

# **A viral pandemic versus a viral video**

***What the COVID-19 crisis taught us about civil activism***

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### **Abstract**

The year 2020 marked an exceptional degree of Black Lives Matter activism. In that same year, COVID-19 took a hold of the world and influenced almost every aspect of normal life. The study's primary aim was to examine whether the BLM breakthrough was somehow effectuated by the pandemic and its social consequences. Using semi-structured interviews, ten BLM allies were questioned about their involvement with the BLM movement over the past eight years. Respondents were aged between 20 and 30 years old, identified as white and attended at least one BLM protest in 2020. Their answers were coded and analyzed. The majority of respondents believed that their involvement was influenced by the pandemic, through the fact that they had more time to themselves. Furthermore, they chose to attend a protest, despite of the social distancing efforts, because they realized the importance of the BLM sentiment. In conclusion, the pandemic does seem to have contributed to the BLM breakthrough in 2020, supporting the main premise of this study.

**Keywords:** *Black Lives Matter, COVID-19, interconnectedness, personal involvement*

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## Introduction

*Black Lives Matter* (BLM) is a social-political movement that strives to eliminate racially motivated violence inflicted on Black communities, particularly police violence (Clayton, 2018). Police violence concerns a form of misconduct, wherein unwarranted force, harassment and / or abuse is exercised by law enforcement (Emesowum, 2016), in some cases with fatal outcomes. African Americans are approximately 2.5 times more likely to be killed by a police officer, compared to their white counterparts (Edwards et al., 2019; DeGue, 2016). Moreover, research has shown that African Americans are two to three times more likely to be fatally shot by law enforcement while being unarmed, and three times more likely to be shot while armed (Nix et al., 2017; Lett et al., 2020). Altogether, police killings are strongly racialized.

The BLM movement officially originates from 2013, but up until last year, the movement was primarily known in the U.S and had its strongest momentum one year after its establishment (Freelon et al., 2016). However, in 2020 there was a significant breakthrough: BLM gained large-scale media and public attention, unlike ever before. This breakthrough was sparked by the death of George Floyd in May; an African American man who was killed by a white police officer after being suffocated for over eight minutes (Kampmark, 2020). The incident was videotaped and quickly went viral: because of its disturbing character, the video enraged millions of people and triggered a wave of intercontinental social protests (Buchanan, 2020). Prior to this event, two similar incidents had occurred that same year: that being the murder of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. Both incidents were met with public disbelief, and consequential civil unrest. Accordingly, a momentum of outrage had already been building up: George Floyd's murder was the straw that broke the camels' back.

The year 2020 will not only be remembered for its BLM revolution. The world was also faced with the spread of COVID-19: a global pandemic that was, and still is combated

by the implementation of social distancing measures. These measures are focused on keeping people to stay home and restricting them from coming together. However, in spite of these social distancing efforts being in place, thousands of people from all over the world still decided to join the BLM protests. Tens of millions of supporters marched the streets, taking part in thousands of protests worldwide. Putnam et al. (2020) stated that “the United States rarely has protests in this combination of size, intensity and frequency; it usually has big protests or sustained protests, but not both”. The BLM movement is considered as one of the largest, maybe even *the* largest social movement in history (ACLED, 2020). And because this all happened in the midst of a global pandemic, that kept people from going to large gatherings, it is that much more remarkable.

George Floyd was certainly not the first African American man to be killed by law enforcement; this incident was also not the first to be recorded and shared on social media. Several of those recordings have sparked a number of sporadic protests before, some more than others, but nowhere near to the extent we saw in 2020.

Why did the BLM movement gain significant popularity, to a degree that not has been seen before, in the same year that COVID-19 took hold of the world? Was Floyd’s murder simply the straw that broke the camel's back, which just happened to occur during the pandemic, or was the BLM breakthrough ‘fueled’ by the world coming up against a global pandemic that forced people to put a hold on their active lives?

This thesis will revolve around one subpopulation in particular, that being BLM *allies*. BLM allyship, or ‘non-Black allyship’ (Al-Malssi, 2020) concerns the support from people who are *not* personally affected by the racial disparities and institutional racism that people of color have to endure. Allies stand in solidarity with Black lives and are advocates of racial equality. The wake of BLM related protests in 2020 attracted the highest number of non-Black supporters the movement has ever seen (Washington, 2020; Buchanan et al., 2020;

Putnam et al., 2020). This remarkable uprise in non-Black support suggests that a significant number of people who previously felt ‘comfortable’ turning a blind eye to the topic of institutional racism, considerably because it did not affect them personally, now felt that they could now longer stay silent. In turn, this hints at a certain contextual change, that somehow facilitated collective action among those who were inoperative before. Indeed, the year 2020 certainly brought about significant changes within the sociopolitical sphere, resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Based on this premise, I formulated the following research question: in what way did ‘life during a pandemic’ influence the uprise in BLM related activism among BLM allies? The answer to this question will provide a more thorough understanding as to why the BLM movement had a revolutionary breakthrough in 2020, but it will also contribute to the existing body of literature on the course of social movements. The more we gain an exhaustive understanding of this topic, the more effectively social movement can transpire in the future.

By means of a series of semi-structured interviews, Dutch BLM allies, who attended at least one BLM protest, will be asked about their involvement with the movement.

As follows, with the help of a brief historical background, the origin and course of the BLM movement is discussed. Then, the theoretical framework presents the relevant literature on the topic of social movement, accompanied by the case-specific hypotheses that function as the foundation for the concerning research. After that, the methodology section illustrates how this research was designed and conducted. Finally, the results are discussed, followed by the overall conclusions.

## Historical background

### Civil rights movement

Historically, there is one salient movement that can be considered as the founder of the BLM ideology: the U.S. *civil rights movement*, that took place during the 1950's and 1960's. When this movement arose, Southern U.S. society was regulated by the *Jim Crow regime* (Morris, 1999), characterized by state-sanctioned racial oppression and segregation. Although this regime was not effectuated in Northern U.S, there was, and continues to be significant racial oppression there as well. During the Jim Crow era, state-sanctioned violence was executed by means of racialized lynching's throughout the whole U.S. In short, the civil rights movements emerged against a pressing backdrop of socioeconomic and political racial exploitation (Howard, 1996; Morris, 1999).

*Rosa Parks* is considered to be the founding mother of the civil rights movements. Parks was an African American woman who refused to give up her assigned bus seat to a white passenger in a racially segregated bus. This act of resistance led to the *Montgomery Bus Boycott*, which eventually caused the Supreme Court to declare racial segregation in buses as unconstitutional (Glennon, 1991). The movement gained huge momentum and continued to last over a decade. It was led by African American citizens who fought against prevailing racial inequality and white domination (Morris, 1999); it is therefore considered as the precursor of the present BLM movement, that is also striving for Black liberation.

Even though the civil rights movement effectuated large victories in terms of achieving racial equality, U.S. contemporary society remains embedded in racialized hierarchy structures. Black citizens are still experiencing significant socioeconomic and political oppression, and are threatened by a more hidden form of state-sanctioned violence: that being racialized police violence.

## **Black Lives Matter movement**

The founding of the BLM movement was sparked by the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012 (Clayton, 2018). Martin, an unarmed African American teenager, was fatally shot by a member of the community watch. Voice recordings of the concerning police calls were publicly released. In July 2013, the perpetrator was found not guilty for his second-degree murder charge (Botelho & Yan, 2013). This acquittal caused a crucial public upset: demonstrations were held in over one hundred U.S. cities and continued for weeks, and the now famous hashtag *#BlackLivesMatter* was founded by three African American women, named Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, meant as a call for action and awareness.

Throughout the following years, similar incidents occurred that also drew significant attention and evoked public upset (appendix A). These recognitions helped solidify and gave momentum to the BLM movement. However, those cases are just a couple of examples from a long list of incidents; every year, hundreds of Black lives are taken due to police violence in the U.S alone.

By all means, George Floyd's murder was not the first incident of racialized police brutality to evoke public controversy, notable media attention and social protests. However, the social protests that were effectuated by these other incidents took place on a relatively small scale and rather locally; these incidents elicited a few hundred protests at most, and nearly all of those protests transpired within the U.S.

## **The 2020 breakthrough**

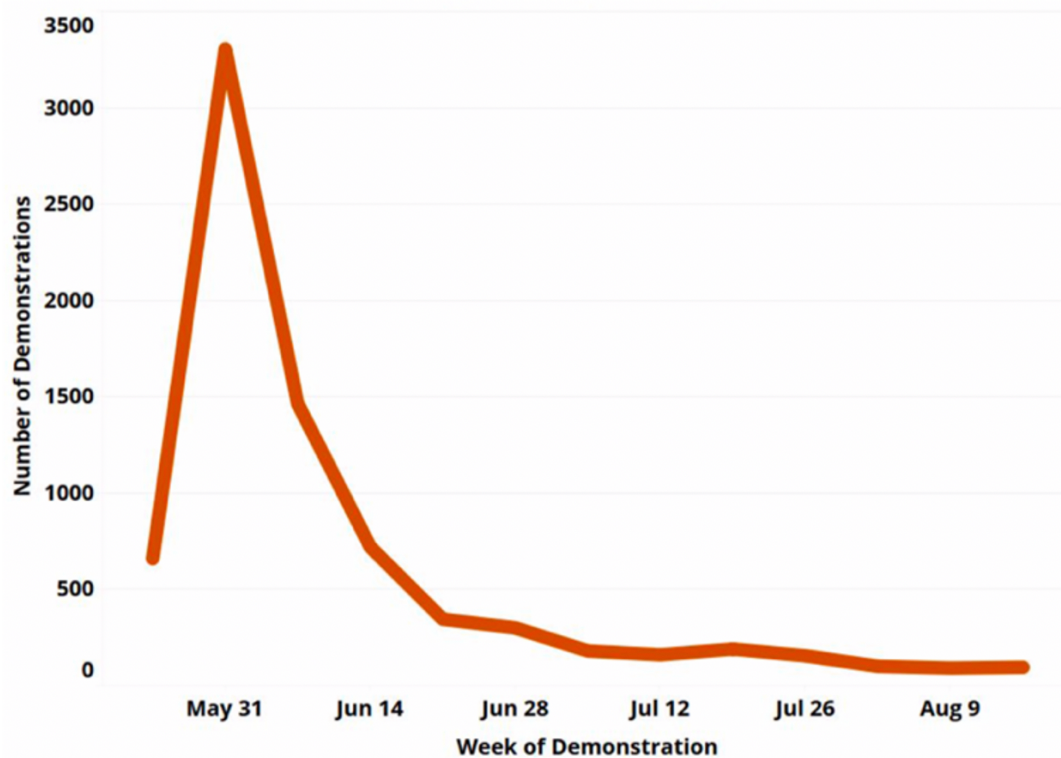
The George Floyd incident led to an eruption of BLM related activism to such an extent that is not comparable to the 'modest' uproar similar incidents have caused in the past. Between May 26<sup>th</sup> and August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, over 7.700 protests and marches took place across



all fifty U.S. states (ACLED, 2020). Other countries quickly followed suit and a worldwide outburst of BLM protests occurred, spread out over six continents and across more than 74 countries. Roughly, a couple thousands of protests occurred ‘overseas’, all in wake of the BLM movement (ACLED, 2020), but there are no precise records. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the course and geographic spread of protests held between May 24<sup>th</sup> and August 22<sup>nd</sup>. Note that figure 2 does not cover Australia.

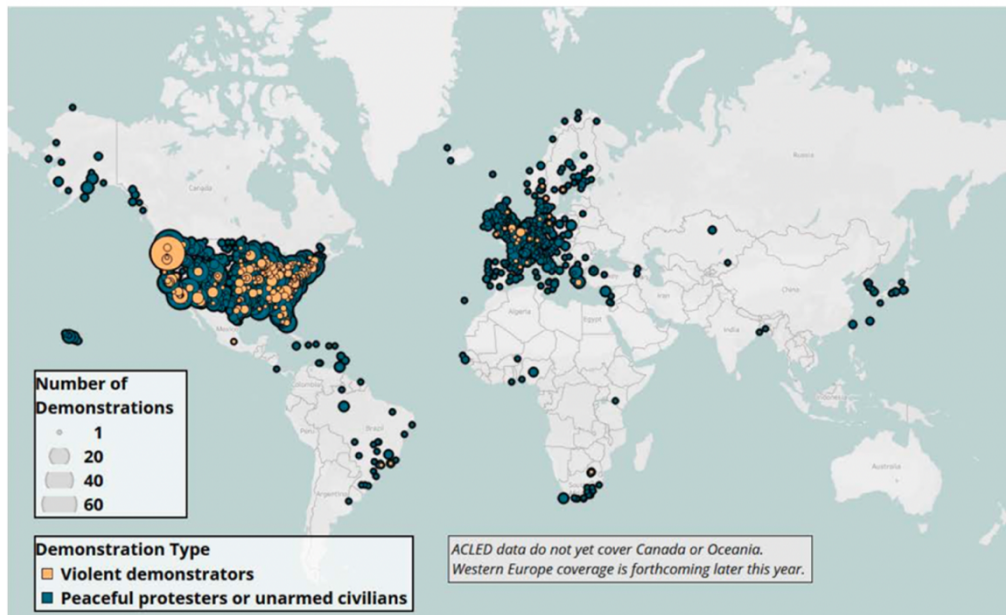
**Figure 1**

*Number of BLM protests per week, across the U.S. (May 24<sup>th</sup> - August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020)*



**Figure 2**

*Geographic spread of worldwide BLM protests (May 24<sup>th</sup> - August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020)*



Altogether, the BLM movement in 2020 embraced an exceptional wave of intercontinental protests, occurring at an extremely high frequency, and including more protesters than ever before. Accordingly, George Floyd's murder effectuated a unique state of affairs, in comparison to any other protest-series that has been part of the BLM movement (Arora, 2020; Putnam et al., 2020). Now the question remains whether there is a well-grounded reason to believe this peak was somehow effectuated by the rising pandemic.

### **Theoretical framework**

The historical background illustrates that the fight against large-scale and institutional racism has been a long and hard-fought process. Nevertheless, the year 2020 marks an exceptional turning point for the BLM movement, especially among one social group, that being BLM allies. This raises three questions: under what sociopolitical circumstances do social movements gain momentum? Why did this movement gain significant momentum

among that particular group? And how can these circumstances be connected to the year 2020?

First, I will elaborate on this particular group and its relation to the BLM movement. After that, important theories on the birth and course of social movements will be discussed.

### **BLM allies**

*Whiteness* or the *white identity* concerns a social construction, wherein one's skin-color and other external features are interconnected with power, wealth and higher social status. In this paper, the term *white* denotes all people that are not socially disadvantaged by their racial appearance, and who identify as white themselves. This definition is closely related to an important concept surrounding the BLM debate; that being *white privilege*, which is defined as 'the absence of the negative consequences of racism' (Eddo-Lodge, 2018, p. 93). Because of this privilege, white people generally have a completely different socioeconomic experience from that of Black, Indigenous and People Of Color, or *BIPOC* (Garcia, 2020). Additionally, political, economic and social power is significantly overrepresented by whiteness, reinforcing a white status quo. The BLM movement aims to dismantle this structural and deep-rooted white domination.

This gives rise to the question: what role do white people play in a movement that fosters the amplification of Black voices? To reiterate, white people that express their involvement with the movement, are considered to be *BLM allies*, due to the fact that they are not personally affected by racial oppression themselves. BIPOC and BLM allies are believed to play a different role within the BLM movement. As an ally, someone is not at the movements' forefront (Al-Malssi, 2020; Philipse, 2020); rather, an ally is there to show support and solidarity to those who are directly discriminated against. BIPOC, but especially Black people are running the race; allies are handing them their towels. Interestingly, this

suggests that white supporters are actually breaking boundaries with the social construction of their whiteness, when engaging with the BLM movement.

As aforementioned, the BLM protests in 2020 included the highest number of non-Black supporters the movement has seen so far. Therefore, there is reason to believe that something had changed this time around.

Throughout this paper, I will make a distinction between BLM allies and BLM sympathizers. ‘Allies’ denotes a stage of active involvement; ‘sympathizers’ can be considered as the stage ‘below’ that, where someone is mindful of the topic, but remains rather inoperative. Considering the direction of this paper, having attended a BLM protest will function as the indicator of active involvement, and thus allyship.

## **Main theories**

Many theories have looked into the birth and course of social movements. However, only a few approaches have become well-recognized and function as the main body of literature. These prominent theories of social movement are able to give some perspectives on the simultaneous occurrence of the pandemic and peaking BLM activism. These perspectives are integrated with the very few existing articles on the interconnectedness between the two phenomena. On that account, each theory is integrated with a case-specific prediction.

### ***Resource mobilization theory***

The *resource mobilization theory* states that in order for a social movement to occur, members of this movement are able to mobilize the appropriate and necessary resources. Some example resources include money, social status and *knowledge* (Clayton, 2018). The latter presumably played a big role in last years’ BLM breakthrough, and relates to the fact that another significant resource became available to a part of society during the pandemic,

that being *time*. In order to constrain the spread of the virus, people were strongly urged to work from home. In reality, this was only an option for the people working office jobs, which are often the higher-educated and wealthier members of society; a socioeconomic category that is underrepresented by racial minorities (Rogers et al., 2020; ACLED, 2020).

Nevertheless, not everyone working from home had more time on their hands: many people had children to take care of, who were also staying home from school. Thus, particularly the people who spend their days at home without having to care for others, therefore also excluding caregivers, were left with newfound ‘unused’ time on their hands. Simultaneously, this might have enabled them to have more frequent access and exposure to the informational content that was propagated during that same time.

Resource mobilization also concerns the mobilization of knowledge and information, which is now facilitated more than ever due to social media. Social media certainly played a big role in last years’ BLM movement: three days after George Floyd was killed, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was tweeted 8.8 million times within 24 hours, and more than 47 million times between May 26<sup>th</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup> (Anderson et al., 2020). Additionally, on #BlackoutTuesday, more than 28 million black squares were posted on Instagram as a sign of solidarity. Furthermore, social media platforms were used to spread valuable information, including protest details, links to appropriate petitions, but most importantly, educational posts. These posts embraced an educational narrative on either BLM history, ideology or allyship, and were meant to encourage others to become engaged with the issue. The large-scale spread of this content functioned as a key feature to the mobilization of last years’ BLM advocacy. According to the Pew Research Center, 12% of U.S. adult social media users indicated that their views on the BLM movement and / or police brutality changed due to information they were exposed to on social media (Perrin, 2020). This same research center showed that 60% of all Black respondents and 37% of all white respondents stated that social

media is important to them in terms of getting involved with a sociopolitical issue (Auxier, 2020). Also, 45% of Black social media users reported that they used an online platform to encourage others to support the BLM movement.

In addition to the fact that social media were heavily used to ignite BLM activism and assemble supporters, people were also spending more time on social media in general, during the pandemic (New York Times, 2020; Gao et al., 2020); which facilitated their access and exposure to this content. Thus, spending more time at home and in turn online, resulted in the fact that this content was able to not only be spread, but also to be noticed to such an extent. Consequently, this might have enabled people to internalize it as well, which then ignited their willingness to become actively involved with the movement (Vissers, 2020).

All in all, the resource mobilization theory suggests that being withheld from ‘normal life’ could explain as to why the people that remain personally unaffected by racism, now had the opportunity to actually consider the topic of racial discrimination, due to the fact that the social restrictions created a momentum for large-scale attention (Washington, 2020).

Prediction 1: Because more time was spent at home and on social media during the pandemic, feelings of involvement among BLM sympathizers were likely to strengthen through (online) knowledge acquisition.

### ***Deprivation theory***

Now, how did this strengthened involvement translate into actual collective action? According to the *deprivation theory*, a social movement is caused by the unjust distribution of societal services or resources: when a part of society feels as if they are deprived of a certain resource that they consider to be essential in order to live a fulfilling life (McAdam et

al., 1988). Those people will then make an attempt to initiate social change, in hopes of obtaining that service or resource.

Racial minorities in particular were more likely to be deprived of appropriate governmental health-protection during the pandemic (Colebrook, 2020; Rogers et al., 2020). Many of the social distancing strategies relied on the assumption that people had some form of socioeconomic safety net at their disposal. However, for many low-SES households, which are overrepresented by members of racial minority groups, this does not reflect their reality. Consequently, COVID-19 contamination was, and still is, strongly racialized (McDonald, 2020; Rogers et al., 2020). Therefore, the willingness to effectuate social change among racially disadvantaged groups, was presumably fueled by the fact that their precarities were amplified because of the pandemic (Colebrook, 2020).

While this narrative pertains to racial minorities in particular, other social groups also felt disadvantaged by the safety restrictions. Studies have reported that especially students felt deprived of important opportunities: study-related opportunities or career-related opportunities that were expected to establish or maintain future careers, or long-awaited travel opportunities. Moreover, many students have reported that the pandemic harmed their academic performance and / or educational plans (Struijs, 2020; Tan, 2020; Aucejo et al., 2020).

Similar to students, many households were deprived of their financial security during the pandemic, especially the ones that already were relatively less financially resilient before the pandemic (Beynon, 2020; Sweet & Swanson, 2021).

Apart from the pandemic resulting in restricted mobility and socioeconomic setbacks, many people also experienced substantial psychological stress. With governmental authorities limiting all non-essential movement, feelings of loneliness and depressive symptoms

significantly increased among different social groups (Panchal et al., 2021; Xiong et al., 2020; Torales et al., 2020).

All in all, many people had reason to feel defeated by the safety restrictions and were left with consequential feelings of deprivation and impotence, accompanied by towering pent-up energy and frustration (Washington, 2020; Cheng & Cheung, 2021). Accordingly, the BLM movement unfolding at that same time might have allowed people to express or relief their frustrations by joining this movement of resistance, thus diverting them from their initial source of frustration. In fact, according to one study (Arora, 2020), people that experienced financial loss as a result of COVID-19, were significantly more likely to have participated in a BLM protest or shown the movement support online. This applied across different racial groups, including black and white respondents.

All things considered, I argue that the willingness to join a protest was expectedly strengthened by the already build-up feelings of frustration a large group of people was left with because of the COVID-19 restrictions and their consequences.

Prediction 2: BLM sympathizers had an increased incentive to protest during the pandemic, because of their frustrations with how the pandemic impacted their (socioeconomic) quality of life.

### ***Political process theory***

Having that incentive, there was still something to consider before deciding to actually join a protest. Because the BLM protests attracted huge crowds of people, they were in direct opposition to the safety measures that were in place at that time (Kampmark, 2020), which only made people's decision to physically join a protest that much more outstanding. Then the question remains: what made them willing to take this risk?



The *political process theory* argues that social movements emerge in the presence of political opportunities for change (Mitchell et al., 1983). Changes are able to occur when a political structure finds itself in a vulnerable position, due to a *crisis of legitimacy*; when the social or economic conditions that are preserved by governmental authorities, are taken into question by members of society.

The spread of COVID-19 has significantly influenced socioeconomic and political structures. With stores and restaurants having to close, and international travel being restricted, the pandemic greatly affected global and local economies. Combined with staggering unemployment benefits, governmental loans and health-care funding, economies worldwide are facing a detrimental economic crisis that is expected to linger for years to come (Berman, 2020). Furthermore, COVID-19 had a significantly polarizing effect on political trust among citizens (Engbersen et al., 2020). Governmental intentions were brought into question by a part of society: their distrust ranged from moderate skepticism to conspiracies that claimed that the entire pandemic was a hoax (Teeffelen, 2020). This ‘newfound’ suspicion towards governmental authorities and its action taking, could be designated as the reason to why political structures were facing a crisis of legitimacy during the pandemic.

However, Colebrook (2020) included an intriguing view in her article, suggesting that the crisis of legitimacy the pandemic brought about, was truly founded in a deep-rooted moral consideration. In her article, Colebrook continues on Nixon’s (2011) definition of *slow violence*, which is a form of violence that generally stays unnoticed, while having destructive consequences. BIPOC have been facing slow violence for centuries, shaped by structural and systemic racism. The centuries-long exclusion of minorities, in terms of healthcare, sufficient income and standard living conditions preceding the pandemic, caused the spread and killing capacity of COVID-19 to be strongly racialized. Consequently, racial violence suddenly

became visible and *faster*. However, it was the recording of George Floyd's murder that triggered "immediate and spectacular visibility" (Colebrook, 2020, p. 498).

With COVID-19 exposing 'the system' for its inability to protect BIPOC in times of crisis, and the simultaneous occurrence of the George Floyd incident, the system's integrity was put into question. In fact, Colebrook (2020) conceptualized George Floyd's murder as "an event that questioned the very value of the world that lockdowns were seeking to save" (p. 499). Additionally, she states that this event "shifted the calculus of the multitude away from how much time in lockdown would be required to save the world, to protests that sought to destroy the world for the sake of life" (p. 499). Reading her article, it could be argued that Floyd's infamous murder caused people to question whether the world needed to be saved from racial oppression, even more than it needed to be saved from the pandemic.

With regards to the political process theory, Colebrook (2020) provides a unique perspective on the crisis of legitimacy, and how this might have turned into a *crisis of morality* when COVID-19 not only coincided with, but also effectuated fast racial violence.

Prediction 3: Because the pandemic and George Floyd's murder both shed a light on a systematic pattern of injustice, demanding social change became more likely to outweigh the importance of adhering to COVID-19 safety measures.

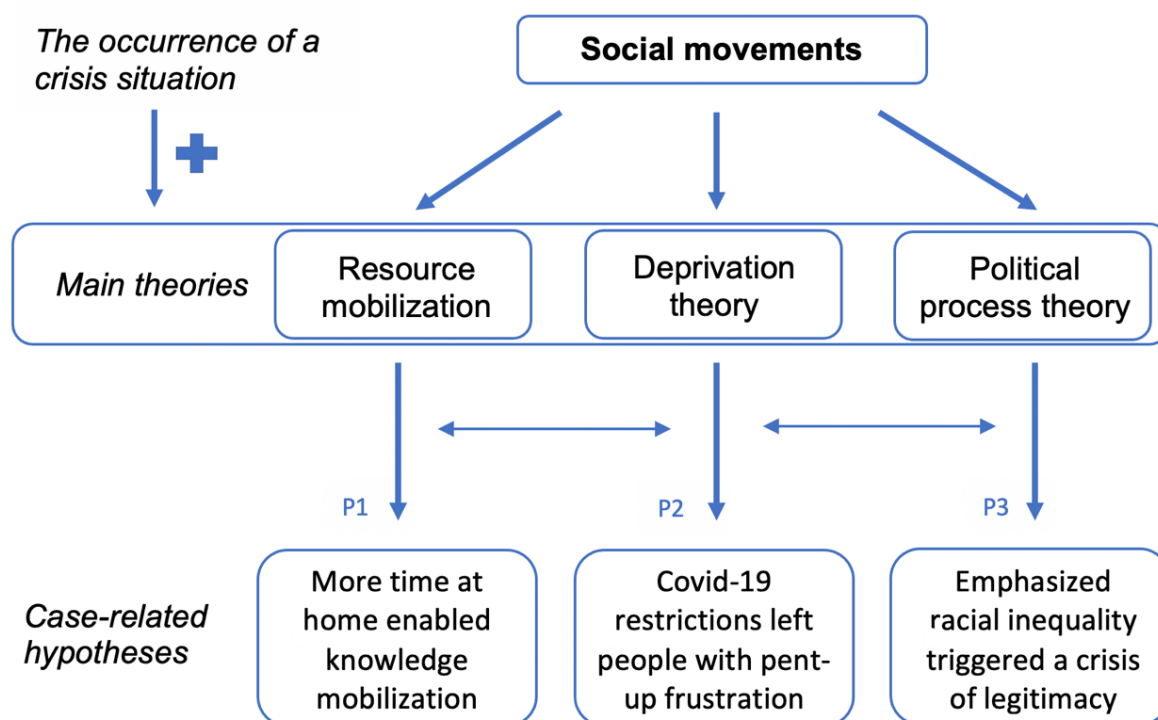
This entire body of literature on social movements emerged in response to the civil rights movement and characterizes an important shift in the scientific approach to social movements. Within the traditional view, social activism was perceived to be disorganized and unplanned, with activists being labeled as "irrational actors charged with emotion" (Clayton, 2018). However, the civil rights movement displayed an exceptional degree of coordination, governance and control, forcing scholars to reinterpret and adjust their understanding of

social movements.

Finally, the fundamental aspects of each theory, that being feelings of deprivation, mobilization of recourses, and governmental vulnerabilities, all appear to have arisen *because of* the pandemic (Figure 3). Accordingly, there is well-founded reason to believe that the BLM revolution we saw in 2020, might have occurred during the pandemic specifically, rather than in spite of the pandemic.

**Figure 3**

*Schematic display theoretical framework*



## **Methodology**

### **Respondents**

First, I conducted a concise series of qualitative interviews with ten BLM allies who attended a BLM protest in the Netherlands. Even though someone can very well be a BLM ally without having attended a protest, the willingness to protest during a pandemic signifies the frame of mind this research seeks to comprehend. Therefore, in order to obtain a true perspective on my research question, respondents needed to have attended a protest.

The predominant age group of the people that attended the BLM protests, ranged between twenty and thirty years old (Mobilewalla, 2020). This same age group is also heavily affected by the COVID-19 restrictions, especially in terms of social life and daily routine. Therefore, the sample group includes respondents from this particular age range.

### **Recruitment and data collection**

I asked ten people from my immediate social circle to be interviewed, and they all agreed. The interview questions revolved around respondents' engagement with the BLM movement over the past eight years. Considering the explorative nature of this research, the interviews were semi-structured and thus involved open-ended questions. All interviews were held face to face and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews were held in Dutch, that being the native language of all respondents. Interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. Based on these transcriptions, responses were analyzed and compared: the goal was to find reoccurring trends within those responses, but to also be observant of distinctive answers.

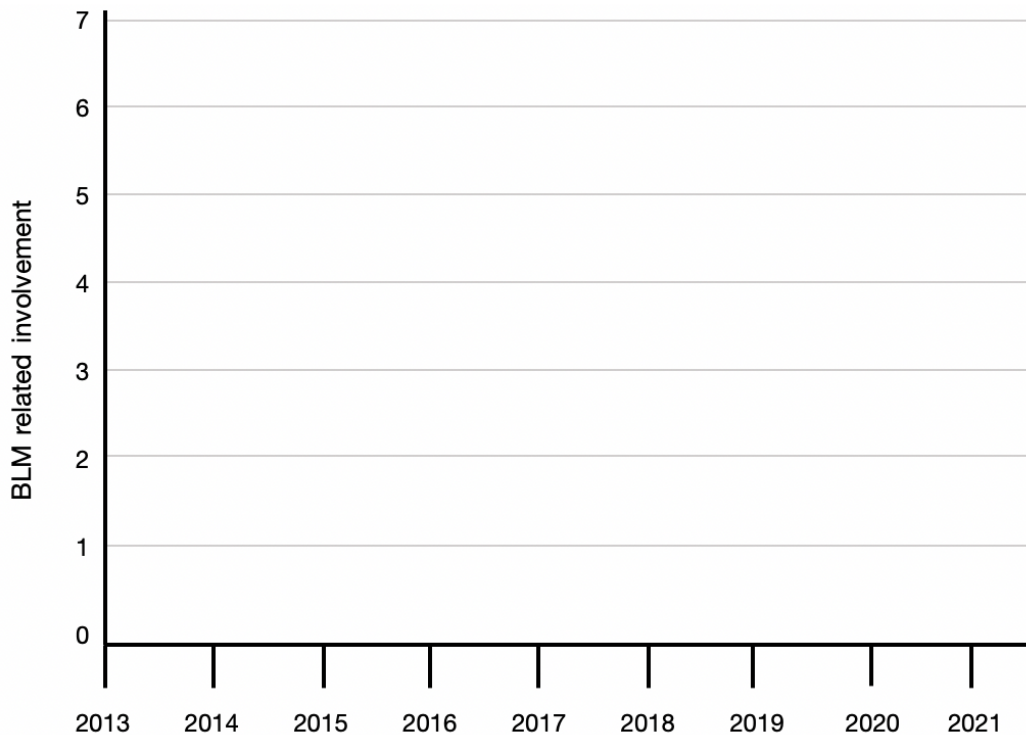
## Procedure

After welcoming a participant, they were informed on the scope of the study: research on the origin and course of social movements, in order for social movements to become more effective in the future. Then, they were told that the study particularly revolved around their BLM involvement. To prevent being leading, they were not told beforehand that the study also looked into the relationship between their involvement and the ongoing pandemic. After that, participants were asked to give their informed consent (appendix B). Then the interview started.

The following series of questions were asked, in this particular order (see appendix C for Dutch translations):

1. In what way do you feel connected to the BLM movement and its sentiment?
2. How is your involvement expressed?
3. How does this involvement effect you in your personal life?
4. Can you describe how you got involved with this movement?

After having answered question 4, respondents were asked to visually conceptualize their involvement with the movement and its sentiment, by using a chronological timeline, depicted in figure 4. The horizontal axis represents this timeline, starting with the year 2013: the year the BLM movement was founded. The vertical axis represents how strongly respondents felt involved with the BLM movement and its sentiment, on a 7-point scale. Respondents received this form on paper, accompanied by an erasable pencil.

**Figure 4***Involvement timeline form*

After respondents were finished, we discussed their timeline together. I asked respondents to describe notable changes and important moments. Then, after the previous years had been discussed, I continued on with question 5 and 6, in order to get their perspective on last year's breakthrough. I assumed that all respondents would draw an upsurge around that time, hence the questions; if that would not have been the case however, I planned to skip to question 7. This turned out to not be necessary during any of the interviews.

5. Why do you think your involvement was strengthened last year / leading up to last year?
6. Do you think the prevailing pandemic somehow affected your involvement?

7. Is it true that you attended a BLM protest last year? How did attending this protest make you feel?
8. What were your considerations to attend a protest while there were safety measures in place that discouraged large gatherings?

## **Implications**

Before interviewing my first respondent, I conducted one pilot interview wherein the respondent wanted to adjust her sketch after debriefing her timeline together. Based on this observation, I chose to explicitly provide each respondent the chance to adjust their initial sketch if they felt that this was necessary. Multiple respondents ended up revising their graph after having discussed it, showing that implementing this option proved to be of added value to the interviews. Only their final version was used for the analysis.

Overall, using the visual timeline ended up being a very helpful tool during the interviews. It enabled respondents to grasp their memory, and thus to elaborate more accurately on the course of their involvement. However, I did observe that some respondents were inclined to draw a relatively gradual timeline, instead of more sudden upsurges, even when this did not exactly match their story. Additionally, some respondents drew their graphs more ‘precisely’ than others. Nevertheless, considering the fact that it concerns very personal and subjective information, this does not invalidate their timeline.

Also, after conducting that same pilot interview, I slightly adjusted two questions.

## **Data processing**

All ten interviews were fully transcribed. Thereafter, respondents’ answers were categorized by means of inductive coding, using the program Atlas.ti (version 1.5.4).

I ended up pinpointing 38 different categories. Based on these inductive categories and their

frequencies, I derived three main themes and seven subthemes from the qualitative interviews. For the finalized codebook, see appendix D.

Due to time constraints, the scope of this research and the amount of data obtained, I conducted a relatively concise analysis. Having coded all interviews and observing all category frequencies, I gathered a clear overview of the main trends and patterns. Therefore, I chose to not continue with a more extensive analysis.

### **Positionality statement**

I myself identify as white, in the sense that I have never been discriminated against on the basis of my skin-color. Racial equality has been an important topic to me for years, but I can honestly say that my own connection to this topic was strengthened in 2020, through the public debate that was sparked by George Floyd's murder. I attended two BLM protests in the Netherlands: one in Rotterdam and one in Utrecht. Since that time, I have wondered why and how these intercontinental protests transpired *then*, considering the fact that the world was already faced with turbulent and unusual times. All this led to me wanting to research whether these two circumstances might have been interconnected, rather than coincidentally occurring.

The people that I interviewed for this study are all people that I know personally. They all identify as white and proclaim that they do not endure any racial oppression or disparities. They all grew up in Rotterdam themselves, and are busy finishing or have already finished a form higher education. My respondents were aware of the fact that I attended at least one BLM protest and were familiar with my general stance on the BLM debate.

Because the BLM debate is socio-politically sensitive, having a personal bond with my respondents and being familiar with each other's shared stance on the topic, allowed us to bypass a certain 'politeness barrier'. We omitted the persuasion of each other's good



intentions, which enabled us to delve deeper into my respondents' true motivations. In addition, myself being white might also have facilitated respondents to answer honestly and upfront, whereas being interviewed by a person of color about anti-racism could have introduced an element of discomfort. Thus, my positionality in relation to the respondents, and my approach to include respondents I personally know, both showed to add strength to my research.

It should be noted that including acquaintances also has the potential for certain things to remain implicit when that information is assumed to be shared knowledge. Therefore, I always asked my respondents to elaborate further on their answer when I felt as though something had remained unsaid, due to a possible implicit understanding.

## **Ethics**

This research used primary data. The data were safely stored on a secure laptop. Each respondent was given a reference number, corresponding to the chronological order the interviews were held in. Respondents' answers or other personal data cannot be traced back to the persons concerned. The research proposal has been approved by the ethics committee, Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences (Appendix E).

## **Results**

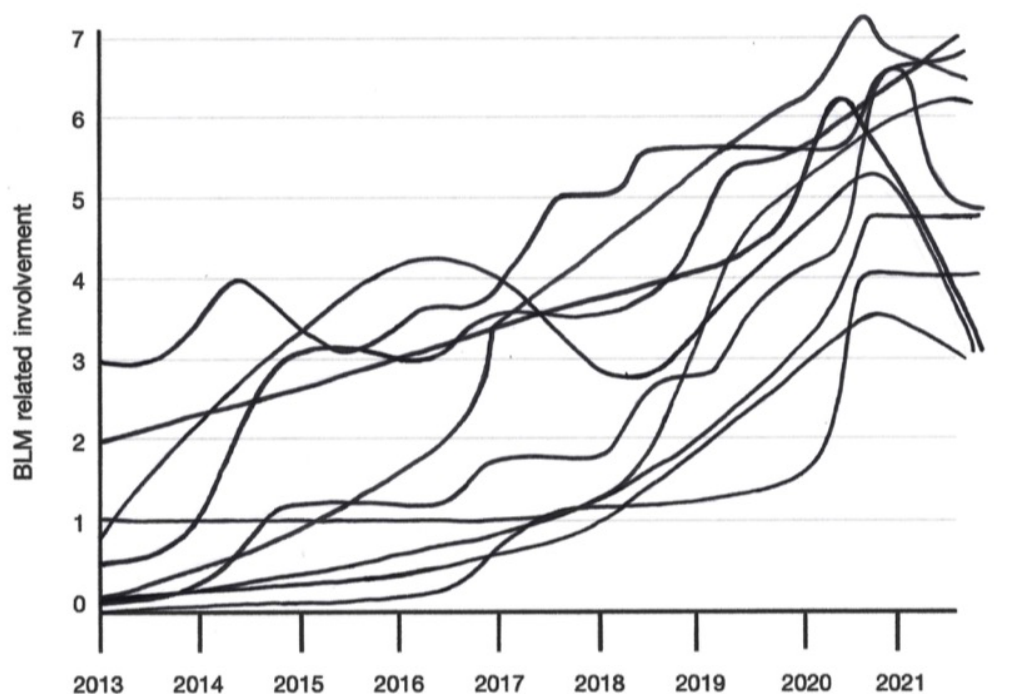
Now, I will discuss the most important themes that emerged, which are represented in a similar order to my codebook. First, I will uncover in what ways my respondents interpret their personal course of BLM involvement. This is necessary to understand and put in perspective the subsequent findings. Then, I will discuss a series of (sub)themes that are directly related to the relationship between the pandemic and BLM activism. Those findings are then used to answer the main research question in the final paragraph.

## Interpretation of personal involvement

Throughout this paragraph, I will discuss my respondents' own interpretations of their graphs. Below, I added a visual that shows all ten graphs that were drawn by my respondents, separately (Figure 5). These graphs concern the self-reported and subjective representations of my respondents' BLM involvement.

**Figure 5**

*BLM involvement: all individual graphs*



By using Excel, I noted my respondents' level of involvement for each half-a-year-mark, and then I generated the overall mean for each of those marks. Figure 6 displays this calculated group mean, which functions as an indication of the general trend of their subjective representations.

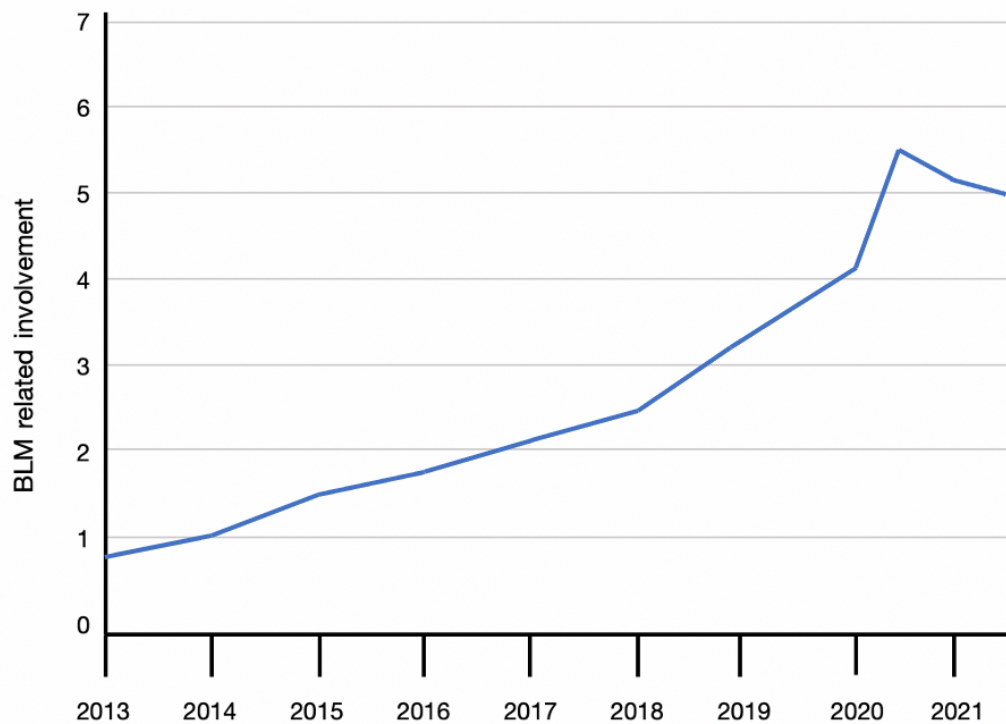
**Figure 6***BLM involvement: group mean*

Figure 5 shows how some respondents experienced a very different trajectory during the years leading up to 2020: some already felt much more involved than others. The fact that the respondents had such individualized trajectories, but yet almost everyone showed an upsurge in 2020, is what makes that year so interesting. That being said, one thing holds true for everyone: each respondent perceived themselves to be involved to a certain extent already, before 2020. This is also reflected in figure 6, that shows how the 2020 peak is preceded by a relatively steady upward trend and followed by a slight decline. Accordingly, figures 5 and 6 both confirm the main premise of this research: the year 2020 marks a notable uprise in BLM related involvement among BLM allies.

As follows, I will uncover how my respondents explained and understood their personal involvement.

Having a ‘colored’ social circle was of the main explanations as to why respondents felt involved earlier on: *nine* respondents expressed that their early involvement was connected to the fact that they were either surrounded by colored peers throughout their high school years, or because they had close relationships with BIPOC, either friendly or romantic. These social contacts either brought about insightful conversations or meaningful observations, that strengthened my respondents’ understanding of the BLM sentiment.

I believe that this shared experience among my respondents unintentionally emphasizes the foundation of what it means to be an *ally*: it means that someone is not personally affected by race-based inequality. Consequently, it seems that it is almost necessary to be confronted with the issue through the relationships one has with the people who are affected by this.

Moreover, four respondents felt that their course of involvement was positively influenced by them becoming more mature throughout the years. They related their maturity to becoming more aware of societal issues in general.

Some respondents remembered a specific matter or experience, other than personal relationships, which signified their feelings of involvement. Respondents either read a certain book, saw a certain documentary, followed a certain study course or had a certain travel experience that changed their understanding of the BLM sentiment.

As aforementioned, the year 2020 includes the strongest upsurge in involvement. This is reflected by the fact that nine respondents affirmed that their involvement was strengthened due to the George Floyd incident, and the wake of civil activism that was evoked as a result. For example, respondents mentioned being touched by seeing the U.S. protest, or having memorable conversations with their inner circle in light of the George Floyd incident. Additionally, four respondents voiced that they felt their involvement had increased in 2020, due to an outburst of BLM related content on their social media that year.

I argue that this shared experience demonstrates how sympathizers have to be fiercely confronted with the issue of racial discrimination, perhaps in multiple ways, for them to become strongly involved. Because their appearance allows them to, and maybe even taught them to not pay attention, their attention needs to be captured and such a ‘trigger-event’ is able to do so.

Regarding the time after the 2020 upsurge, most respondents either reported their involvement to have decreased again, or to have remained unaffected (figure 7). Respondents primarily explained this through the fact that the overall liveliness of the movement has gradually gone down since 2020, and then their involvement also (slightly) decreased. Indeed, no more protests are held in the Netherlands and less related content is posted on social media, which were both important markers of involvement for some respondents. In other words, their attention has faded to a certain extent, because it is no longer actively captured.

It is important to note that not one respondent mentioned the pandemic when they were openly asked about their involvement, or why their involvement strengthened in 2020, if that showed to be the case. The fact that the pandemic was not brought up ‘naturally’ throughout their reasonings, is also telling: it means that *if* the pandemic shows to be of influence, this fact did not consciously cross their minds. In light of the answers they gave, I argue that people tend to reason their societal involvement based of very personal and / or tangible experiences; circumstances that do not appear to be directly related to the cause, are not taken into account.

Nevertheless, when I did explicitly ask them about the possible impact of the pandemic, they did have well-reasoned and insightful answers. This is further discussed in the following paragraph.

## **Pandemics' influence on involvement**

Resulting from the question whether or not my respondents thought that their involvement was somehow influenced by the pandemic in 2020, I observed two types of interpretations among their answer, which I will now go on to discuss.

### *Involvement strengthened*

When asked, seven respondents believed that their involvement was strengthened due to the social restrictions that followed the initial outbreak. All seven of them expressed that they had more opportunity to become actively involved, because they had more downtime and less social distractions during the pandemic. One respondent conceptualized this shared experience by saying:

I think that before, our daily life actually just went on and because there was no pandemic, you just think less about almost everything in your life, actually. You just keep going from one day to the next and then suddenly a year has passed. Now with the pandemic, all of that actually comes to a standstill and therefore you just have a lot more time to focus on things that are not prominent in your daily life.  
(resp. 1, V, 23)

Another respondent shared this, regarding the time the BLM protests occurred:

Especially then, then it had just started actually. It had been only two months or so, that all of us were in the pandemic; nothing had been arranged at all, so everyone was really at home. So there was little distraction either, there were few other things to keep you busy with. (resp. 7, F, 21)

Three respondents explicitly mentioned them simultaneously spending more time on social media, while spending more time at home. According to them, they were continuously exposed to and confronted with BLM related content, because they spent a great amount of time on their phone. One respondent said:

I'm not outside, I'm not out for dinner, I'm not going to restaurants, I'm not going out, so I'm just scrolling on my phone instead of going out and then I just see a lot more information than I would have actually seen if I was doing other things. (resp. 4, F, 22)

After that, she stated this with regards to that information: “Normally you think about it for a moment, but then you go out immediately afterwards, so then you lose sight of it a bit. But now it lingered more.” Another respondent made an additional point to this by stating:

So I think because you were confronted with it all the time, it hit you extra hard, because as soon as you put your phone away and you get on with your life, then it's not there, especially if you are white. (resp. 7, F, 21)

Thus, the majority of respondents acknowledged that life during a pandemic enabled them to become more informed about, and therefore more regardful of the BLM sentiment. Their answers also reflect an interplay between factors that explains how the pandemic facilitated this process. As aforementioned, certain people have the privilege of not having to worry about racial discrimination, especially when they have a lot of other things going on in their life. Based on their answers, my respondents appeared to be very aware of this fact. However, the pandemic threw a spanner in the works and forced people to put a hold on their active lives. During that same time, the George Floyd incident occurred, which evoked a worldwide reaction, both online and offline. Because it happened during a time wherein there was little opportunity to look away or seek distraction for those who normally

would have, this group of people was now forced to face the reality BIPOC are hardly able to escape, inside and outside of a pandemic. Additionally, because there were so little distractions, people turned their phones, which were simultaneously blowing up with BLM related content; forcing people to face the facts even more.

Finally, one respondent interpreted her involvement in relation to the pandemic in a way that has not been considered yet throughout this paper. She said:

Because of the pandemic, you reach that kind of *core* or something, you are more dependent on yourself, and more distractions disappear. So then you become more in touch with yourself, and closer to what you feel; then your emotional involvement also opens up more. (resp. 10, F, 23)

She continued by saying: “If I am more in touch with my feelings, then I can also reach the feelings of others more, so through those emotions I can also become more involved in these kinds of movements.” Because she was able to deeply connect with herself and her emotions, she was also able to empathize with other people’s emotions more. With that said, she is the only respondent to address an intriguing psychological effect of the pandemic. Her interpretation sheds a novel light on the potential relationship between the pandemic and someone’s sociopolitical engagement; a light that remains underexposed throughout the body of literature that focuses more on rational motives. Therefore, the concerning theories seem to overlook the role of empathy and compassion, which, according to this one respondent, were strengthened during the pandemic.

I briefly mentioned the emotional aspect of social activism earlier; before the civil right movements, social activists were considered to be irrational and ‘charged with emotion’. Academics later on moved away from this idea, but this respondents’ experience seems to relate to it in a sense. However, my interpretation of this experience is that the pandemic



indirectly allowed her to be more regardful of other people's sorrow. For me, this does not mean that she was 'overcome' by her emotions, as is suggested by the former paradigm. Rather, I would argue that it uncovers an emotional element that has not been considered yet; maybe because the COVID-19 outbreak brought about extremely distinct circumstances, compared to other crises.

From this viewpoint, the answers that were given by the other respondents, regarding the same question, are put into a slightly different perspective. Whereas those answers reflected how the pandemic signified their feelings of involvement, this form of reasoning might have missed an intermediate step; maybe, the pandemic strengthened their ability to empathize, which then strengthened their willingness to be involved.

### *Involvement unaffected*

In contrast to the majority of respondents, three of my respondents stated that the course of their personal involvement remained unaffected by the pandemic. One respondent specifically stated that she did not have more time on her hands during the pandemic, due to the fact that she was working at a hospital fulltime. Therefore, she did not have more opportunity to be concerned with social issues, compared to her pre-pandemic life. However, she proceeded by saying "but other people probably did, and much more was written about it then, because people had more time to do that, so in that sense yes" (resp. 8, F, 24). With that being said, this respondent revealed the other side of the coin: because the pandemic did not affect her time wise, her personal involvement remained unaffected by the pandemic. This inversely confirms the idea that the pandemic was in fact of influence.

One of the other two respondents did acknowledge that she spent more time on social media during the pandemic, along with the fact that her social media were filled with BLM related content. She then said: "I think I have been more conscious about it as a result"

(resp. 5, F, 22). However, she explicitly stated that she did not think the pandemic significantly affected the course of her personal involvement.

The third respondent believed that the BLM movement was partly overshadowed by the public concerns surrounding the pandemic. She stated that news outlets were primarily covering COVID-related headlines, that the pandemic resulted in less opportunity to discuss the topic with others, and that the pandemic withheld people from attending the BLM protest (resp. 2, F, 22). Only this last respondent reasoned how the pandemic might have had a counterproductive effect; the other two respondents still recognized a general shift in media attention, directed towards the BLM movement.

It should be noted that the resource mobilization theory originates from a few decades ago, while the phenomenon of *trending*, especially online, is fairly new. Therefore, this theory does not uncover how a topic becomes trending.

### **Deciding to attend a protest**

The previous paragraph revealed why the pandemic did or did not influence my respondents' involvement. Regardless of how they interpreted this premise, all of them reported to have felt strongly involved in 2020. This next theme explores why and how their involvement transpired into engaging in a physical protest during the pandemic.

When being asked about their considerations to join a protest during the midst of a pandemic, eight respondents deemed the BLM movement as important enough to make an exception on the COVID-19 safety measures; five of them regarded the movement as *more* important explicitly. One respondent elaborated on her decision to join a protest by stating:

“No matter how horrifying COVID is, you will not hear me denying that, but this is something that has been going on for a long time; a pandemic that kind of infected us all, you know, we all kind of have the racism virus and this felt

like...How can you compare it? The first lockdown, to banish the virus. This was the first step, and then you have to prioritize. For me it was, say something that's temporary against something that has so much history and has been present for so long, and it just has to be over. (resp. 3, F, 21)

Another respondent said this, with regards to the protest taking place during a pandemic:

Whether that is totally responsible to all healthcare employees, facing the crisis we are all trying to fight against, I don't know. But is it responsible that people are still being oppressed and that there is still racism every day, also in the Netherlands, which many people still want to deny? Also no. (resp. 6, F, 21)

First and foremost, it is clear that the respondents interpreted their decision to attend a protest as an issue of morality, which shows that there was a general understanding of the fact that ethical questions could be raised regarding their choice. Therefore, the decision to still attend a protest, proves that they believed that it had to be done, regardless of other things going on. Many people did not share this understanding at that time, given the fact that the protests became a rather controversial topic. Joining a protest in spite of that, as an *ally*, required someone to observe the issue more selflessly, and to recognize that not everyone had the chance to wait until the pandemic was over, to worry about the issue. Therefore, I argue that these representations might reflect that strengthened sense of empathy and understanding, which I described earlier on in relation to one respondent's narration on how the pandemic reinforced her emotional involvement.

Furthermore, attending a protest also seems to reflect another shared perspective among my respondents: that racism has brought too much suffering for it to be disregarded by the suffering that was caused by the pandemic. With that said, in a way, it seems as if the relatively 'short-lived' pandemic might have put centuries of sorrow into perspective, causing

the pandemic to function as a frame of reference for some, instead of a reason to not get (physically) involved, as other people considered it to be.

From that point of view, I argue that the pandemic might have functioned as a magnifying glass in relation to the BLM movement, but in a slightly different way than Colebrook (2020) reasoned this relationship. Whereas she described how the pandemic exposed a structural pattern of oppression, in turn causing the BLM sentiment to be emphasized, I hypothesize that people might have become more perceptible to human grief. Again, this is closely connected to my earlier narrative on strengthened empathy functioning as an intermediate step. While the pandemic might have brought some people closer to themselves, as one respondent expressed, the pandemic also brought about a sense of collective suffering, through the feeling that everyone was going through it together. This experience might have caused some people to feel more closely connected to and be more mindful of others. Because almost everyone was suddenly faced with adversity due to the pandemic, and therefore found themselves in an unfortunate situation, I argue that some people were prompted to reinterpret their selfhood in relation to others, and maybe even in relation to adversity in general. Accordingly, also argue that this process was more likely to transpire among the people who experienced relatively less social adversity during their pre-pandemic life.

All in all, life during a pandemic presumably reinforced people's emotional awareness and involvement, causing them to become more regardful of others' suffering. That being said, the pandemic and the BLM movement do not seem to have transpired completely independently of each other.

This idea is also reflected by the fact that five respondents even expressed to have attended a protest, in order to make the necessary statement: joining a protest in spite of the safety concerns would signal the importance of the BLM movement. One respondent said:

“Maybe timing wise you could say ‘well, this isn’t perfect’, but on the other hand I think it also shows how urgent it is that change needs to come” (resp. 6, V, 21). After that, she addressed the public controversy surrounding the protests, and said: “Then I might say something crazy, but negative attention is also attention. Maybe people should start thinking about it for a while then, why it is so important and why people did it anyway”. Another respondent stated the following, with regards to the timing of the protests: “I think on the one hand, the fact that those restrictions were in place, but that we all wanted it so badly, that actually helped make the point we wanted to make. Like okay, it is *that* important” (resp. 2, V, 22).

Interestingly, this reflects how they are understanding of the fact that the people who are not personally affected by racial inequality, need a rude awakening for them to become conscious of this matter. Not only that; some people also ‘used’ the pandemic as a tool to plead their case and trigger this rude awakening. Again, this also suggests that the two phenomena cannot be thought of as *just* having lived side-by-side.

There was only one respondent who addressed the direct relationship between the pandemic and race-based inequality. Asking her whether she thought the pandemic influenced her involvement in any way, she answered by saying:

I do think the pandemic has exposed structures of inequality. Because you can immediately see who has been hit the hardest: where those people live, what those people do and what those people look like. And then you can really only draw one conclusion: those are not people like me. (resp. 3, V, 21)

By saying that, she affirmed Colebrook’s narrative on *fast* and *visible violence*: she recognized how racial minorities remained unprotected during the pandemic, and how that amplified a pattern of racial inequality. With that being said, she is the only respondent who reasoned her decision to protest as *due to* the pandemic, rather than in spite of the pandemic.

Moreover, it is very important to point out that none of the respondents mentioned anything with regards to them being frustrated with or affected by the safety measures and stay-at-home-orders. Certainly, none of them mentioning this topic can be explained through the fact that it truly did not influence their involvement.

Nonetheless, social desirability remains a persistent bias within qualitative interviewing; and admitting to attending a protest out of frustration instead of solidarity, depicts a trait that is less socially desirable. Therefore, it could still be possible that underlying frustrations did in fact have something to do with my respondents' decision to actively join the BLM movement.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Before all else, it should be noted that this research included a fairly concise analysis: only ten respondents were interviewed, who were all around the same age, and grew up in the same city. Moreover, this study is situated in the specific context of the Netherlands, where most citizens have unlimited access to online content and are free to organize and attend social protests. Therefore, in order to gain a more profound understanding of social activism in times of crisis, additional research needs to be conducted with different sample groups and in other areas where citizens do not have the same resources and opportunities.

Also, it is important to be reminded of the fact that the COVID-19 outbreak brought about very distinct circumstances, that are different from other crises. Thus, not every crisis situation is expected to 'naturally' effectuate similar outcomes. Again, further research is required to further explore this question.

As follows, I will now discuss what the previous results suggest in relation to my predictions.

The majority of my respondents seem to confirm the resource mobilization theory, along with the first prediction: because more time was spent at home and on social media during the pandemic, feelings of involvement among BLM sympathizers were likely to strengthen through (online) knowledge acquisition. The second prediction, embedded in the deprivation theory, was not attested to by my respondents: BLM sympathizers did not have an increased incentive to protest during the pandemic, because of their frustration with how the pandemic impacted their (socioeconomic) quality of life.

Finally, the political process theory, and in turn the third prediction were partly confirmed: because the pandemic and George Floyd's murder both shed a light on a systematic pattern of injustice, demanding social change became more likely to outweigh the importance of adhering to COVID-19 safety measures. The majority of respondents primarily attested to the second fragment of prediction; demanding protection for Black lives momentarily outweighed the importance of the pandemic. The first fragment was only addressed by one respondent.

With two out of the three predictions attested to, this study suggests that there is indeed a connection between the pandemic and the BLM breakthrough.

Moreover, I proposed a possible reinterpretation of the relationship between these two phenomena, or the way the pandemic 'shed a light' on the BLM sentiment. Instead of deeming the pandemic as simply an 'outside influence' that prompted people to become more involved, it might also have simultaneously triggered something 'from within': a strengthened sense of emotional involvement, directed towards others. Therefore, that emotional aspect which no longer plays a substantial role in current theories, since the theoretical paradigm shifted, does seem to be of influence, which may identify a flaw in the current theoretical consensus on social movements.

Why and how the pandemic might have influenced our feelings of empathy remains partly undefined, but one explanation might concern the realization that suffering can happen to anyone, which is realized because one finds themselves in a crisis situation, and therefore someone becomes more regardful and understanding of others who have been suffering, or human suffering in general. Accordingly, being confronted with unforeseen adversity, would prompt someone to become more perceptible to the adversities of others.

Considering the scope of this research, this question cannot be further explored, but I suggest that Psychology literature might be able to provide helpful insights and contribute to obtaining a broader understanding of social movements.

All taken together, the results carefully suggest that the ruling pandemic effectuated an uprise in BLM related involvement, among those who had the privilege of being less operative or involved before, due to them not personally being affected by the issue of racism. While this can be partly explained by the resource mobilization theory and the political process theory, this study also suggests the presence of an underexposed emotional component.

Finally, the pandemic effectuated the perfect opportunity for a particular group of people to become very involved with the issue of racism, which only highlights the fact that those people have the privilege of being relatively unbothered by it throughout normal life. Now that the pandemic seems to be coming to an end, it is now our job to continue this course of involvement and take on this responsibility ourselves.



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## Appendices

### **APPENDIX A: CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF IMPORTANT POLICE KILLINGS THAT GENERATED PUBLIC UNREST**

In 2014, an African American man named Eric Garner died after being wrestled to the ground by multiple police officers, with one of them taking Garner into a chokehold. The videorecording of this incident reached nationwide attention and following the jury's decision to not indict the officer that suffocated him, tens of protests took place in different U.S. cities, and one rally in London.

In that same year, surveillance videos of a twelve-year-old boy, named Tamir Rice being fatally shot by a police officer (Luibrand, 2015) were released, along with a related 911 call. The case was covered by multiple media outlets, and provoked minor protests in Cleveland, where the incident had taken place.

In 2018, another African American man named Stephon Clark was killed by the police. Police bodycam recordings were published, causing numerous protests to be held in Sacramento, the city where the incident occurred.

There have also been similar incidents that were not recorded, yet still effectuated a substantial number of protests. One primary example is the case of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African American man who was fatally shot by a police officer in 2014. After the shooting *and* after a jury decided to not indict the officer three month later, weeklong protests and riots erupted in Ferguson; now known as the 'Ferguson unrest'. Some protests were met with heavy police force and turned violent, in turn drawing national attention. Protests were also held in a number of other U.S. cities. During these two waves of the Ferguson unrest, over 250 estimated protests took place in total.

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

### INFORMED CONSENT



Project Title	BLM allies in 2020.
Name of Principal Investigator	Anna Lambert.
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Anna Lambert. I am inviting you to participate in this research project about being a BLM ally. The broader goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of your involvement with the BLM movement.
Procedures	You will participate in an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. You will be asked questions about your involvement with the Black Lives Matter movement. You must identify as white, and you must have attended a BLM-protest in 2020.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are no obvious physical, legal or economic risks associated with participating in this study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to discontinue your participation at any time.
Potential Benefits	Participation in this study does not guarantee any beneficial results to you.
Confidentiality	<p>Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No personally identifiable information will be reported in any research product. Moreover, only trained research staff will have access to your responses. Within these restrictions, results of this study will be made available to you upon request.</p> <p>This research project involves making audio recordings of interviews with you. The audio recordings, forms, and other documents created or collected as part of this study will be stored in a secure location in the researchers' offices or on the researcher's password-protected computers and will be destroyed within ten years of the initiation of the study.</p>
Compensation	There will be no compensation after participating in this research.



<b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact the primary investigator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name: Anna Lambert</li> <li>- Email: anna.lambert@xs4all.nl</li> <li>- Phone number: 0031618337000</li> </ul>	
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree that you will participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
<b>Audio recording</b>	<p>I consent to have my interview audio recorded</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no</p>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	NAME PARTICIPANT	NAME PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
	SIGNATURE	SIGNATURE
	DATE	DATE

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN DUTCH

The following series of questions were asked, in this particular order:

1. Op welke manier voel jij je verbonden aan de BLM-beweging en het bijpassende sentiment?
2. Hoe uit jouw betrokkenheid zich?
3. Hoe beïnvloedt deze betrokkenheid jou in je privéleven?
4. Kan je beschrijven op welke manier je betrokken bent geraakt bij deze beweging?
5. Hoe denk jij dat het komt dat jouw betrokkenheid vorig jaar/naar aanloop van vorig jaar werd versterkt?
6. Denk jij dat de heersende pandemie jouw betrokkenheid op een bepaalde manier heeft beïnvloed?
7. Klopt het dat jij vorig jaar een BLM-protest hebt bijgewoond? Hoe voelde jij je tijdens het bijwonen van deze protest?
8. Wat waren jouw overwegingen om een protest bij te wonen op een moment waarop er coronamaatregelen van kracht waren die grote samenkomsten afraadden?

## APPENDIX D: CODEBOOK

Main theme	Subthemes	Categories	Interpretations / Variation / Quotes
<b>Personal relationship with BLM</b>	Feelings of connectedness	Empathizing with injustice	"Because how can I sleep, knowing that people are treated so poorly, because of something so insignificant"
		Multicultural social environment	- being raised in Rotterdam - culturally diverse school - close relationship with POC
		Duty / responsibility	"It really feels like an obligation, because they say: 'you are only free when everyone is free', and that is truly how I see it"
		Recognizing own privilege	
	Expression of involvement	Dialogue with social circle	- friends - family - acquaintances
		Self-education	- reading books or articles - watching the news - listening to podcasts - learning from others
		Joined a protest	
		(re)posting on social media	"I shared a lot of posts on Instagram, mainly about the BLM movement in the Netherlands"
		Incorporating BLM sentiment in job / internship / study	"During my internship, I wrote texts about stories, and I thought it was important that when it was about someone of color, not to mention that"
		Recognizing / adjusting internal prejudice	"I think that those prejudices that you have in yourself, and then really neutralize those"
	Important markers BLM allyship	Colored social circle	- culturally diverse school

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- close relationship with POC</li> <li>- colored romantic partner</li> </ul>
		George Floyd and following unrest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- George Floyd video</li> <li>- BLM protests in the U.S.</li> <li>- Suddenly BLM was everywhere</li> </ul>
		Maturity	"At that age, I was starting to become more aware of the world, I was evolving as a person"
		Social media engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- posting / re-posting</li> <li>- knowledge acquisition</li> <li>- BLM explosion because of algorithm</li> </ul>
		Engagement through other communicative channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- books</li> <li>- documentary / movie</li> <li>- television</li> <li>- hip hop</li> </ul>
		Study or work	"A big part of my Bachelor study was about power and identity, and how that is formed in relation to other people"
		Travelling	
		BLM protest in 2020	
		Other	"There was a janitor at our school, who posted extremely racist content on his Facebook"
<b>Pandemics influence on involvement</b>	Involvement strengthened	More time spent at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more time to read and learn about BLM</li> <li>- less distraction / less active</li> <li>- able to attend a protest</li> </ul>
		More time spent online / on social media	"You couldn't really get through a day by putting down your phone, that happened a lot less"
		More opportunity to be mindful of others	"because of the pandemic, you become more in touch with yourself, and in turn your emotional involvement opens up"

		Pandemic highlighted social inequalities	
	Involvement unaffected	Did not have more time	
		BLM was overpowered by COVID-related content	"Because then there was a new vaccine again, that it disappears in the background"
		Course of involvement was unaffected	"Even if there wouldn't be a pandemic, and that would still have happened to George, I still would have gone to a BLM protest"
Protesting during the pandemic	Feelings during protest	Solidarity / unity	
		Sadness / heavy	- sad that it had to be done - helpless feeling - you could feel the pain
		Uncomfortable because of whiteness	"Especially at that time, the question prevailed: white people, what are you doing this for?"
		Worrying about it being a hype / not effective	"Did people come to collect their karma points?"
		A mix of emotions	
		Safety discussion in the back of their mind	
	Decision to attend protest	BLM was of bigger importance in the end	"Racism is something that has been going on for so long; a pandemic that has infected us all"
		It could not wait any longer / momentum	
		As a statement to show its importance	"Maybe people should start thinking about it for a while, why it is so important and why people did it anyway"
		To express allyship	
		Safety was taken into consideration	- wearing masks / keeping a safe distance

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- it took place outside</li><li>- not being part of any high-risk group oneself</li></ul>
		The more people, the bigger the impact	

## APPENDIX E: ETHICS AND PRIVACY CHECKLIST



### INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website ([http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page\\_id=17](http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17)). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

### PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Thesis final version

Name, email of student: Anna Lambert -- 579130al@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Marieke van Houte -- vanhoute@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: February – June 20<sup>th</sup>.

Is the research study conducted within DPAS YES - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?  
(e.g. internship organization)

## PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - NO

*If 'NO': skip to part V.*

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES - NO  
 Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES - NO

*If 'YES': skip to part IV.*

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

*If 'YES': skip to part IV.*

## PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO

*Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*

Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - NO

Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO



Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - **NO**

Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - **NO**

Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - **NO**

Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - **NO**

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

*My study is on the participation in Black Lives Matter protests and involvement with the movement. Therefore, my topic indirectly involves political issues. In order to not be leading, they will not be fully informed about the nature of the study.*

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

No.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

No.

#### **PART IV: SAMPLE**

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

At my own home or the home of the respondents.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

10 respondents.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

People who attended a BLM protest in the Netherlands, between 20 and 30 years old.

#### **Part V: Data storage and backup**

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

- I will record the interviews on my phone.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

- Myself.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

- One time. After transcribing the interviews, the recordings will be deleted.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

- I will know the respondents myself, but I will not use their names in my study. Each respondent will be given a number. Therefore, the transcription files are not able to be traced back.

## **PART VI: SIGNATURE**

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

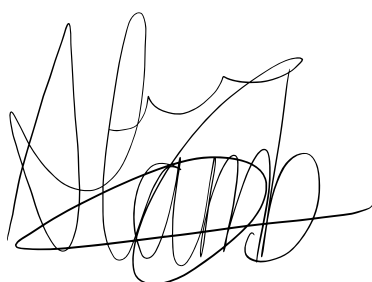
Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Anna Lambert

Name (EUR) supervisor: Marieke van Houte

Date: 20/06/2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Anna Lambert', written in a cursive style.