to a YouTube video in which leaders further explained their plans and provided more details on the protest. SMOs in Ecuador stressed government economic policies harming the poor, while their Bolivian counterparts emphasized what they believed to be an illegal coup that ignored the votes of Indigenous peoples. For the most part, SMOs called for peaceful but firm acts of resistance. We did not uncover specific calls for violence, although many posts warned potential participants of state repression, often encouraging people to find their strength in numbers. A smaller number of posts sought to mobilize different types of resources, such as food, water, masks (to protect against tear gas), and first aid kits to treat those injured by state forces.

Facebook was frequently used to disseminate videos or pictures of protest events in progress, such as when CONAIE shared videos of its occupation of public spaces in Quito’s colonial center. This was intended to show the presence of families, non-Indigenous allies, and others and to convey a festive atmosphere in order to demonstrate the diversity of participants and encourage others to join (accompanying text called on all Ecuadorians to come to the spaces to join the others.

Exposing violence

In all three countries, Indigenous activists used Facebook to frame state actors as violent and its agents as perpetrators of human rights abuses. They did so through messages recounting specific acts of violence against civilians, telling the stories of victims (often with graphic depictions of their injuries), and disseminating images of injured protesters.

Exposing violence was by far the most common use of social media in Bolivia. Organizations disseminated graphic images and accounts of state violence on Facebook. Images of Interim President Áñez and her interior minister Arturo Murillo were often juxtaposed to pictures of injured Indigenous protesters, often with captions attributing blame to them. In particular, Facebook was used to make domestic and international audiences aware of the events of November 19, 2020, in Senkata, a district in the Aymara city of El Alto above La Paz. Security forces killed eight citizens who were protesting to demand the restoration of Morales, and many more were injured in what activists now call the Senkata massacre. Bolivian media did not report on the repression, but the world became aware of the violence through social media. La Resistencia Bolivia, a Facebook page, received videos and photos from witnesses and posted them along with captions and firsthand accounts. The images were accompanied by messages such as “Genocide in El Alto, may the world see and react to what the repressive coup regime is doing to the humble people of Bolivia.” This content continued to be disseminated throughout 2020, and many of the images have been used as evidence against Áñez and other authorities responsible following the return of the MAS to power.

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By the second week of October 2019, the social media accounts of Indigenous SMOs in Ecuador, which tend to have hundreds of thousands of followers, were constantly sending out messages to the world. These included images of bloody and battered individuals accompanied by text denouncing President Moreno and Minister of Government María Paula Romo as the perpetrators of the violence and calling for them to face legal consequences: "Violent repression in plain daylight of the poor fighting the brutal regime of @Lenin and @mariapaularomo, they are repressing Instead of listening to the valid demands of the Indigenous movement." Participants also countered government claims that protesters initiated the violence by posting videos showing that state forces attacked demonstrators without provocation. In some cases, videos included interviews with the victims and with witnesses.

Following the death of twenty-four-year-old Camilo Catrillanca, officers involved insisted that they shot the Mapuche activist because he was brandishing a weapon. In the not-so-distant past, the Carabineros' version of events would have been accepted by the relevant authorities and the case closed. But the Carabineros neglected to consider the widespread use of social media in 2018. Two videos of the incident emerged showing that Catrillanca was unarmed and was fleeing from police when he was shot in the back of the neck. The videos spread rapidly via Mapuche social media accounts and soon went viral in Chile and beyond. Beyond copies of the viral videos themselves, posts were accompanied by details of the killing, calls for justice, pictures of the crime, Catrillanca's funeral, protests, and police repression. Mapuche actors continued to use social media to expose violence during the protests that erupted throughout the country in subsequent weeks. SMOs and individual activists extensively used social media to record and disseminate heavy-handed police responses to the mostly peaceful protests. Videos of peaceful protesters hit in the face by rubber bullets and sustaining serious eye injuries went viral, and the government was condemned by international nongovernmental organizations.

Other uses

Twitter and Facebook were used to disseminate informational posts providing details and news about current events, political developments, or announcements about measures such as legal action. For example, Ecuadorian SMOs shared tweets about the identity of police agents who had infiltrated the protests. These included pictures of a plainclothes officer, warning: "This man is Sgt. Edwin L who has been identified as a member of the military intelligence after infiltrating peaceful protesters. Be on the lookout for others!" Mapuche SMOs advised their members about developments related to the case, such as National Assembly member Emilia Nuyado's meeting with Catrillanca's family. Informational posts served to counter the messages of state agencies and traditional media outlets. Most often, they convey SMO positions on relevant policy issues that would otherwise not be made available. For example, CONAIE posted, "The Indigenous Movement says NO to the International Monetary Fund." This was accompanied by links to an "open letter" detailing their stance on the government's relationship with the International Monetary Fund and suggesting that mainstream media ignores the perspectives of Indigenous citizens. Informational posts also announced legal action, such as when the Bartolinas in Bolivia insisted that they would use all their mechanisms available in Bolivia's constitution and justice system to defend their rights, or when SMOs in Ecuador revealed that they were compiling evidence about "hundreds of cases among the injured, deceased, detained, criminalized" that would be the subject of a formal complaint to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

But we also uncovered examples of sophisticated, coordinated information dissemination campaigns. For example, the negotiations that took place between Indigenous leaders and Ecuadorian government ministers over the weekend of October 12–13, 2019, were

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open to anyone who wanted to watch. While the government hoped to conduct the negotiations behind closed doors, Indigenous leaders from CONAIE and other organizations insisted that they be live streamed on Facebook. Ecuadorians followed the proceedings closely, as Indigenous leaders had anticipated, and some segments went viral. One of the most frequent observations made was the extent to which the Indigenous participants, most of whom had little formal education, outmaneuvered Moreno's negotiating team of ministers with their degrees from foreign universities.

Social media have become a key tool for promoting collective identity during protest events. The most common posts in this category include statements affirming the rights of Indigenous nationalities, often accompanied by pictures showing people in traditional dress or depicting the practice of cherished customs. Themes include *sumak kawsay*, self-determination, references to domestic or international law on Indigenous recognition, and allusions to First Peoples as holders of particular rights.[2] The posts were intended to instill pride in a context where state and private media were depicting Indigenous protesters as dangerous mobs.

But we also identified a number of posts that sought to create a broader sense of identity uniting Indigenous and non-Indigenous working people in opposition to oppressive elite-backed states. Indigenous SMOs in Ecuador present their goals, demands, and political action as beneficial to all Ecuadorians, such as when CONAIE tweeted: "The expanded council of @CONAIE_Ecuador includes broad participation from all sectors, it is a place where we will evaluate the national and popular strike based on our common grievances and histories of oppression." Some posts do not mention indigeneity at all, aligning frames instead with issues that are important to non-Indigenous sectors: rejection of neoliberal policies, austerity, and cuts to social programs. SMOs are careful to find a balance between emphasizing the rights that their indigeneity confers and maintaining the support of a broader set of actors. A similar strategy was used by Mapuche organizations. While many posts focus on Catrillanca's indigeneity and a shared history of oppression, others seek to unify nonelite Chileans in a battle against an oppressive state. In this way, they seek to create a shared identity among Mapuche and nonelite Chileans, both ignored by successive governments. For example, there were numerous messages calling for "solidarity between Original Peoples and the Chilean people against a common enemy."

"Criticism" posts, often disseminated over Twitter to speak directly to the government, were used to condemn policy or particular politicians (other than exposing violence). For example, Ecuadorian SMOs tweeted, "The Government has not fulfilled the mandate of the people, it benefits a few and not the majority." Bolivian SMOs denounced the interim government as "racist, run by coup plotters with no respect for the vote of the people." A relatively small number of posts involved responding to criticism by state officials or media outlets. For the most part, these involved denying accusations against SMOs and their leaders or rejecting the framing of protesters as violent, disorganized, and irrational. Finally, some organizations used their Twitter accounts to issue direct threats to certain sets of actors or specific individuals. ECUARUNARI, which represents people in Ecuador's highlands, posted: "Let the oligarchy tremble, the Indigenous Movement won't play their game anymore. Down with the *paquetazo* [a package of policies that lead to increased prices for goods], we are going to radicalize the resistance."[3] In Chile and Bolivia, SMOs threatened key politicians, including their then presidents and interior ministers, with "justice."

[2] *Sumak kawsay* is a Kichwa concept that translates as "good living" and represents an alternative approach to development and well-being, emphasizing harmony and balance with nature and community.

[3] ECUARUNARI, "Que tiemble la oligarquía," *Twitter*, October 9, 2019.

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Discussion

Indigenous movements in Latin America are characterized by established organizations, experienced leadership, close-knit personal bonds, and a strong sense of collective identity (Postero 2007; Yashar 2005). But we are frequently told that "connective" action in the age of social media is diffuse and unstructured, and participation is far more individualized, with collective identity and hierarchical organizations taking a back seat to personalized action frames (Castells 2009; Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabudcedo 2014). The extent to which these developments support or hinder traditionally marginalized actors is the subject of an unresolved debate.

During the so-called Indigenous revolution of the 1990s and early 2000s, SMOs achieved significant political victories by deploying a diverse repertoire of actions that encompassed political participation, mobilization of various types of resources, communication and public relations, collective identity promotion, and disruptive action (Lupien 2023; Paige 2020). All seven categories of social media use we identified fit into one of these activities, and most support more than one. Social media thus provide Indigenous SMOs with new and effective ways of performing these essential tasks.

Disruptive action has always been at the center of social movement mobilization (Paige 2020; Rice 2012). But this requires SMOs to activate large numbers of people and convince them to support these efforts. It also entails providing people with the details they need to participate (dates, times, and locations) and justifications for the proposed action. This has traditionally occurred through the distribution of flyers, posters, and other printed documents, a practice that continues to this day. Particularly in rural areas, mobilization often involves driving—or even walking—from village to village to meet with residents, although local radio has also been used for decades. During the 2018 uprising, social media allowed SMOs to reach and mobilize potential supporters more quickly than in the past, which likely explains why this was the most common use. This suggests that social media have become a key resource for organizing disruptive action. But the activating supporters function also facilitated various other SMO activities, including political participation and communication and public relations. A prime example is the previously mentioned series of negotiations between Indigenous SMOs and the Ecuadorian government in October 2019, live streamed at the demand of Indigenous leaders. In this way, social media can enable leaders' efforts to engage in the institutional political area on their terms.

Social media were also used for communication by bypassing traditional media outlets during protest events. Much has been written about media concentration in Latin America; in most countries, major television networks and newspapers are owned by the wealthiest families who have strong connections with mining and other extractive industry interests (Artz 2017). Indigenous protest events are often either ignored entirely or framed as threatening and dangerous (Banks 2018; Wilkes et al. 2010; Richards 2010). During protest events, social media may be the only means for marginalized actors to counter negative frames and reach domestic and international audiences directly.

Indigenous SMOs understand the threat of repression when planning disruptive action. Making state violence visible has proved challenging in the past, given the elites' control of mass media. But in 2019, Indigenous SMOs used social media to expose instances of state violence that legacy media downplay or ignore. This is clearly an important factor when it comes to mobilization, as it provides a tool that resource-limited actors did not previously have. The killing of Camilo Catrillanca serves to illustrate why exposing violence is one of the most common uses of social media. When social media exploded with images and messages denouncing the extrajudicial killing and calling for justice, the government was forced to apologize and take action. Similarly, videos disseminated by Indigenous protesters in Ecuador and Bolivia were seen around the world and drew condemnation

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from international organizations and several foreign states, forcing the governments to reconsider their approach.

Exposing excessive and extrajudicial violence directed against Indigenous citizens is one of the greatest benefits of social media, as it can reach domestic and international audiences. At least some officials may be more reluctant to support repression when they know the world is watching. The visibility of state violence also allows protesters to gain sympathy and attract allies both at home (including fostering divisions within the elites) and abroad. In this way, exposing violence not only is a tactic for sustaining disruptive action but also serves as a tool to enhance political participation, mobilization of moral resources, and public relations.

Informational posts encompassed tasks that are at the center of political participation and public relations activities: sharing current events and positions, policy developments, as well as declarations of intent to engage in legal measures. Yet social media were used less frequently than we anticipated. By sharing and redistributing content, social media have the potential to rapidly disseminate information that SMOs with limited resources wish to share, potentially reaching individuals outside the conventional support network. But these same affordances mean that state actors, hostile media, and other antagonistic actors will have access to the information just as quickly. Traditional mechanisms for disseminating information are based on established relationships and include community assemblies and traveling messengers. These intimate forms of communication, while not immune to state espionage, may continue to be preferred by activists who wish to keep information within communities. Information is also an essential resource and therefore fits into information resource mobilization. SMOs require it to make informed decisions and adjust their strategies with respect to both protest and institutional political participation. Informational social media posts allow participants to receive information directly from other Indigenous actors, without having a third party select and interpret content.

Successful Indigenous SMOs create solidarity among groups of otherwise heterogeneous and isolated communities through the construction of collective identity (Postero 2007). But during the 2018–2019 protests, social media were used less for promoting identity than the literature would suggest. In part, this may be attributed to the fact that we analyzed social media posts during large protest cycles. The promotion of collective identity is a continuous, long-term endeavor. During periods of disruptive action, SMOs must focus their efforts on immediate circumstances. This likely explains why social media were primarily used to activate supporters and respond to state-sanctioned violence. But we also noted how Indigenous SMOs used social media to align their demands with those of other sectors, and thus to develop solidarity with broader civil society. CONAIE, for example, was able to take on a leadership position in 2019 by aligning its socioeconomic grievances with those of working-class Ecuadorians, and social media were at the center of its efforts to do so as it tweeted out cross-sectoral messages of solidarity. Mapuche SMOs also skillfully linked their demands to those of non-Indigenous civil society, particularly with respect to calls for a new constitution. In this way, social media provide a tool for Indigenous activists to engage in political participation, public relations, and human resource mobilization by balancing indigeneity with a common identity for excluded citizens.

Facebook versus Twitter

As Table 2 shows, Facebook was used much more frequently than Twitter. While the relatively small number of Twitter posts makes it difficult to draw compelling conclusions, our analysis did reveal differences with respect to how the platforms were used. Facebook was used to activate supporters and organize protests, to expose state violence, and to disseminate information, which also happen to be the most common uses. Twitter was primarily used to deliver and respond to criticism and to issue threats.

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The findings align with previous research on how different platforms are used for mobilization. Studies have noted that Facebook is typically used for maintaining and reinforcing existing social relationships (Buccafurri et al. 2015). Facebook's network structure revolves around reciprocal friendships, leading to more closed networks (Ernst et al. 2017). This supports the importance of the in-person relationships and established community bonds that are so important to Indigenous communities. Facebook's affordances include more reciprocal message exchanges, extended textual content, and more audiovisual material, which allows for the creation of more personal and intimate connections. These allow for a stronger connection with a movement's base, but leaders also note that Facebook is used by people of different generations, which ensures reaching a wider segment of the population (von Bülow, Vilaça, and Abelin 2018). Facebook messages transcend the constraints of the 280-character limit available on Twitter at the time this research was conducted, granting political actors a platform to present their case in greater detail. These affordances amplify its utility as a potent instrument for political engagement and mobilization. But the affordances may involve both benefits and drawbacks when it comes to using Facebook for organizing. It can help to reproduce existing reciprocal relationships and forge closer bonds than Twitter, and its closed nature ensures that they are reaching followers and keeping rivals at bay. But this feature may also make it more difficult to reach potential supporters who are not part of the closed, friendship-based Facebook networks.

Twitter is more outwardly focused and, with its asymmetric following model, allows for faster and wider diffusion of political content, enabling messages to reach a broader audience beyond a movement's base (Buccafurri et al. 2015). Twitter posts are more public; anyone can see them, even if they have not "friended" the organization that produces them. This makes it a more useful tool for communicating with actors, such as the state and other rivals, that are external to a movement and to Indigenous allies. Indigenous SMOs are more likely to use Twitter for brief and public exchanges with those on the "outside"; it allows them to criticize and respond to criticism in a public forum (they are not trying to convince supporters in these cases) and to send messages (including threats) to state actors who are not part of their Facebook networks. But we see that Indigenous SMOs are primarily interested in using these tools to enhance political engagement, communication, identity promotion, resource mobilization, and protest activation activities through relationships with their communities, and Facebook is more conducive to those tasks.

Country comparison

The use of digital technologies may not support the mobilization tasks of all organizations in all circumstances. Variation across the three countries was observed with respect to frequency of use and (to a lesser extent) the primary uses. For one thing, most of the 469 posts we retrieved were produced by about ten organizations; the other eighty SMOs published only a handful of publications. Bolivian SMOs were far less likely than their counterparts in the other two countries to use social media. This is likely due in part to the uneven infrastructure and access issues across the region; remote rural areas where many Indigenous communities live remain poorly connected (UN Development Programme 2022). This is particularly true in Bolivia, where SMOs produced far fewer posts. The widespread use of digital tools may therefore further exclude small and rural organizations representing marginalized peoples because their communities lack access, infrastructure, and training. Also, larger, better-resourced organizations such as Ecuador's CONAIE and the Mapuche collective Mapuexpress were more likely than smaller SMOs to produce regular content.

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As Table 3 shows, there is relatively little variation with respect to the primary purposes of social media posts between the three countries. The notable exception is that in Bolivia, social media were less frequently used to activate followers and more commonly used to expose state repression. In part, this can be attributed to a lower rate of cell phone usage and internet access in that country; well more than half of Chileans and Ecuadorians are internet users, compared to only 34 percent of Bolivians.[4] Leaders of Bolivian SMOs know that social media posts are less likely to reach their followers. They must therefore rely on traditional means of communication to encourage people to participate in collective action and to disseminate details about protest events. At the same time, it makes sense that they primarily used social media to expose violence. While calls to action are aimed at supporters who have limited access to technology, posts that expose government repression are likely to be intended for international audiences, including international institutions and human rights organizations. As a core communications and public relations task of social movements, it strategically makes more sense to focus social media campaigns on potentially sympathetic publics at the global level under such circumstances.

The level of repression exercised by the unelected government in Bolivia is also a likely explanatory factor. In particular, the Senkata massacre that took place on November 19 had a chilling effect on Indigenous social movements, with a notable drop in calls for mobilization following that date. For many SMOs, using social media for this purpose was to put individuals at risk. Many of the organizations we studied in November 2019 had closed their social media accounts by early 2020, or at the very least deleted tweets and Facebook posts. While these tools can be used to make repression visible and hold those responsible accountable, extreme levels of state violence can also force activists offline, potentially negating these benefits.

Conclusions

The research findings deepen our understanding of the role of social media in political organizing, shedding light on their integration within traditional modes of protest. Social media are used to support a variety of tasks beyond rapidly mobilizing supporters or fostering group identity. The study unveils a diverse range of activities mirroring the multifaceted strategies employed by established Indigenous SMOs. Additionally, the research emphasizes the necessity for more nuanced discussions on the impact of social media in mobilizing marginalized actors, emphasizing that while they complement traditional strategies, they do not replace them. This underscores the evolving and intricate dynamics of contemporary political activism.

Moreover, the findings invite us to reconcile the divergence between connective and collective action theories, suggesting the need for greater synergy between theories that explore both "traditional" social movements and networked movements. While existing theories often dichotomize "new" and "old" movements, our findings highlight the imperative for a more holistic theoretical framework at the intersection of these two paradigms. And the prevailing theories surrounding the utilization of social media in protest have primarily evolved in isolation from the context of Indigenous mobilization. Indigenous SMOs continue to rely on centralized coordination, established leadership structures, and grassroots community engagement while simultaneously harnessing the power of social media to amplify their impact.

But while social media platforms facilitate diverse mobilization tasks, notable variations exist between larger organizations, which possess the necessary resources and expertise to effectively utilize these platforms, and smaller, more isolated entities, which lack such

[4] See Statistics, Country ICT Data (until 2018), at https://www.itu.int/.

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advantages. Geography and infrastructure also come into play, and the level of state repression may also play a role in activists' ability to use the platforms effectively. Consequently, social media platforms may not inherently level the playing field, as access barriers and political circumstances continue to exacerbate divisions between Indigenous actors.

These observations invite reflections on the evolution of collective action. Our understanding of the digital divide has shifted from inequality differentiated by a simple measure of access to multiple dimensions of digital inequality that include equipment, autonomy of use, skill, social support, and the purposes for which the technology is employed (DiMaggio and Hargittai 2001). But for Indigenous actors in less developed societies such as Bolivia and Ecuador (and to a lesser extent, Chile), our original understanding of the digital divide as a problem of basic access remains relevant. Many of the assumptions made by researchers in the Global North—that access has been diffused to segments of the public initially excluded—do not always apply in the Global South. "Traditional" SMOs remain (and must remain) key actors in Indigenous politics and contemporary Indigenous actors challenge the distinction between "new" and "old" forms of collective action present in the networked movement literature. Indigenous movements do not fit into the diffuse, nonsituated, tech-savvy model described in a growing number of studies on collective action in the internet age. Some of the greatest strengths of Indigenous civil society (e.g., strong organizations, experienced leaders, ethnic identity) remain relevant. This is characteristic of Indigenous civil society and should compel us to challenge the very notion of what twenty-first-century collective action looks like.

Supplementary material. To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.4

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Pascal Lupien is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Brock University.

Adriana Rincón holds a PhD in global governance and human security from the University of Massachusetts Boston. She teaches at Athabasca University.

Andrés Lalama is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at the University of Toronto.

Soledad Machaca is a social communications specialist based in La Paz, Bolivia, and holds a graduate degree from the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés.

Gabriel Chiriboga is a social development specialist and a graduate of the Universidad Técnica del Norte in Ibarra, Ecuador.

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