

Protest Video Games in the Popular Uprising in Chile: Analysis of their Discourses and Contributions to the Discussion on Political Video Games in Contemporary Social Movements.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Video games position themselves as expressive media capable of communicating social and political discourses through their procedural rhetoric (Bogost 2010; Frasca 2001; Pérez Latorre 2015). In this sense, video games can reinforce, question, or propose messages related to political events (Bogost 2010), depict protests and citizen demonstrations (Venegas and Moreno 2021), contribute to digital activism strategies of marginalized groups with counterhegemonic perspectives (Anderson-Barkley and Foglesong 2018; Jones 2008), and constitute political spaces to encourage civic engagement and channel political discontent (Davies 2022; Neys and Jansz 2019).

The incorporation of political elements into video games ranges from a mere superficial or cosmetic appearance to the integration of significant protest, especially when players, through design, make decisions and observe their consequences (Venegas and Moreno 2021). The literature has analyzed the design of video games in the context of various contemporary social protests to assess their messages and contributions to the protest. Examples such as *Liberate Hong Kong*, *Stop Desahucios* (Píxel de Troya, 2016), and *V de Vinagre* (Flux Game Studio 2013) have captured the demands of protesters and denounced clashes with police forces in street protests in Hong Kong in 2019, the actions of the Mortgage Affected Platform in Spain, and the mobilizations in Brazil in 2013, respectively (Davies 2020; Fagundes et al. 2017; Venegas and Moreno 2021).

In October 2019, Chile witnessed a massive movement of citizen and working-class protests that unfolded in the streets, media, and social networks to denounce inequalities, life precariousness, exploitation, exclusion, and discrimination against women and indigenous peoples, low wages, and, in general, the negative effects of

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the neoliberal development model (Mayol Miranda, Paulsen, and Baño 2019; Ponce 2020). This event is part of a historical process of the formation and crisis of the neoliberal ethos in the population, initiated during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (Canales 2022) and driving a constituent process. In the context of street protests, cases of excessive use of force by the Chilean police against protesters were reported, with incidents of arbitrary arrests and violations of human rights (Amnesty International 2023; 2020).

During these mobilizations, three video games referencing street protests and citizens' demands were developed and circulated: *Negromatapacos* (Nemoris Games 2019), *Primera Línea* (IISE EIRL 2019), and *Nanopesos* (Gormaz 2019). From a cultural studies perspective, the goal of this study is to analyze how the discourse of these video games represented social protest and the demands of mobilized citizens.

The method employed was the social discourse analysis model of video games, which involves examining the ludic design of characters/players, the game world, and activities in the game (Pérez Latorre 2015). The sample included the three publicly available video game cases on Google Play and itch.io: *Negro Matapacos* (Nemoris Game 2018), *Primera Línea* (IISE EIRL 2018) and *Nanopesos* (Gomaz 2018).

The results indicate that *Negro Matapacos* and *Primera Línea* express a denouncement of police violence against peaceful street protests through their mechanics. The first video game illustrates arbitrary detentions and proposes a non-violent defense method, reflecting one of the available options during street protests. On the other hand, "Primera Línea" simulates police violence and human rights violations. However, by adopting the main mechanics of a popular defense video game ('Plants vs. Zombies'), it incurs in ideological dissonance, treating the represented protesters as simple disposable resources rather than subjects with rights.

On the other hand, *Nanopesos*, by focusing on the ethical, emotional, and material dilemmas of living on a minimum wage in Chile, uses procedural rhetoric to disseminate one of the foundations of social protest. In this way, it becomes a significant protest video game that stimulates critical thinking.

In conclusion, the contributions and importance of these video games to the protest in Chile will be discussed. Subsequently, similarities and differences with other experiences in the world of video games created during social protests will be analyzed, with the aim of contributing to the global discussion in game studies about the opportunities that video games have for citizen movements and activism worldwide.

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