

# Migration and Digital Political Activism: The Venezuelan Case

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## Abstract

The Venezuelan diaspora, estimated at approximately 7.7 million people (UNHCR, 2024), represents a huge migratory phenomenon driven by a multidimensional crisis encompassing political, economic, and humanitarian dimensions. This migration has shaped a globally active diaspora, with significant concentrations in countries such as Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Chile, the United States of America, and Spain. This study introduces an innovative methodology using Facebook user data to demographically and geographically characterize this diaspora. Using data extracted from the Meta Business platform and audience segmentation by the “expatriates” criterion (individuals who previously resided in Venezuela), we aim to better understand the magnitude, distribution, and characteristics of this population on the social network. The research is complemented by data from organizations like Sin Mordaza to link the digital presence of the diaspora with their participation in political activism activities, such as opposition primaries and protests against electoral fraud. The objective is to determine how digital connectivity facilitates the organization and activism of the Venezuelan diaspora, offering new tools for the analysis of public policies and anti-migratory narratives.

## Keywords

Venezuelan migration, digital activism, Facebook segmentation

## Introduction

Migrant political activism has been a transformative force in numerous historical contexts, enabling overseas communities to not only maintain their national identity but also influence the politics of their countries of origin and host countries (Adamson, 2016; Tsavkko Garcia, 2018). Politically motivated diasporas transcend mere nationalism, supporting national agendas and forging connections with host states, international organizations, and global media to amplify their voices. Culture, in its various forms (music, literature, film, visual art), becomes an emotional bridge to connect with global audiences, as observed in cases such as the Cuban exile (Heindl, 2013), the Palestinian diaspora (Mavroudi, 2008), the Chilean exile during Pinochet's dictatorship (Wright & Oñate Zúñiga, 2007), and the Basque exile during Franco's regime (Oregi & Arregui, 2008).

In the 21st century, social media has revolutionized the capacity for organization and dissemination of information for political action. The internet has become a fundamental tool for political socialization, engagement, communication, fundraising, and lobbying, both for established political groups and emerging actors.

This article focuses on the Venezuelan diaspora and examines how digital political activism manifests in this context. Based on the premise that digital technology, particularly social media, has radically transformed collective action and political participation, we will analyze how the Venezuelan diaspora uses the social media platform Facebook to organize, amplify their demands, and participate in the political life of their country of origin.

## Literature Review

The relationship between technological evolution and political action has been constant throughout history. From the organization of political parties in the 19th century to the influence of radio and television in the 20th century, each technological advance has reshaped political dynamics (Aldrich, 1995, 2011). Electoral campaigns, for instance, shifted from relying on robust party structures to being shaped by advertising investments and mass audiovisual communication (Norris, 2004).

The advent of the digital economy and the internet has brought an even more disruptive transformation. The ability of individuals to develop comprehensive campaign platforms, often complementing or even replacing traditional party structures, has democratized access to the public sphere and generated instability in political systems (Fernández, 2021). The internet functions as a medium that facilitates global connectivity and political participation (Naghibi, 2011), becoming a preferred weapon of diasporic communities (Adamson, 2020). Social media, in this sense, not only serves for communication and identity maintenance but also as a political space for promoting ideologies and agendas that strengthen participants' sense of belonging and identity.

Technology has also globalized social movements, enabling the rapid organization of protests on a global scale. An early example of this was the 2008 “One Million Voices Against FARC” initiative (Rosato, 2014; Vásquez, 2011), where Facebook played a crucial role in serving as a digital platform where thousands of users were mobilized to organize global protests. This phenomenon underscores how social media has occupied a space for political organization and communication previously dominated by party structures, facilitating the emergence or strengthening of disruptive political actors, both internal and external to the system.

## The Context of Venezuelan Migration

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2024), over 7.7 million Venezuelans currently live outside the country. This figure positions Venezuelan migration as the third-largest migratory crisis globally, after Ukraine and Syria. The Venezuelan crisis, which intensified starting in 2015, has generated a massive exodus in which one in four Venezuelans has left their country. This complex crisis, rooted in political, economic, and humanitarian factors, has displaced a significant portion of the population, creating a globally distributed diaspora (van Roekel & de Theije, 2020). The main destinations for this migration include Latin American countries such as Colombia, Peru, Brazil, and Chile, as well as the United States of America and Spain, thereby consolidating a Venezuelan presence in various regions of the world.

Venezuelan migrants, often excluded from formal legal citizenship, turn to non-State, everyday, and digital practices to assert political identity and rights. Palma-Gutiérrez (2023) focuses on face-to-face, place-based actions across the Andes, where migrants engage in creative, performative, and productive acts to generate “lived citizenship” despite legal marginalization. Sometimes, virtual spaces (diasporic networks via social media) offer another terrain for civic engagement: sustaining identity, solidarity, resistance, and political agency (Plascencia, 2022).

The Venezuelan diaspora exhibits a high level of digital connectivity: WhatsApp is the most used social network by Venezuelan migrants worldwide, with 85% of users. Second place preferred social network for the Venezuelan diaspora in Latin America is Facebook (used by 76% of migrants), while for Europe, it is almost tied between Instagram (46%) and Facebook (41%; Consultoría Política y Formación Internacional, 2023). The Venezuelan diaspora is characterized by being an active and organized community that uses various mechanisms to maintain ties with its country of origin and influence national and international political agendas (Maresca, 2023; Paez, 2019). In this context, social media and digital connectivity have become essential tools for organization, information dissemination, and political mobilization.

Research from Esberg and Siegel (2023) examines how diaspora influences the online discourse of Venezuelan political activists. Through an analysis of over 5 million tweets by 357 activists, the study finds that diaspora transforms activists’ networks and rhetoric. Diaspora activists engage more with international audiences, increasingly advocate for foreign-led interventions (e.g., diplomacy, sanctions), and harshly

criticize their home regimes. Conversely, they discuss local grievances and domestic mobilization less frequently. These shifts, according to the authors, are attributed to new political opportunities and reduced risks of repression abroad. The findings highlight how diaspora reshapes dissent in the digital age, offering insights into the broader implications of diaspora activism and repression. This characteristic indicates that digital platforms are being used as a strategic tool for political articulation by Venezuelan migrants, especially in contexts where access to traditional media is limited or state censorship is prevalent.

## Methodology

This research seeks to characterize the digital presence of the Venezuelan diaspora worldwide and link it to recent global activism actions promoted by the Venezuelan opposition in online social networks, focusing on the case of the digital platform Facebook. To this end, two fundamental research questions (RQ) are posed:

RQ1: what is the demographic and geographic map of the Venezuelan diaspora?

RQ2: what is the relationship between political activism and social media presence among Venezuelan migrants?

Our methodology is based on the extraction and analysis of data from Meta's advertising platform, Business Ads. The advertising platform allows the use of audience segmentation filters, including the category "expatriates", which identifies users as "people who lived in Venezuela and now reside abroad". This data allows for detailed demographic and geographic characterization, including variables such as gender, age, and educational level, enabling us to profile Venezuelan migrants present on the Facebook social network.

By April 2025, Meta's advertising platform established that between 5.3 and 6.3 million "people who lived in Venezuela and now reside abroad", representing up to 83% of the total confirmed number available on the Venezuelan diaspora (UNHCR, 2024).

The methodology is based on previous work by Spyrtos et al. (2019) and Palotti et al. (2020), who validated the correspondence between Facebook data and official United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees statistics. The study by Spyrtos et al. (2019) explores the use of Facebook advertising data to quantify patterns of human mobility worldwide. It assesses the platform's ability to classify users as "migrants" based on their previous residence. The analysis of data from 119 countries highlights the potential for early detection of trends, such as the increase in Venezuelan migrants in Colombia and Spain in 2018. However, its limitations include social media penetration bias, overrepresentation of certain groups, and reliance on proprietary algorithms. Although it does not replace official statistics, the method offers complementary information for migration analysis and policy-making, emphasizing the importance of disaggregated and timely data for better governance.

Previous research has demonstrated the great potential of Facebook's advertising platform for monitoring the Venezuelan migration crisis. Palotti et al. (2020) demonstrate that aggregated data on Venezuelans identified as "former residents" can estimate the number of refugees, their distribution across countries, and their socioeconomic status. The platform's high spatial resolution, low cost, and real-time data capabilities provide critical information, surpassing traditional methods in terms of timeliness and granularity.

While Facebook's estimates closely match official statistics, challenges such as algorithmic opacity, social media penetration bias, and lack of historical data are acknowledged. Therefore, Palotti et al. (2020) highlight the platform's value as a complementary tool for migration tracking and humanitarian intervention information. The advantages of this approach include access to data updated in near real time and the ability to obtain detailed demographic segmentation. In addition, it offers global and massive coverage. The tool has limitations, including dependence on the platform's algorithm, lack of transparency in geolocation criteria, and exclusion of migrants without digital access. However, its validity as a proxy is supported by its high correlation with United Nations statistics, which indicate that it represents up to three out of every four officially registered migrants.

Subsequently, using data from a recent event reflecting the global political participation of Venezuelan migrants: the primary election to select the presidential candidate of the Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, held on October 23, 2024; an additional regression analysis was conducted to determine whether a significant correlation existed that would further validate the use of digital indicators as a proxy for political participation and the migratory presence of the Venezuelan diaspora. This complementary approach enabled testing not only the demographic reliability of Meta's digital data but also its explanatory power for transnational political engagement patterns.

## Results

### Geographic Distribution of the Venezuelan Diaspora

The geographic distribution of the Venezuelan diaspora is presented, based on Meta Business data (RQ1). A map visualizing the diaspora shows the intensity of the Venezuelan presence in different regions of the world (with emphasis on Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Europe). "Venezuelan Expats - Meta Business Data"<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1) would be a very good proxy, showing the main destination countries (Colombia, United States of America, Chile, Peru, Spain, etc.) and estimated figures for each.

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1 See the interactive graphic at <https://flourish-user-preview.com/api/canva/embed/visualisation/22725569/0N1RapE8usVxnAeUBiLV7uojRYrs2-m2v3Bgp-2juio0YgIX0iPt3ladEJ7UEN3q/>.

**Figure 1**  
Geographic distribution  
of the Venezuelan  
diaspora  
*Source.* Author's  
elaboration based on  
Meta Business Data.  
[https://public.  
flourish.studio/  
visualisation/22725569/](https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/22725569/)

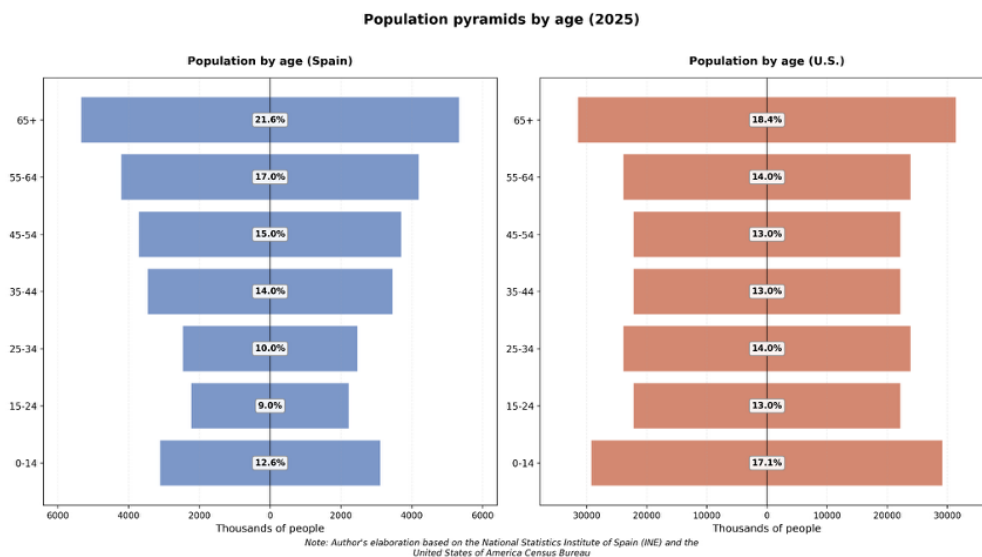


Regarding the demographic profile of the diaspora (RQ1), demographic characteristics (age, gender, and educational level) of the Venezuelan diaspora were analyzed based on Facebook data. The extracted data enable the construction of a new map of the Venezuelan diaspora, highlighting the mentioned key areas of concentration: Colombia, the United States of America, Spain, Peru, Chile, and Argentina.

Demographically, migrants exhibit a younger population pyramid and higher educational levels than the average in their host countries. Population pyramids for key destination countries, such as Spain and the United States of America, compare the demographic composition of the diaspora with that of the general population.

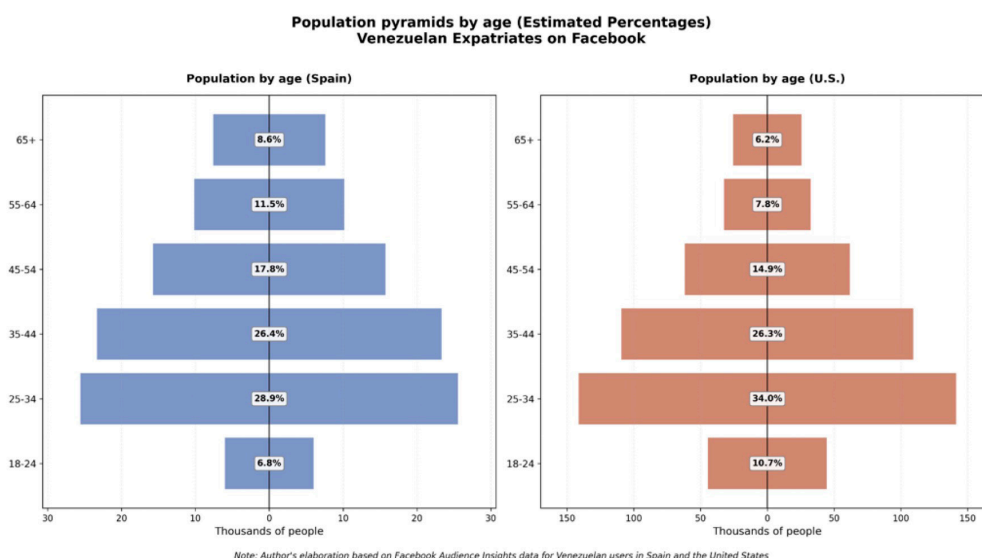
Figure 2 presents population pyramids for two primary destination countries for the Venezuelan diaspora: Spain and the United States. Spain's pyramid exhibits an inverted shape, characterized by a narrow base and broader middle age groups (30–60 years), which indicates an aging population with low birth rates. In the older age groups, there are more women than men, reflecting their longer life expectancy. In contrast, the United States' pyramid displays a columnar shape with a slight bulge in the 25–45 age groups. Its base is wider than Spain's, suggesting higher birth rates and a younger overall population. The gender gap is less pronounced, though feminization persists in older ages. Both pyramids demonstrate an inverted base, more pronounced in Spain, signifying a higher proportion of older individuals compared to younger ones.

Figure 3 compares the population pyramids of Venezuelan migrants in Spain and the United States to those of the general populations. These pyramids reveal a Venezuelan diaspora primarily concentrated among young adults (20–40 years old).



**Figure 2**  
Population pyramid of Spain and the United States of America  
Source. Author's elaboration based on the National Statistics Institute of Spain and the United States of America Census Bureau.  
Graphics created with claude.ai

In both countries, this migrant influx rejuvenates the demographic profile by bolstering the working-age population amid clear aging trends. However, the effect is more diffuse in the United States.



**Figure 3**  
Population pyramid of the Venezuelan migrant in Spain and the United States of America  
Source. Author's elaboration based on Meta Business Data (Facebook data).  
Graphics created with claude.ai

As the graphics show, for both countries, Venezuelan migration represents a demographic opportunity, filling gaps in the labor market and contributing to the sustainability of the pension system. The comparison between the population pyramids of Spain and the United States of America allows us to visualize the context of ageing (more critical in Spain) compared to the demographic dynamism of the Venezuelan diaspora, which is located in the young and productive segments. This

difference can be key to defining integration, employment, and citizenship policies that harness the potential of this migrant population as a strategic asset amid local demographic challenges.

The demographic contrast between the native populations and the Venezuelan diaspora reveals several policy opportunities. On the one hand, as workforce renewal, both countries could benefit from integrating Venezuelan migrants into sectors facing labor shortages. On the other hand, as population rejuvenation, especially in Spain, migrants can slow down or mitigate the effects of demographic aging.

The Venezuelan diaspora, though born of crisis, presents a demographic opportunity for ageing societies like Spain and, to a lesser extent, the United States of America. Their youth, resilience, and capacity for labor market participation can serve as critical resources for demographic sustainability. Policymakers should not only recognize this potential but proactively design integration strategies that convert this demographic presence into a long-term national asset.

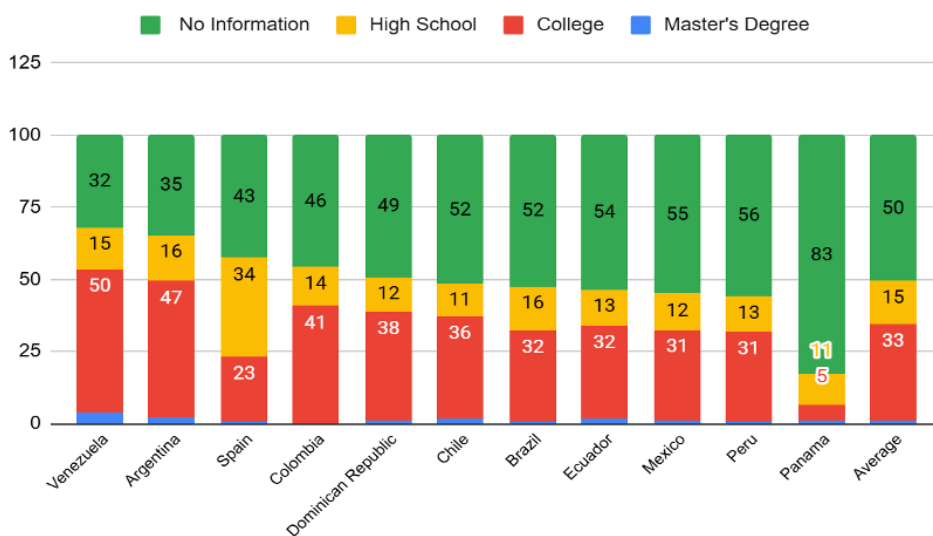
## Educational Level of the Diaspora

Facebook data also enable understanding of the educational profiles of migrant populations, which is essential for assessing their integration potential and socioeconomic contributions to host societies. This section analyzes the educational attainment of Venezuelan migrants in various countries, using data visualized in Figure 4. The countries covered include key destinations in Latin America and Spain, with indicators for four education levels: high school, college, master's degree, and unspecified education ("no Information").

The overall average reveals a population in which approximately 33% possess a college education, 15% have completed high school, and 5% hold a master's degree. This comparative analysis underscores the educational diversity of the Venezuelan diaspora across receiving countries. While migrants in Spain and Argentina tend to be more highly educated, limitations in data collection in other countries obscure the whole picture. Nonetheless, understanding these educational trends is key to designing policies that maximize the social and economic contributions of Venezuelan migrants in the region.

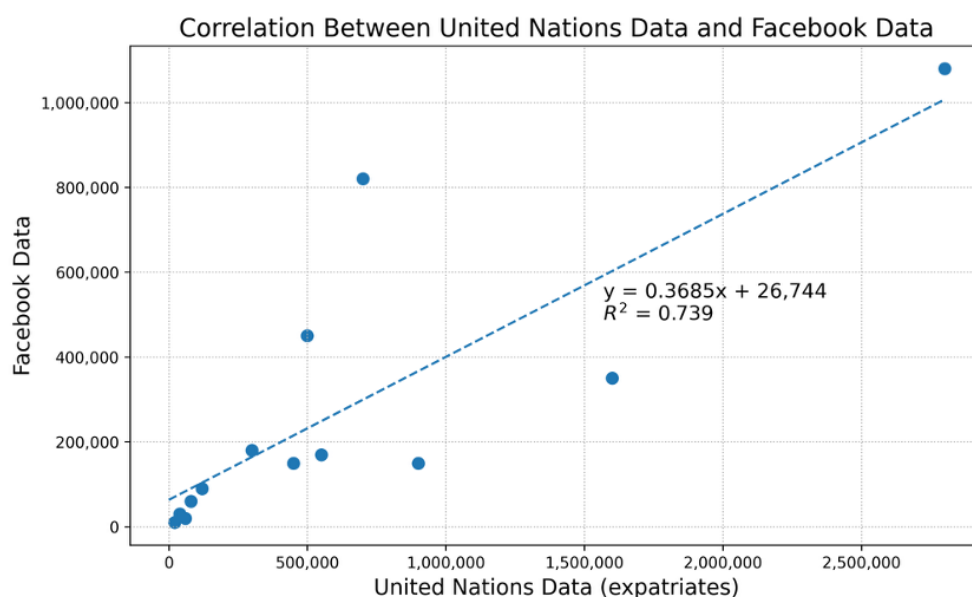
## Reliability of Facebook Data as a Proxy

The correlation analysis between Meta's advertising category, "Venezuelan expatriates", and the official migration statistics reported by the United Nations revealed a strong and statistically significant positive association (Figure 5). The simple linear regression model yielded a coefficient of determination of  $R^2 = 0.739$ , indicating that approximately 74% of the variance observed in migration records can be explained by Meta's digital estimates.



**Figure 4**  
Educational composition of the Venezuelan diaspora across Latin America and Spain: a comparative assessment  
*Source.* Author's elaboration based on Meta Business Data

This result demonstrates a high level of empirical consistency between the two data sources, particularly in countries with the largest concentrations of the Venezuelan diaspora, such as Colombia, the United States of America, Spain, Peru, and Chile, where Facebook estimates closely align with United Nations demographic proportions. Minor deviations were observed in regions with lower internet penetration or higher irregular migration rates, conditions that tend to reduce digital representativeness.



**Figure 5**  
Linear regression between United Nations statistics and “Venezuelan expatriates” category in Facebook  
*Source.* Author's elaboration based on United Nations statistics and Meta Business Data

Overall, the findings support the validity of Meta's digital indicators as a demographic and migratory proxy, capturing the magnitude and spatial distribution of the Venezuelan diaspora with substantial accuracy. Even more, Meta's data allows us to characterize Venezuelan migration in a much broader and more specific way, in terms of both geographical and demographic aspects (such as age, gender, and education) that are not covered by the official data available from the United Nations. This strong correspondence reinforces the analytical value of social media metrics as a complementary instrument for understanding contemporary migration dynamics and transnational population movements.

## High Capacity for Mobilization and Transnational Political Participation Among the Venezuelan Diaspora

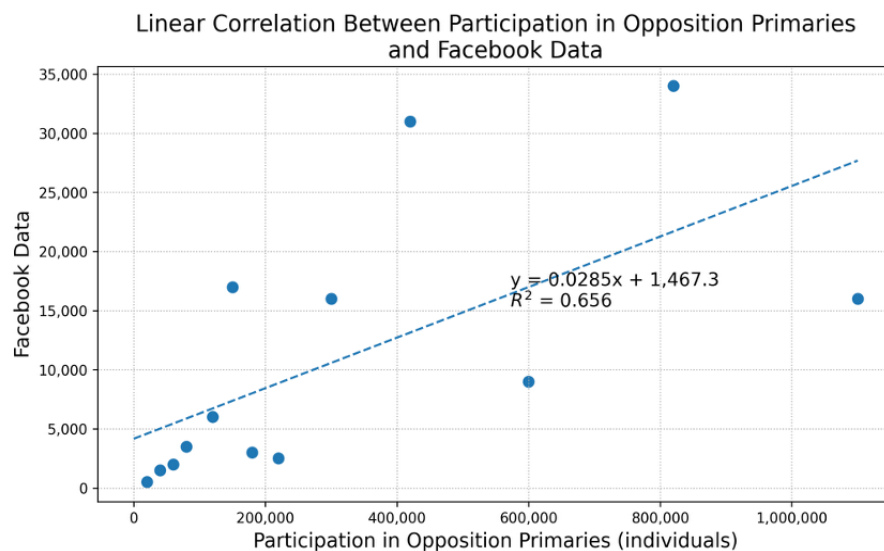
The strong linear correlation ( $R^2 = 0.739$ ) between Meta's "Venezuelan expatriates" data and official United Nations migration statistics not only validates the reliability of digital indicators as demographic proxies but also reveals a substantive correspondence between territorial presence and digital activity within the Venezuelan diaspora, particularly during periods of political mobilization.

This relationship became especially evident during the Plataforma Unitaria Democrática primary election on October 23, 2024. Countries with the highest concentrations of Venezuelan social media users closely matched those reporting the largest numbers of voters abroad. This overlap between digital presence and territorial participation demonstrates that the diaspora is not merely symbolically linked to its homeland but actively exercises forms of transnational citizenship and political agency.

The strong association between digital and territorial dimensions constitutes empirical evidence of the diaspora's political engagement, confirming that social media platforms function as more than mirrors of geographic dispersion. They serve as effective arenas for organization, coordination, and collective expression, enabling dispersed populations to operate as coherent political communities. The Venezuelan diaspora thus emerges as a globally networked political actor, capable of transforming digital connectivity into tangible participation within national political processes.

Further analysis examined the relationship between the concentration of Facebook users and the organization of political activism events. As shown in Figure 6, the correlation between participation in opposition primaries and Facebook data reached 65.6%, indicating that nearly two-thirds of the variation in participation can be explained by Facebook metrics. This finding highlights the capacity to estimate the electoral potential of the diaspora and to identify countries with higher prospects for political mobilization.

This concentration also translates into political opportunities. For example, the 65.6% correlation observed during the Venezuelan opposition primaries of October 2023 demonstrates the potential to anticipate mobilization dynamics by country or region.



**Figure 6**  
Linear correlation between participation in opposition primaries and Facebook data  
*Source.* Author's elaboration based on Meta Business Data

Another key event illustrating this dynamic was the global protest of August 16, 2024, against electoral fraud in Venezuela. This transnational demonstration, largely organized through social media, resonated in more than 50 cities worldwide<sup>2</sup> (Figure 7), with notable activity in Madrid, Miami, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires. Digital calls to action facilitated decentralized yet effective coordination, as users shared materials, maps, and visual narratives to amplify both public and media impact.

Together, these findings demonstrate that digital concentration translates into real political mobilization, reinforcing the idea that social media not only reflect the dispersion of the Venezuelan diaspora but also empower it as an organized and influential political force operating beyond national borders.

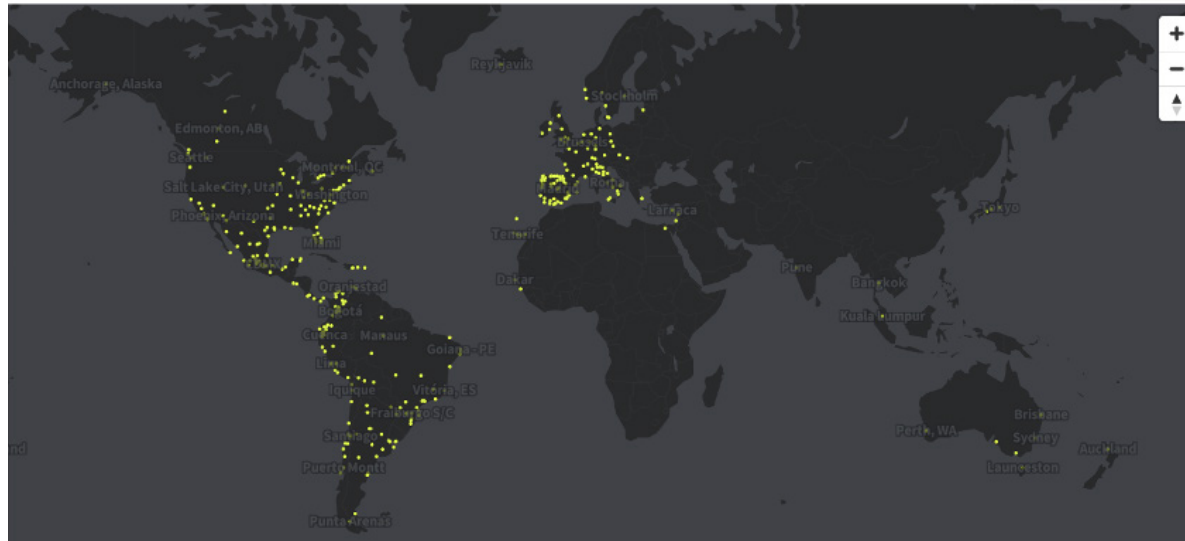
## Discussion

The findings of this research offer several important implications for understanding migration and digital political activism in the Venezuelan context. The useful adoption of new methodology for diaspora mapping and profiling represents a significant methodological advance in the study of diasporas. Acknowledging the limitations previously mentioned, the use of Facebook data from Meta Business Ads has proven to be an effective and accessible tool for characterizing the Venezuelan diaspora globally. This methodology, leveraging the penetration of the social network, allows for obtaining demographic and geographic data at a scale and detail that complement official statistics and help forecast migratory trends, offering a more granular and updated view of the migratory phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup> See interactive chart at [https://flourish-user-preview.com/api/canva/embed/visualisation/22914497/SLohk8\\_oZ0iLoyhiQtlctEOTAJxe5JZRJ6JC2I5N411nXorrFnFfqdRy8QTx6tWk/](https://flourish-user-preview.com/api/canva/embed/visualisation/22914497/SLohk8_oZ0iLoyhiQtlctEOTAJxe5JZRJ6JC2I5N411nXorrFnFfqdRy8QTx6tWk/)

## Worldwide protest points against electoral fraud

August 16, 2024



**Figure 7**

Protests against electoral fraud in Venezuela.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Sin Mordaza Data. <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/22914497/>

The findings confirm that Meta's digital indicators serve as a reliable proxy for demographic and migratory trends, accurately capturing the scale and spatial patterns of the Venezuelan diaspora. Additionally, Meta's data provides a more comprehensive and detailed portrayal of Venezuelan migration, encompassing geographic and demographic details that are not fully addressed by official United Nations data. This close alignment underscores the value of social media metrics as a complementary tool for analyzing modern migration dynamics and transnational population movements.

The detailed characterization of the Venezuelan diaspora, including its geographic distribution and demographic profile, also enables a better understanding of its potential and contributions, both socially and economically, in host countries, as well as its impact on the politics of the country of origin. Data on educational levels, for example, suggest the diaspora's capacity to contribute to the development of qualified human capital (RQ1).

Facebook data also serves as a tool for public policy and anti-migration narratives. The results of this research can serve as a basis for designing more effective public policies aimed at the Venezuelan diaspora, facilitating their integration in host countries and strengthening their civic participation. Likewise, understanding how the diaspora organizes and communicates through digital media can inform the development of counter-narratives against anti-migratory discourses, highlighting the agency and organizational capacity of migrants. This finding has significant implications for challenging anti-migration discourses that underestimate migrants' contributions and agency in host societies.

Furthermore, there is a clear importance of digital connectivity for political activism and mobilization. The strong correlation observed between social media

presence and participation in political activism activities (opposition primaries and protests) underscores the critical role of digital connectivity in the organization and mobilization of the Venezuelan diaspora. In these cases, social media seem to have served as platforms for coordination, information dissemination, support network formation, and message amplification, enabling the diaspora to exert political influence despite its geographic dispersion. This is particularly relevant for protest and public visibility actions, where global coordination is key. The findings presented here demonstrate that forced exile does not necessarily lead to depoliticization or disconnection but can generate new forms of political organization and influence, particularly when equipped with effective digital tools.

In summary, the use of Facebook data for political analysis offers a better understanding of the diaspora's role as a transnational collective actor. In the Venezuelan case, digital connectivity has not only served as a communication medium but also as a catalyst for political activism. The research addresses RQ2 by demonstrating a clear link between the concentration of Facebook users in certain locations and the diaspora's ability to organize and execute protest and public visibility activities. Data from global protests against electoral fraud (Figure 7) and participation in primaries highlight how digital networks facilitate transnational collective action.

This article illustrates how the Venezuelan diaspora has emerged as a relevant political actor through the strategic use of social media, particularly Facebook. Using an innovative methodology based on Meta Ads data, the diaspora's demographic and geographic characteristics have been mapped, and its digital presence has been linked to concrete political actions. This emergence as a key political actor in the contemporary landscape is not only due to its size and complexity but also to its active participation in the political sphere through digital channels. The use of Facebook and other digital platforms has proven to be a powerful tool for mapping and understanding the demographic and geographic characteristics of this diaspora, as well as its capacity for political organization and mobilization.

The results of this study reveal a high degree of correspondence between digital and territorial presence, confirming that online activity is not merely symbolic but reflects tangible political participation. The strong correlations observed during the Plataforma Unitaria Democrática's primary election of October 23, 2024 ( $R^2 = 0.739$ ), and the subsequent global protests of August 2024 demonstrate that the diaspora's digital engagement translated into real, measurable participation across multiple countries. These events highlight the Venezuelan diaspora's ability to coordinate, organize, and project political influence beyond national borders through digital infrastructures.

This research confirms the hypothesis that digital connectivity and social media are fundamental to the political activism of the Venezuelan diaspora, facilitating participation in democratic processes, protest organization, and the global visibility of their demands. The applied methodology, based on social media data analysis, validates the reliability of these sources as a proxy for migration and activism.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the overlap between online and offline participation represents a new stage in transnational political behavior, where diasporic communities operate as hybrid actors combining physical presence and digital agency. This model challenges traditional notions of political belonging and opens new avenues for understanding digital citizenship in exile.

Findings suggest the need to continue exploring the potential of digital tools for studying diasporas and transnational activism. Future research could delve deeper into analyzing the content generated by the diaspora, the effectiveness of different digital communication strategies, and the interaction between the diaspora and the policies of host and origin countries.

Ultimately, the Venezuelan case offers a paradigmatic example of how migration, empowered by the digital revolution, becomes a dynamic force capable of influencing political, social, and humanitarian processes on a global scale. The lessons from the Venezuelan case may be useful for studying similar processes in contexts of migratory crises and authoritarianism. The digitalization of politics from exile is not only a strategy of resistance but also a legitimate expression of transnational citizenship.

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