

The Politics of International Solidarity

Appeals to solidarity are common in international relations, but solidarity is rarely addressed in international relations research. In this paper, we theorize the concept, propose a strategy of operationalization, and map and explain empirical manifestations in a most-likely case: natural disasters. Solidarity arises when adversity befalls an innocent victim, prompting public expressions of compassion that identify the victim's struggle as a collective concern, and burden sharing to help the victim overcome its misfortune. Solidarity is neither rare, nor a given: the extent of both identification and sharing can and do vary. We find that while over 40 percent of large natural disasters between 1995 and 2018 resulted in minimal international solidarity, more often than not some form of mutual support occurred. Solidarity emerges most consistently when it is needed the most, to address very large-scale disasters. Yet, its limited forms – with either strong identification or high sharing, but not the other – also provide opportunities for virtue signalling and exploitation. Our theoretical framework offers new insight into the patterns and correlates of international solidarity in a de-solidarizing world.



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