

Factors Shaping Public Opinion on Social Movements during Political Instability

A Case Study on Black Lives Matter (BLM)

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• Abstract

The research discusses the various demographic and non-demographic factors mobilizing public opinion in favor of social movements represented by the mass movement of Black Lives Matter (BLM) during political transitions. It aims at answering the question of how social movements can gain the support of public based on the examination of demographic and non-demographic factors. The hypothesis is that social movements acquire power from demographic factors such as race, gender and political identification in addition to non-demographic factors represented by social media, mass media, and technology. The research would focus on the American public opinion using the survey findings from Roper iPoll which indicates a significant relation between BLM, political identification, gender, race and use of information technology in validating social movements. The study concludes that public support for BLM is prejudged by demographic factors including race and political identification more than factual information transmitted by information technology as a non-demographic factor.

Keywords: social movement, public opinion, political instability, black lives matter, racial discrimination.

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Factors Shaping Public Opinion on Social Movements during Political Instability: A Case Study on Black Lives Matter (BLM)

العوامل التي تشكل الرأي العام حول الحركات الاجتماعية اثناء عدم الاستقرار السياسي
دراسة حالة حياة السود مهمة

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• ملخص:

يناقش البحث مختلف العوامل الديموغرافية وغير الديموغرافية التي تحشد الرأي العام لصالح الحركات الاجتماعية المتمثلة في الحركة الجماهيرية لحركة حياة السود مهمة (BLM) خلال التحولات السياسية. ويهدف إلى الإجابة على سؤال حول كيفية حصول الحركات الاجتماعية على دعم الجمهور بناءً على فحص العوامل الديموغرافية وغير الديموغرافية. الفرضية هي أن الحركات الاجتماعية تكتسب قوتها من العوامل الديموغرافية مثل العرق والجنس والهوية السياسية بالإضافة إلى العوامل غير الديموغرافية المتمثلة في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ووسائل الإعلام والتكنولوجيا. سيركز البحث على الرأي العام الأمريكي باستخدام نتائج الاستطلاع الذي أجراه Roper iPoll والذي يشير إلى وجود علاقة مهمة بين BLM والهوية السياسية والجنس والعرق واستخدام تكنولوجيا المعلومات في التحقق من صحة الحركات الاجتماعية. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن الرأي العام تجاه حركة BLM يستمد قوته من العوامل الديموغرافية بما في ذلك العرق والهوية السياسية أكثر من كونه مستند على حقائق كما تتداولها تكنولوجيا المعلومات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحركة الاجتماعية، الرأي العام، عدم الاستقرار السياسي، حياة السود مهمة، التفرقة العنصرية



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- **Introduction**

The past decade had witnessed numerous political violent events in the United States during the presidential elections 2020, which witnessed many protesting movements calling for stopping racial-based violence mainly by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Presidential elections of 2020 and BLM protests had magnified violent confrontations between the supporters of Ex. President Donald Trump and currently President Joe Biden.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the public of American citizens belonging to various demographic features and political orientation perceive the BLM movement, whether they support or oppose it. For example, the movement escalated the political polarization existing between Republicans and Democrats and substantially caused obvious shift in many people's political views. According to the democrats narrative, Trump administration has been reinforcing racism and the killing of people of color including George Floyd would be the normal outcome of the overall racial discrimination manifested by the regime, little governmental support for black minorities, and absence of social justice. On the other hand, the republicans have another narrative which presumes that the BLM is a social movement existed since 2013 which was taken advantage of during the elections in order to impact its outcome, giving that the dramatic incident of killing George Floyd occurred in a democratic state, nevertheless was unfairly attributed to the republican regime.

Current studies highlighted the relationship between BLM and the choice of political leaders from the public perspective; others focused on how the movement has impacted public policy, how Trump regime was involved in aggravating racial crimes. This

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study focuses on how the republican leadership which is perceived publicly by perpetuating racism have contributed to enlarged public support for BLM.

Another hypothesis is that BLM as a social movement could gain the public support also deploying the social media. Public opinion, political actors, and social media and technology played a pivotal role in activating the influence of the movement but social media role in mobilizing public opinion would be the major theme in this study in addition to how communities from different ethnic and political identifications tend to have a prejudice or stereotyping towards BLM.

Problem Statement and Purpose of Research

Worldwide, racial discrimination and hatred crimes have been increasing due to the exposure to technology platforms and during political instability sustained by a change in the political regime. In the US, racial inequality has been one of the major issues on the political agenda because of the diversified nature of the American society. This racial injustice had been exhibited basically against the blacks in the form of hatred crimes throughout the American history up to present.

The BLM is a continuing movement which emerged as an attempt to defend Blacks' rights and advance racial justice which sparked many waves of protests right before the presidential elections in 2020 due to the murder of George Floyd. This incident was associated to the existing political regime at the time and escalated accusations of racial injustice practiced by the republican regime. The issue was framed as the only solution to restore racial equity and justice is to have democrats in power. As current studies strongly correlates the BLM protests to the public preferences of political leadership, the question of whether Blacks demands and rights were fulfilled within the democrats ruling or remained the same, should be answered to better judge if racial crimes are considered a state level or individual level acts, and therefore suggest recommendations.



The research aims at analysing the public opinion and how people perceive BLM, to find out how the movement affected their support or opposition based on demographic factors associated with their ethnic group or political orientation, and non-demographic factors such as social media, news, and technology.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The research would be based on original empirical surveys from Roper iPoll targeting American citizens who might be supporters or opponents of the BLM to answer the following research questions drawn from the major research question of:

What makes the public support or oppose social movements? Sub-questions include:

1. How the public perceive BLM based on their ethnicity and political views?
2. How news and social media contribute to public perception of BLM?

The basic research hypothesis is that people tend to judge BLM either based on their ethnic community and political orientation and the social and mass media access is a major requirement for any social movement to mobilize and influence public opinion.

Theoretical Framework

Concerning social movements theories, the past and the present of social movement theory reveal different paradigms stressing various aspects of social movements and the actions they stage. They provide different answers to questions such as: ‘Why do people protest?’, ‘Who is protesting?’, ‘What forms of protest do protesters take part in?’. Table 1 provides an overview of the different answers to these questions given by the different approaches to social movements. In what follows we will elaborate on these.

A new generation of scholars from the late 1960s on – in challenging the early “classical” model of collective behavior –,

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has interpreted social movements as “politics by other means”¹. Following that breakthrough, political violence can be understood as a social pathology, but as a collective effort to pursue goals with intelligible strategies. What characterizes the social movement perspective is, above all, an emphasis on locating political violence within broader processes of political contention and within the context of social, political, and cultural conflicts, and to examine its emergence as shifts from non-violent towards more violent repertoires as a result of interactive dynamics involving various political actors.

The political access theory argues that if social movements gain access to the policymaking process, they can successfully influence policies through formal political institutions. Finally, the public opinion shift theory claims that social movements do not directly influence public policy change but induce shifts in public opinion, which, in turn, influence policymakers’ decisions².

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- 1- Tilly, Charles (1979): “*Social Movements and National Politics*”, University of Michigan Press, paper no. 197
 - 2- McAdam, Doug (1982): “*Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*”, 1930- 1970. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

	Classical approaches <i>Mass society Coll. behaviour</i>	Contemporary approaches		
		<i>Resource mobilization</i>	<i>Political process approach</i>	<i>Social constructivistic Approaches</i>
<i>Why people protest</i>	Grievances, discontent, anomie Class conflict	Resources, opportunities, social networks efficacy	Political opportunities (Cognitive Liberation)	Social construction of reality: (Meaning)construction Identity Emotions Motivation
<i>Who protests?</i>	Alienated, frustrated, disintegrated, manipulated marginalized	Well-organized, social networks, professional, resourceful Embeddedness	Coalitions between challengers /political elites Embeddedness	Countercultural groups, identity groups Embeddedness
<i>Forms of protest</i>	Spontaneous, irrational, expressive, violent (Panics, fashions, mobs, crime)	Rational, planned, instrumental (Institutional politics, lobbying, interest groups)	Rational, instrumental, polity-oriented (Elite contention lobbying, Indigenous minority disruption i.e. sit ins strikes)	ideological, expressive, identity-oriented (cultural and religious organizations, self-help groups, alternative lifes tyles)

Table 1: theories on participation in and the emergence of social movements

Concerning political violence many scholars tried to identify the various sources of political violence. One attempt to identify the determinants of political violence was to classify its determinants into three groups: structural, cultural, and individual determinants¹. Some researchers focused on the structural determinants by explaining political violence with referring to the social class layers or groups. For example, due to factors such as urbanization and industrialization, individuals lose their ties with

1- Mider, Daniel (2014): “*Determinants of Political Violence: A Study of the Literature*”, Journal of Social Science Studies, Research Institute for Man and Society, vol.1, no.2.

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social groups and society as a whole, they become alienated and consequently susceptible to ideologies that inspire the use of violence¹. In this regard, violence practiced by the state is perceived as an important factor generating violence – a concept of counter-violence has even been created to denote organized reactions of citizens in response to the use of force by state institutions. In other words, the more rigid the political regime, the more likely that political changes will take place through the use of violence².

Other researchers attributed political violence to cultural patterns and norms within the dominant culture or subculture focusing on fixed patterns of actions existing in the community and arising out of sanctioned values, beliefs and attitudes provided in the course of socialization. This cultural perspective can be examined either from a micro-social approach including exposure to domestic violence or extreme punishment, and being raised up in a broken or neglectful family where basic needs for love, acceptance, and respect are unfulfilled. On the other hand, the macro-social determinants of violence within the cultural approach refer to particular patterns or values that are sanctioned by the dominant culture and stimulate individuals to take violent action. Within this concept, it is emphasized that violence is determined by the unique historical experiences of a particular culture. For example, in the United States the long history of black slavery and the grapple with political and civil equal rights could have mitigated racial inequality at the legal and political level; however, the roots of the black perceived image as less favored race could explain why they are still being discriminated against socially and individually.

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- 1- Coser, L. A. (1967). *“Internal Violence as a Mechanism for Conflict Resolution”*. In L. A. Coser, *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict*. New York: The Free Press. *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict*.
 - 2- Piotrowski, A. (2003). *Notatki o pojęciu przemocy [Notes on the concept of violence]*. *Przegląd Socjologiczny [The Sociological Review]*, LII, 1, Łódź: Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe



Conceptual Framework

Public opinion definition would be the majority beliefs, opinions or judgments of a society concerning political, religious, moral questions and are called: public opinion. Public opinion is a fundamental citizen freedom but it can also be built by being influenced by different media types, political and even social criterion.

Social media is defined as the set of interactive Internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content. It can refer to basically internet platforms or information outsourced by the public through mass media.

Political violence refers to using or threat to use tangible force to achieve political targets. An ideological definition to political violence refers to any violation for individuals' rights and freedom to deprive them from freedom of thought and expression. Political conflict is usually associated with and used interchangeably with political transition¹.

Social violence refers to all aspects of collective force and suppression in daily social life by different communities. It is violence practiced by groups or individuals against other communities in the society because of political, social, gender, ethnic, and religious reasons.

For this research, a social movement will be defined as any organized collective action with a shared identity to promote societal change, emphasize social or political rights while political movement would be defined as any organized collective action aiming at achieving major political changes at the state level including changing the political regime.

Public policy can be generally defined as a system of laws, rules, programs, decisions, and courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given topic promulgated by a governmental entity or its representatives.

1- Tawfik, Hassanein (1992): "*Al Onf Al Siasy Fel Nozom El Arabiya*"
Center of United Arabic Studies

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Literature Review

The presidential elections of 2020 optimized the popularity of BLM as a social movement due to the coincidence of racial crimes associated with it. Four factors elevated the risk of electoral violence whether perpetrated directly by police officers or by ordinary citizens. First, a highly competitive election that could shift the balance of political power. Heightened political competition is strongly associated with electoral violence especially that when outcomes are uncertain but close is there a reason to resort to violence.

Second, a partisan division based on identity of democrats and republicans. Today, Americans have sorted themselves into two broad identity groups: Democrats tend to live in cities, are more likely to be minorities, women, and religiously unaffiliated, and are trending liberal. Republicans generally live in rural areas or exurbs and are more likely to be white, male, Christian, and conservative¹.

Third, the electoral rules that enable winning by exploiting identity cleavages. The USA electoral system comprises features that are correlated with greater violence globally. Winner-take-all elections are particularly prone to violence, possibly because small numbers of voters can shift outcomes. Two-party systems are also more correlated with violence than are multiparty systems, perhaps because they create us-them dynamics that deepen polarization².

Fourth, the weak institutional constraints on violence, particularly security-sector bias toward one group, leading perpetrators to believe they would not be accountable for violence

1- Mason, Lilliana (2018): *“How Politics Became Our Identity”* Lilliana Uncivil Agreement (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 2018)

2- Bingham G. Powell, Jr., (2016): *“Party Systems and Political System Performance: Voting Participation, Government Stability and Mass Violence in Contemporary Democracies”* American Political Science Review 75, no. 4 (1981): 861–79



acts. The United States suffers from three particularly concerning institutional weaknesses today—the challenge of adjudicating disputes between the executive and legislative branches inherent in presidential majoritarian systems, recent legal decisions enhancing the electoral power of state legislatures, and the politicization of law enforcement and the courts¹.

In addition to those factors, the political instability in the USA prior to and during the presidential elections revealed different aspects for political violence demonstrated by the police abuse and racial injustice initiated by killing George Floyd. On 25 May 2020, Minneapolis police officers arrested George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, for allegedly using a counterfeit \$20 bill. One officer pinned Floyd to the ground and kneeled on his neck for eight minutes and 15 seconds, killing him². Floyd's death prompted a surge of demonstrations associated with the movement of Black Lives Matter (BLM) which was initiated in Minneapolis and quickly spread all over the United States with widespread demonstrators denouncing police racial violence. The protest movement has also organized around other victims of police violence and racism across the country.

Moreover, the period preceding the US presidential election in 2020 has witnessed a massive amount of political tension due to the political polarization between Republicans and Democrats manifested as the supporters of Biden and Trump which soon turned into racial violence by killing George Floyd. This racial crime sparked nationwide demonstrations of protestors against Trump administration at the time. Although Black Lives Matter existed as a social movement since 2013, it was linked to the call for changing the political regime being the main culprit of racial violence against the blacks. By definition, BLM started as a social movement calling for racial equity and justice legally and socially until the coincidence of killing George Floyd simultaneously with

1- Birch S., Daxecker U., Hoglund K (2020): “*Electoral Violence: An Introduction*” Journal of Peace Research, 2020, Vol. 57(1) 3–14

2- BBC (2020): <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726>

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the presidential elections 2020. Since then, it obviously turned into a political movement as it affected voters' preferences for political leaders, caused violent demonstrations against the government, and succeeded in impacting the final political outcome of changing Trump regime and fostering public policy reforms at the local level.

This racial crime was not the only incident, as the United States have witnessed numerous incidents of mass shooting¹, violent hate crimes and police killing rate of black men was 2.5 times compared to white men². Following Floyd's death, a similar incident of August 2019 occurred when police officers confronted Elijah McClain who died after authorities reportedly tackled him while he was walking home from a convenience store in Aurora, Colorado, put him in a carotid hold, and had first responders inject him with ketamine³. Another racial crime committed by police officers which is at the start of 2020, Ahmaud Arbery was shot and killed by a former police officer and his son while out jogging in south Georgia. In Kentucky, police raided the wrong home while attempting to serve a warrant and exchanged gunfire with one of the occupants; his partner, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old paramedic who was sleeping at the time, was shot and killed by the officers⁴.

Violence practices by demonstrators of BLM since Floyd's killing included around 38 incidents in which demonstrators have significantly damaged or torn down memorials around the country, including statues of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and colonial explorer Christopher Columbus. Although these incidents account for a small subset of demonstrations, the

1- BBC (2019): <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50936575>

2- Peeples, Lynne (2020): "Brutality and Racial Bias: What the Data Say?", Nature | Vol 583 | 2 July 2020, d41586-020-01846-z.pdf

3- The Cut (2021): <https://www.thecut.com/2021/09/the-killing-of-elijah-mcclain-everything-we-know.html>

4- New York Times (2022): <https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html>

trend has become another battlefield for the hyper-partisan “culture wars” over America’s history of racism¹.

Violence acts practiced by police officers started as the US government forces soon took a heavy-handed approach in reaction to the growing protest movement although many police officers throughout the country have joined the peaceful demonstrations. Authorities have used force such as firing less-lethal weapons like tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray or beating demonstrators with batons, in over 54% of the demonstrations in which they have engaged. The escalated violence against demonstrators push to militarize the government’s response to domestic unrest, and particularly demonstrations perceived to be linked to left-wing groups like Antifa, which the administration views as a “terrorist” organization. Counter violent acts were manifested by counter-protests who were armed individuals initially standing by but soon turned violent, with clashes between pro-police demonstrators and demonstrators associated with BLM movement. The situation was aggravated to the extent that demonstrators drove trucks through the crowd, shot paintball guns, and pepper spray at counter-demonstrators rallying in support of the BLM movement. During the confrontation a member of the right-wing Patriot Prayer armed group was shot dead by an unknown individual².

Social Movements and Public Opinion

Current literature presented a strong relationship between social movements on the one hand, and public opinion to raise awareness of the cause on their agenda and political alliances on the other hand to attain its policy goals. On the other hand, a political movement as defined above, would be any organized collective action aiming at achieving major political changes at the state level including changing the political regime.

1- Bloomberg (2020): <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-06-07/falling-monuments-to-racism-are-defeats-for-trump-s-culture-war>

2- ACLED (2020): “Demonstrations and Political Violence in America” New Data for Summer.

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In current literature, the influence of BLM on citizens' choice of political leaders remains contested as it was countered with opposing slogans such as "all lives matter" and "blue lives matter". One study, examined the role that Black Lives Matter (BLM) played in influencing voters whose presidential votes shifted from 2016 to 2020 because it presumably exposed the racial violence entrenched in Trump regime. So, It is also possible that BLM served as a source of increasing support for the 2020 Democratic candidate, Joseph R. Biden Jr., by promoting awareness of discrimination against Blacks and raising the salience of racial injustice more generally. Another argument at the time, suggested that BLM could backfire by giving Trump a second term" as many feared that the protests would alienate moderates who were put off by civil unrest. Another widely promoted argument was that BLM helped Trump by distracting voters from his failure to control the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, thus serving to improve his overall chances of reelection¹. The study examined whether and in what direction BLM affected the election is based entirely on people self-reports about whether BLM influenced their votes. It indicates that most who reported that BLM made them more likely to support Biden were Democrats who were already likely to support Biden. Likewise, most who claimed it made them more likely to vote for Trump were already going to vote for Trump for other reasons.

Social Movements and Mass Media

Newspapers and social media played a pivotal role in amplifying BLM and eventually deployed it in controlling the electoral outcome. For, newspaper mentions of BLM, illustrating the timing of the sudden surge in news attention to the treatment of Blacks by police in June 2020. Given the timing of this event, any opinion change brought on by BLM should appear between

1- Mutz C. Diana (2022): "*Effects of Changes in Perceived Discrimination during BLM on the 2020 Presidential Election*" Science Advances, Department of Political Science and Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.



waves 5 and 6 of the panel, that is, during the summer of 2020. Another study indicated that how BLM protests lead to increased use of antiracist vocabulary on multiple digital platforms. It found out that BLM protests could dramatically amplify the use of terms associated with the BLM agenda throughout the movement's history such as "systematic racism", "which supremacy", and "mass incarceration" which received more public attention on social media platforms including google, twitter with widespread hashtags of #blacklivesmatter and #icantbreathe¹. Once the social media conversation went "to the streets," these highly visible protests garnered consistent media attention, continued to fuel the social media conversation, and translated to changes in the way many people felt and the urgency with which they acted².

Due to the large media campaign, donations and fundraising were skyrocketed in BLM within the elections time. For, the BLM executive director reported that across their entities and partners, they have raised just over \$90 million in one year, 2020. Of these donations, the average donation via their main fundraising platform was \$30.64 and more than 10% of donations were recurring. This has been a record-breaking year for fundraising, which has been matched with just as historic an amount in campaign budgets and grant disbursements. The BLM executive director declared that when BLM calls for defunding the police, it also calls for community investment. In addition to the billions of donations collected by BLM, they called for defunding the police claiming that the police budget is taken out of law enforcement budgets to go back into the communities that have been historically harmed by these systems³.The significant role of

1- Dunivin, Zachary et al (2022): "*Black Lives Matter Protests Shift Public Discourse*", Department of Sociology, Indiana University

2- Williams, Jamillah B., Mezey, Naomi, Singh, Lisa (2021): "*#BlackLivesMatter—Getting from Contemporary Social Movements to Structural Change*", Georgetown University Law Center, California Law Review Online, Vol. 12

3-Black Lives Matter 2020 Impact Report: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/2020-impact-report/>

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social media publicizing the BLM not only contributed to spreading of the movement to the street level but also enforced a sense of ethical obligation for economic collective action in the form of large donations. For BLM, the largest economic discussion on Twitter was centered around a global fundraising campaign to match the million dollars that BTS, the Korean pop band, donated to the BLM movement.

Their campaign sparked on social media hashtags ranging from #matchamillion and #bts to #btsarmy. After giving \$1 million to BLM, BTS inspired its fans to donate \$1.3 million to a dozen related advocacy groups. A wide variety of corporations also contributed financially to the movement, either to the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation or to other anti-racism organizations. For example, Walmart, pledged \$100 million for an internal racial equity center; Bank of America announced a \$1 billion commitment to programs that help “communities of color address economic and racial inequality; PepsiCo pledged \$400 million to initiatives that “lift up Black communities and increase Black representation” at the company; Apple’s announced a “Racial Equity and Justice Initiative with a \$100 million commitment”; and Comcast announced “a plan to designate \$100 million to fight injustice and inequality against any race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation or ability,” with much of that money going to internal projects.

Social Movements and Public Policy

The literature on social movements has primarily examined the causes of the emergence and development of protest, whereas relatively little attention has been paid to the movements’ consequences particularly on public policy change. Many scholars argue that social movements need public support in order to have power over public policy and the government agenda¹. In other words, movements need the help of mediators in order to force the

1- Burstein, Paul (1985): “*Discrimination, Jobs, and Politics*”. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

political authorities to take into account their claims and modify their policies accordingly. Based on current the literature, there are two main facilitating factors: public opinion and political alliances. These two factors reflect the two major targets of social movements: the public space and the political arenas. On the one hand, movements try to raise public awareness and concern about certain issues. In other words, they engage in what Klandermans (1988) has called consensus mobilization¹. In doing so, movements have two more or less explicit objectives. First, they try to steer direct structural and cultural changes in society by influencing people's attitudes and behaviors. Second, they address public opinion in order to make it an ally. As, they benefit from the support of public opinion, social movements increase their legitimacy as political actors in front of the political authorities. On the other hand, the second main target of movements is represented precisely by the power holders. They interact above all with state actors in order to force them to reform policies or the political system itself. Being powerless actors who do not have sustained access to the institutional arenas, movements need to mobilize political allies in order to reach their policy goals. So, current literature view public opinion and political allies as mediators for social movements' success in producing policy change. However, it view political change as an outcome of the social movement which is why this research argues that both policy reform and political change can be inevitable outcome when social movements are coupled with strong public opinion.

The Public Opinion Mediation Model

Authors who have stressed the importance of public opinion for policy changes have a specific view of democracy. They usually embrace the model of representative democracy². According to

1- Klandermans, Bert 1988. "The Formation and Mobilization of Consensus." In *From Structure to Action*, edited by Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow, 173-96. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

2- Burstein, Paul (1998): "*Bringing the Public Back in: Should Sociologists Consider the Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy.*" *Social Forces*. Forthcoming

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this view, power holders respond to public opinion for electoral reasons. In an electoral competition system, elites are sensitive to citizens' demands in order to maintain their power. This theory underscores the so-called "tyranny of the majority." As Lohmann (1993) has put it, to take into account the public's preferences does not mean to follow naively the democratic ideal of respecting the citizens' will, but is rather an instrumental attitude by elected officials aimed at preserving their power¹. Thus, as Burstein (1998) has pointed out, the struggle of democracy gives the ruled considerable power over their rulers. Any shifts in public opinion alert the political elites, who will adjust their behavior accordingly. In other words, changes in public opinion should be followed by corresponding changes in public policies. A number of studies have stressed this close relationship between public opinion and policy emphasizing that, particularly when political issues are felt as important by the general public, a clear and visible shift in the public opinion forces the authorities to adjust their policies.

As per the theory of representative democracy, social movements and interest groups should not have a direct impact on public policy. In a typical democratic regime, political elites respond to the claims that are supported by the majority of citizens and do not take into account particular interests of minority groups such as social movements and interest groups². By responding to minority demands, elites run the risk of not being re-elected, at least in the long run. In this view, social movements would only have an indirect effect on policy. Burstein (1999) stresses three ways in which social movements can have an indirect impact on

1- Lohmann, Susanne 1993. "A Signaling Model of Informative and Manipulative Political Action." *American Political Science Review* 87: 319-33.

2- Krehbiel, Kenneth (1991): *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

public policy¹: changing the public's preferences, that is, attracting public opinion to their cause; increasing public concern with regard to the issues raised by the movement; and changing the legislator's perception of the public's preferences or of the issue's saliency in the public space². Thus, Burstein maintains that when scholars find a direct impact of protest on policy, the impact of protest diminish or even disappears if they include the preferences of the general public in their models.

According to this view of democracy, the impact of social movements on policy is mediated by public opinion. Together with a variety of other external factors, protest influences public opinion and hence can have an indirect impact on policy³. In this sense, public opinion is an intervening variable between a range of external factors, including social movements, and policy outcomes. Burstein in 1985 has proposed a theory that stresses the crucial role played by social movements and media coverage as external factors that shape the general public's preferences. His study shows that the Civil rights movement and media coverage affected the people's awareness of the issue and this, in turn, led the Congress to act in favor of the blacks' rights in the US. Costain and Majstorovic (1994), work on the impact of legislative activity on the orientation of the general public preferences, advanced a model of policy change whereby public opinion both influences and is influenced by legislation⁴. They illustrate their theory with time-series data on the American women's movement

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- 1- Burstein, Paul (1999): "*Social Movements and Public Policy*." In *How Social Movements Matter*, edited by Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Forthcoming.
 - 2- Giugni, Marco, and Florence Passy (2000): "*Social Movements and Policy Change: Direct, Mediated, or Joint Effect?*" Political Science Department, University of Geneva, Switzerland.
 - 3- Page, Benjamin, and Robert Y. Shapiro (1983): "*Effects of Public Opinion on Policy*." *American Political Science Review* 77: 175-190.
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and show that the movement's mobilization heightened the public awareness which, in turn, influenced the legislative production. Thus, in this view, policy change is the outcome of an interactive process involving social movements, the state, parties, and public opinion. Again, we see that the impact of social movements on policy is not a direct one, but is mediated by public opinion.

The Political Alliance Mediation Model

A political alliance model can be derived from the existing literature on social movements, in particular from the political processes approach, which has stressed the role of political opportunities for the emergence, development, and outcomes of movements. One key variable in this respect is the presence and availability of political alliances argue that political opportunity structures are more conducive to movement emergence when allies are in the opposition. Schumaker (1975) has proposed a more detailed typology of the responsiveness of the political system. He first distinguished between two types of acceptance: gaining access to the political system (access responsiveness) and obtaining access to the political agenda (agenda responsiveness). Substantial effects are related to the capability of social movements to bring about policy changes. They can do so by forcing the authorities to adopt new policies (policy responsiveness) or to implementing them (output responsiveness). Schumaker distinguished a third type of substantial effect (impact responsiveness), which is the final outcome of the policy-formation process¹. For example, a state may adopt new legislation for environmental protection and actually implementing it, but the quality of air does not necessarily improve.

According to this model, to have a substantial impact on public policy, social movements need the support of powerful political

1- Schumaker, Paul D. (1975): "Policy Responsiveness to Protest-Group Demands." *Journal of Politics* 37: 488-521.

allies that take up their claims in the institutional arenas¹. In the absence of such mediation, movements can hardly change the course of politics. This political mediation model implies a different view of democracy than that discussed above. The pluralist view of democracy, in which political change follows a bottom-up path, leave the place to an elitist view of democracy according to which public policies stems from political elites and hence follow a top-down path.

In a study conducted by Amenta et al. (1992) on the impact of the Townsend movement in the United States, which, in a somewhat different perspective, they put forward a political mediation model². In an attempt to test various models of social movement formation and outcomes (economic, social, political opportunity, and political mediation), they find strong support for the claim that political opportunities mediates the relationship between social movements and outcomes, specifically policy outcomes. Their explanation stresses that the state and the party system determine whether mobilization gains acceptance and produces benefits for the constituency, the two dimensions put forward by Gamson (1990) and used in a number of subsequent studies of the consequences of social movements³.

In the two models discussed above, social movements have an indirect impact on public policies: they first mobilize, then their claims are taken up either by public opinion or political allies, and the pressure of the public and the action of the allies eventually produce policy changes. This paper proposes that social movements do shape the general public's preferences, which in turn influence public policies and that political alliances do provide crucial opportunities in the institutional arenas.

1- Tarrow, Sidney 1994. *Power in Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2- Amenta et al. (1992): "A Hero for the Aged? The Townsend Movement, the Political Mediation Model, and U.S. Old-Age Policy, 1934-1950

3- Gamson, W. (1990). *The Strategy of Social Protest* (2nd ed., 185 p.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

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Accordingly, in this paper a new model is developed in which political change and policy reform are the outcome of a social movement that is combined with strong public opinion.

While previous model focused on the notion that social movements requires a mediator exemplified by political allies and public opinion in order to achieve political and policy outcome, this paper examines how public opinion on social movements are being shaped within the time of political instability. The research assumes that independent variables including social media and mass media on one hand and the party identification and race can produce stereotypes on public perception of BLM.

Methodology

The method of primary data collection would be based on a survey conducted by Roper Ipoll to measure the public opinion on BLM as a movement and how people tend to perceive it. As indicated in the research model, public opinion mobilization is determined by objective factors like news and media or by subjective factors such as citizens' ethnic group and political identification.

The method of primary data collection would be original survey by Roper Ipoll to measure what are the determinants that make the public oppose or support BLM. Some questions targeted if the public think that Trump regime could deal with the racial issues existing the US or it made them worse. Other questions investigated the role of social media, official news, and people in leading positions such as religious leaders, in guiding the public opinion to oppose or support BLM. Demographic variables played a crucial role in the data collection because the original research hypothesis that public perception of BLM as a social movement is prejudged by their ethnicity and political identification.

The sampling plan targets a diverse group of American citizens according to age, gender, education level, ethnicity, and political



identification. However, the data analysis focused primarily on party identification, race, and gender in perceiving BLM.

The data will be analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to run cross tabulation among major demographic variables including political identification, ethnicity, and gender. Plus, a partial correlation model is run to test the coefficient correlation between party, race, and gender on one hand and other variables such as BLM support, social media impact, official news influence, and political atmosphere.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is that the researcher was intended to design and distribute surveys measuring its variables but due to the time limits and long authorization process, the researcher analyzed the raw data as presented by Roper Poll conducting cross tabulation and partial correlation instead of full regression analysis model. So, the study limitations is that the survey questions were not sufficiently covering all variables it was supposed to measure as the number of the questions were limited which made it difficult for the researcher to present a comprehensive factors that impacts the public opinion on social movements during political instability in particular.

Data Analysis and Findings

Cross tabulation Data Analysis on Demographic Values

The survey sample is composed of one thousand respondents throughout different states and belonging to different political parties, ethnic groups, age groups, and education level. The cross tabulation analysis between gender versus political party demonstrates a strong significance between democrats being mainly females versus republicans being males for most females tended to identify themselves as democrats whereas most males identified themselves as republicans (P-value= $<.001$). On the other hand, the race/ethnicity versus political identification reflects high significance in the analysis to whether a particular

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race belong to republicans or democrats as most black and Hispanic communities were identified as democrats while most white were identified as republicans (P-value= .000). When it comes to the education level versus political identification, the data analysis showed low significant value; for p-value=0.16. Finally, the age factor played a crucial role in political identification as obviously shown individuals between 18 and 49 years old leaned towards the democrat political party while individuals aged between 50 and 60+ years old are more inclined into the republican party (p-value=.002).

Cross tabulation Data Analysis on BLM

Regarding political party, when respondents were asked about their favorable or unfavorable impression on BLM in question 3, the respondents who exhibited stronger support for BLM were mainly democrats and independents versus a small percent of republicans who had a favorable impression of BLM (p-value=.002). Referring to the race of the sample, most black people had strongly favored BLM while the white and Hispanic were less in favor of BLM but not less enough to make a significant difference (p-value=0.18) between black and white and p-value=0.13 between black and Hispanic. In terms of the gender disparities, the difference between females favoring BLM and males not favoring it was highly significant (p-value <.001).

When respondents were asked in question 11 if the Black Lives Matters movement made racial issues in America better or worse, or has it not really changed things either way? The response was highly gendered as most females exhibited support to the role of BLM in making racial issues better while most men considered it to have made racial issues worse in America (p-value <.003). The ethnicity factor made a significant difference also as most respondents who agreed that BLM made racial issues better in America were mostly black and Hispanic while the white community did not believe that BLM impacted racial issues (p-value <.001). Political party also was a strong indicator of how the

respondents perceived BLM role as most democrats considered BLM to have brought racial issues to the government agenda while most republicans opposed that idea (p-value <.001).

Concerning the various protests or demonstrations that respondents attended recently in question 13, most respondents have attended protests against police brutality seconded by attending other issues and finally attending BLM protests. This means that not necessarily all supporters of BLM should have demonstrated their support by action, rather they were driven more by objecting to the police violence at large rather than police violence that is race-based.

As respondents were asked whether they identify themselves as supporters to BLM or not in question 15, surprisingly most of them unselected the supporter option. This means that with the absence of moderate answer, most respondents refrained to describe themselves as direct supporters of BLM. The tiny percent of supporters, however reflected a higher support by women rather than men (p-value= <.001) and by the blacks rather than white or Hispanic (p-value=000). Similarly, democrats were more likely to describe themselves as supporters of BLM rather than how republicans perceived themselves as p-value=<.005).

When respondents were asked in question 16 if they think people in the Black Lives Matter movement considered black lives matter more than other lives or the same amount? The result was in favor for the idea that BLM think that black lives are more important than other people's lives; for 53% reckoned that BLM considered black lives to be more important versus 45% considered that BLM values other lives equally. The difference is not highly significant but the political identification and race had highly impacted the responses. As most republicans compared to democrats thought that BLM viewed the lives of the black as more important and most democrats considered BLM to have viewed all lives as equally important. The difference based on the political identification is high as p-value=.001). In the same way, race was a prominent factor in all responses because most black

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respondents confirmed that BLM viewed all lives as equally important while the white respondents denied that (p -value=.002). The gender perspective was not that significant though, as there were no much difference in responses based on gender.

Regarding the question no. 20 if they agree or disagree integration versus segregation in neighborhoods is the solution to the race problem? Most respondents supported integration of the blacks and the difference in responses between democrats and republicans indicated low significance (p -value=.772). The same applies to race and gender, as most respondents belonging to different races whether males or females, were pro the idea of integration.

Data Analysis on Political Regime of Trump

To test how the public perceived freedom of expression in the US within the political regime of Trump at the time, respondents were asked in question 1 about how easy or difficult is it for BLM to use their free speech rights without consequence in America today? On a scale from one to seven, respondents' answers for scale one versus scale seven showed a huge difference, as those who replied with very difficult (scale one) were 12% versus 25% respondents who replied with very easy (scale seven). The percentages in between those scales were distributed almost equally among respondents. However, the difference between replies with scale one to scale seven reflect that a larger number of respondents viewed Trump's regime as enabler for freedom of expression for BLM particularly.

In terms of the political identification, it is worthwhile here to mention that the majority of respondents who considered freedom of expression for BLM in America is difficult were mainly democrats while most respondents who viewed freedom of expression for BLM in America as easy were republicans. The difference is highly significant as per the chi-square test for p -value <.001). The race did not reflect a high significance as expected because responses through the seven scales were

distributed almost equally among the black, white and Hispanic. This means that public opinion about the extent to which Trump regime allowed freedom of expression for BLM is prejudiced by political identification because when it comes to the ethnicity variable, the blacks did not show any higher ratio than other races in terms of denying freedom of expression within Trump regime.

In a more direct way, respondents were obliged to give upfront answers on how they think about the political regime as question 4 was posed to measure how much do they approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump has handled Black Lives Matter. The percentages of answers reflected a large gap between those who approved to some extent or strongly versus those who disapproved to some extent or strongly for the percentages were 37% and 61% respectively. The gender aspect had a greater significance here as most females were disapproving the way Trump handled BLM while most males approved the way the regime dealt with BLM (p-value=.000). In the same way, the race had a high significance on how blacks and whites judged trump regime for most respondents with approval were white while most respondents with disapproval were from the black community (p-value=.001). The political identification played a crucial role in judging Trump's regime performance with BLM. For most approving respondents were republicans whereas the majority of disapproving respondents were democrats, the difference was highly significant as p-value=.002.

Data Analysis on Social and Mass Media

To test the impact of social media as a non-demographic factor on shaping public opinion, respondents were asked as per question 5, from what they have read and heard on social media, how do they feel about the Black Lives Matter movement? 55% of the sample confirmed supporting BLM because of what they have heard or read on social media, while 44% opposed BLM because of the social media content on it. Those who never formed their opinion based on social media output were only 10%. This percent

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reflect high impact for social media on shaping the public opinion whether by supporting or opposing.

Similarly, when they were asked in question 10 from what they have heard or read on social media, do they support or oppose the Black Lives Matter movement? The total responses for supporting BLM because of the social media was 63% while the total responses of opposing BLM because of social media was 33%. The total responses of those who were never affected by social media content on BLM was only 5%. The difference between respondents whose opinions were shaped positively or negatively on BLM due to social media and those who were never influenced by social media in forming their opinions is considerably significant (95% versus 5% only).

To test the frequency of using social media as a source of news and the probability of hearing about BLM through social media particularly, they were asked in question 19 how much, if anything, have they heard about the Black Lives Matter movement from the social media? 46% answers confirmed they have heard a lot about BLM from social media, whereas 27% replied that they heard little about BLM from social media. Either answers reflect, though that social media is considered a source of information to a large number of respondents. On the other hand, respondents who never heard of BLM from social media represented only 27% of the total sample which indicates a large gap between the number of individuals that social media can access to disseminate information to. With significant difference between the youngest and older age groups ($p\text{-value}=.002$), it is obvious that the older the respondents, the more they demonstrated use of traditional mass media rather than social media. Conversely, the younger the respondents, the more they relied on social media for obtaining information.

Surprisingly, when respondents were asked in question 6 to describe a recent instance where they changed their views on a political or social issue because of something they saw on social



media, most respondents did not change their views on BLM specifically due to the social media. For only 12% reported that social media caused them to change their views on it. Other issues presented did not reflect a significant change in opinion due to the social media. Most answers though contradicted the idea that social media make people change their opinions for 34% denied changing their opinion because of social media. It can be inferred from answers to this question compared to answers to questions 5 and 10, that social media can substantially form the public opinion, however, it hardly can change their opinion on something they already have an opinion for.

To test how if mass media could influence the public opinion in the same way that social media does, respondents were asked in question 8 whether in the past few months have they heard on news or TV anything that expressed any opposition for BLM? 25% have heard some opposition on BLM while 75% have never heard any opposition for BLM on mass media. When the meaning was flipped in question 9 to whether in the past few months have they heard on news or TV anything that expressed any support for BLM? The result reflected a higher percent of support demonstrated by mass media rather than opposition, as 41% responses confirmed that mass media supported BLM while 57% said they never heard any support for BLM on mass media. The number of respondents who were undecided or neutral about what mass media say with opposition or support for BLM was 1% in every question which means that very little percent of respondents are attaining their information from mass media which eventually makes both traditional and social media equal in terms of access to the public.

Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to measure the public opinion and people perception of BLM, to find out how the movement affected their support of opposition in relation to gender, race, and political identification and based on the information presented at

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the news and the social media. The research would be based on original empirical surveys from Roper iPoll targeting American citizens in 2020 who might be supporters or opponents of the BLM during the presidential elections to answer the following research questions drawn from the major research question of *what makes the public support or oppose social movements*. The answer to this question required breaking it down to two questions:

First, how the public perceived BLM based on their ethnicity and political views? The data findings indicate that the majority of respondents had a strong prejudice based on their political identification and ethnic belonging. This was inferred based on the significant correlations between the blacks and the strong support for BLM as exemplified by asking them whether they have had a favorable impression of BLM or not and when they were asked if the movement could bring up racial issues on the government agenda. Most answers who supported BLM and believed in its role in making racial policy changes were coming from the black community and democrats. The black support for BLM can be fully understood in the sense that the movement's mission to attain racial equality. However, there is an uncertainty around the democrats support for BLM particularly within the presidential election's in 2020 because it is difficult to judge whether they genuinely support the movement or their support is merely a manifestation of opposition to Trumps regime being a republican candidate.

The responses to questions testing the public opinion about the political regime in particular at the time denoted to some extent that political identification primarily played a crucial role in judging Trump regime. The data tells us that most respondents belonging to the democrat party have strongly criticized Trump for not allowing freedom of expression to the BLM and denied its ability to deal with the movement successfully. On the other hand, respondents belonging to the Republican Party have



acknowledged Trump regime's ability to address the movement demands and give them adequate space for expression.

Second, how did mass and social media contribute to public perception of BLM? in this regard, the data analysis showed that a massive number of respondents depended on social media proposed content to form an opinion on BLM whether by support or opposition. Only tiny percent denied that social media had any influence on their views of BLM. Frequency of using social media also was taken into consideration as a factor which indicates how frequently respondents used it and to what extent it can hence shape their opinions. The largest percentage of answers confirmed obtaining a lot of information about BLM from the social media, seconded by a smaller percent expressing less frequency in the use of social media as they obtained less information about BLM via social media. In either case, only small fraction of the sample stated that they never used social media and only this fraction makes it possible to conclude that only minority of respondents were excluded from the hypothesis that social media had a great impact in shaping the public opinion.

Nevertheless, this influence of social media on shaping the public opinion was not in alignment with the social media ability to change the public opinion. For, respondents were required to describe a recent instance where they changed their views on a political or social issue because of something they saw on social media, most respondents did not change their views on BLM specifically due to the social media. So, it can be inferred that social media can substantially shape the public opinion but it has less ability to change the public views on something they already have an opinion for. The data findings did not reflect a greater difference between the use of mass media versus social media as sources of information because there was no clear disparities in the frequency of using social media versus mass media. It should be noted though that the age factor played a pivotal role in determining which group of respondents leaned towards using mass or social media as a source of information. With significant

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difference, it is obvious that the older the respondents, the more they demonstrated use of traditional mass media rather than social media. Conversely, the younger the respondents, the more they relied on social media for obtaining information.

Accordingly, the basic research hypothesis is that people tend to pre-judge BLM either based on demographic factors such as ethnicity and political orientation, and non-demographic factors such as exposure to social and mass media. The data findings conformed with the hypothesis as it proved how different ethnic groups and communities belonging to a particular political identification were inclined to support or oppose BLM and the way the political regime dealt with it just from the ground of their ethnicity and political orientation. On the other hand, it can be concluded that social movements can be most powerful when they impose on social and mass media being the major sources of information for the public to shape their opinions.

For future research, it would be worthwhile to conduct future research to find out successful social movements' long term outcomes on whether they could achieve any political change and policy reform.



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