

CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

Social Movements in the Era of COVID-19 and Collective Uprising

Working Group Description:

The convergent disasters of COVID-19 and yet more killing of Black people by law enforcement in the context of ongoing white supremacy catalyzed significant social movement activity in the Spring of 2020. These crises appear to be focusing events, altering the landscape of social justice claims-making and the possibilities for institutional change. While movement mobilization is rooted in years of organizing, current movement engagement also include emergent frames, demands, and tactics. Research will help us understand the specific internal and external conditions that are galvanizing movement activities, the strategic and symbolic repertoires in play, and the effects of mobilization on both movements themselves and the long-term outcomes they seek. We recognize the pandemic catastrophe and violent Black death to be socially constructed, rooted in systemic racism and neoliberal politics, and inextricably linked. Therefore, our references to pandemic-era crises and movement responses describe this intersection.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. COVID-19 and the Spring and Summer 2020 Police Killings as Focusing Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How have the convergent crises of COVID-19 and state violence against Black people shaped pandemic-era social movement activity? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: In what ways have events of the pandemic era opened a new wave of activism, altered existing social movements, and created opportunities for the emergence of new social movement groups (e.g., the disaster movement opportunity counterpoint to disaster capitalism)? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How are activists responding to disaster capitalist attacks on a wide range of civil, political, and social rights? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: How are movements using direct action to advance their movement goals across a wide range of concerns, such as rent strikes and decarceration?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 5</u>: How are movements engaging or leveraging these crises toward achieving longer-term or bigger goals?
2. The Relationship between Pre-Pandemic Movement Activity and Pandemic-Era Movement Mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How has pre-existing movement activity paved the way for pandemic-era movement mobilization (e.g., abolition/immigration justice leading to decarceration and Defund the Police demands; reproductive justice leading to renewed focus on home births/abortions; healing justice leading to real-time resilience and grief practices)? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How are social movements inventing or adapting tactics to meet the moment (e.g., relief efforts, mutual aid, caravan protest)? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How are emergent mutual aid efforts interacting with ongoing strategic movement activities such as base building and specific movement projects like anti-deportation organizing and anti-gun violence efforts? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: How are the crises rearticulating relations between movement groups and across issue siloes? • <u>Research Question 5</u>: How do social movement groups balance short-term needs and long-term goals during crisis?
3. The Impact of the Pandemic on Movement Time and Space/The Impact of Movements on Pandemic Time and Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How have pandemic-era events altered the time-horizons and spaciality of demands for change, justice, and institutional response? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How does this movement moment compare to historical periods and transnational parallels of crisis movement activity? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How has context—regional, national, transnational—informed different movement responses to stay-at-home conditions that are simultaneously hyper-local, transnational, and virtual? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: What are the spatial dimensions of pandemic-era movement organizing, demands, and accomplishments? • <u>Research Question 5</u>: How is the pandemic era altering the borders between grassroots movements, non-profits, advocacy, and policy?
4. Longitudinal Effects and Social Movement Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What are the short-term and long-term institutional, cultural, and movement effects of pandemic-era movement activity? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How has the pandemic era altered how movement groups conceive of power and logics of grassroots social change? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How did an uptick in pandemic-era social movement activity affect movements' capacity for long-term strategizing? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: What will be the impact of the current protests against police violence on protest politics and protest policing?
5. The Role of Movement Imaginaries During Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What are the social imaginaries and vocabularies of pandemic-era movements? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How have previous crises and focusing events materialized pre-existing and new imaginaries?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How are social movement and critical imaginaries—e.g. healing justice, disability justice, afro-futurism/pessimism/optimism, queer (anti) futurities, speculative fictions—functioning as cultural repertoires and roadmaps for this time? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: What can we learn from the visual, spatial, and material languages of pandemic-era protest, e.g. demands, slogans, props, hashtags, music, and gestures? • <u>Research Question 5</u>: How do imaginaries transform in the process of becoming realized and what is the relationship between strategic and prefigurative impulses?
<p>6. Far Left and Far Right Engagements with the State</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How are far Left and far Right movement groups mobilizing against the state and how do these projects differ? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: What are the politics of engagement between far Left and far Right groups, and is there evidence of mutual escalation or “outbidding”? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What are the implications of pandemic-era movement activity for electoral politics and the 2020 election? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: How are the current crises being used by movements of the Right, such as white Christian nationalism broadly construed, to increase state instability and challenge formal democracy? • <u>Research Question 5</u>: What are the regional, national, and global or transnational dimensions of anti-state movements?
<p>7. The Relationship between Social Movements and Social Movement Scholarship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What can social movement scholarship offer pandemic-era social movements, actors, and organizations in real time? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: What can we learn from the pandemic era about the value and limitations of social movement scholarship? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How has the in/visibility of different kinds of movement activity changed due to increased online communication during the pandemic, and what does this mean for movement scholarship? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: What kinds of social movement scholarship representation (outputs, deliverables, offerings) beyond academic writing and presentations capture or serve the moment and/or longer-term activist learnings? • <u>Research Question 5</u>: In what ways do pandemic conditions affect dynamics of participant action research and participant observation?

Ethical / Methodological Considerations:

Ethical and methodological concerns loom especially large in regard to social movement scholarship at this critical time. Given the heightened vulnerability associated with social movement participation, researchers must guard against data extractivism, exploitation of research participants, and the risk of exposing social justice movement tactics and strategies. We encourage adherence to social justice research principles such as anti-racist and feminist values, accountability, transparency, reciprocity, and/or participatory action research design. Black feminist traditions and other liberatory methodologies remind us to avoid colonial approaches to research and instead center the realities of those most impacted. Because the disparate impacts of COVID-19 and extra-judicial state killings are rooted in entrenched white supremacy, reflexivity about the

unintended racialized assumptions and consequences of liberal research practices is especially important; racialized practices always intersect with gender and political economy.

Methodological challenges are also significant as social distancing means restricted access to movement spaces, background conversations, and certain kinds of ethnographic data. Conversely, the growing use of social media and new communication platforms offer vast new reservoirs of data on social movements, although they may reproduce invisibilities along old lines and expand surveillance. Scholars should be mindful of these conditions and the potential effects of our work.

Contributors:

Mary Bernstein, Department of Sociology, University of Connecticut

Aalap Bommaraju, Department of Sociology, University of Cincinnati

Natalie Cisneros, Department of Philosophy, Seattle University

Shana M. Griffin, PUNCTUATE

Jennifer E. James, Institute for Health and Aging, University of California, San Francisco

Meghan Elizabeth Kallman, School for Global Inclusion and Social Development, University of Massachusetts-Boston

John Krinsky, Department of Political Science, The City College of New York

Rachel E. Luft, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Seattle University

Adelle Dora Montebianco, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Middle Tennessee State University

Jilly Traganou, Parsons School of Design, The New School

Simón E. Weffer-Elizondo, Department of Sociology and Center for Latino and Latin American Studies, Northern Illinois University

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