

“Things Fall Apart?” Prospects of Solidarity in a Precarious World

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Abstract

In this article, we examine the potential of solidarity to address global challenges in an increasingly precarious world. Solidarity involves individuals or groups supporting causes—whether ideas, people, or contexts—to combat marginalisation and injustice, even as such efforts frequently encounter resistance. This prompts the critical questions: What motivates solidarity, how is it expressed, and how effective is it in resolving the issues it seeks to address? Drawing on illustrative examples from a variety of social movements worldwide, we analyse the diverse forms of solidarity and the tensions that arise when dissent and resistance intersect with collective action. Despite these challenges, we argue that solidarity remains a viable framework for addressing some of today’s most pressing and complex issues. By exploring both the opportunities and obstacles it presents, we highlight solidarity’s enduring relevance and transformative potential in fostering meaningful change.

Keywords

demonstrations; precarity; solidarity; strikes

1. Introduction

In this article, we examine the enduring relevance and transformative potential of solidarity in addressing global challenges within an increasingly precarious and polarised world (Herzog, 2018; Mishra & Rath, 2020; Vandeveld, 2024; Varma & Shaban, 2024; Wilde, 2007; Yuen & Tong, 2021). Solidarity, which we define as collective action to combat marginalisation and injustice, operates in complex and contested spaces where it often intersects with resistance and dissent. We aim to advance the discourse by demonstrating how solidarity can bridge divisions and foster meaningful change.

We build on Émile Durkheim's foundational theories of mechanical and organic solidarity to analyse the dynamics of modern solidarity movements (Durkheim, 1933; Mishra & Rath, 2020; Schiermer, 2014; Thijssen, 2012; Thompson, 2012). Durkheim's (1933) distinction between solidarity rooted in shared values and identities, and solidarity based on interdependence within complex systems, frames our exploration of how solidarity functions in contemporary contexts. By applying this theoretical lens, we examine both its capacity to unite communities and its potential to deepen existing divisions.

Our analysis draws on illustrative examples from a variety of social movements worldwide. Grassroots movements and protests often reflect mechanical solidarity, where shared grievances or identities create a collective front. In contrast, challenges like climate change and economic inequality demand organic solidarity, which relies on networks of cooperation among diverse groups who support that cause. By investigating these manifestations, we highlight the adaptability of solidarity as a tool for addressing a wide range of pressing issues.

We make three key contributions to the study of solidarity. First, we integrate the concept of digital solidarity, examining how online activism enables virtual communities to mobilise around shared goals, expanding opportunities for collective action while also highlighting challenges such as polarisation within echo chambers. Second, we critically explore the interplay between solidarity and polarisation, analysing how solidarity can both bridge divides and intensify tensions in areas like migration, populism, and environmental activism. We identify conditions under which solidarity can counteract polarisation and foster inclusivity. Finally, we offer practical insights for policy and practice, emphasising inclusive approaches that integrate diverse perspectives to address challenges such as climate change, racial inequality, indigenous rights, and economic justice. By addressing these dimensions, we advance both theoretical understanding and practical applications of solidarity in a polarised and interconnected world.

Through this article, we situate solidarity within the context of contemporary global challenges, bridging historical and contemporary perspectives. We argue that solidarity is not only a mechanism for collective action and social cohesion but also a critical framework for addressing complex issues in a fractured world. By examining its contested nature and diverse forms, we lay the foundation for future research and practical applications to foster unity and resilience in uncertain times.

In the remainder of this article, we outline the theoretical framework that underpins our analysis, drawing on Émile Durkheim's theories of mechanical and organic solidarity to ground our discussion. We then detail our methodological approach, highlighting how we synthesise historical and contemporary scholarship to explore solidarity in its various manifestations. Next, we review the literature on solidarity, examining its contested nature and the ways diverse actors leverage it to advance their causes. This discussion is followed by an analysis of contemporary expressions of solidarity, from grassroots movements to digital activism, with a focus on their strategies and implications. Finally, we conclude by revisiting our central argument, discussing how our findings contribute to the existing literature, and offering practical insights for fostering solidarity to address today's pressing challenges. Through this structure, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of solidarity's potential in a polarised world.

2. Theoretical Framework

We employ Émile Durkheim's theory of solidarity to underpin our article. Durkheim, a French sociologist, is widely regarded as a foundational figure in the discipline of sociology. His primary focus was on the functioning of societal institutions during a period characterised by significant transformations in continental Europe, including urbanisation, industrialisation, and shifts in labour dynamics, with spillovers to other parts of the world (Durkheim, 1933, 1951). These changes resulted in interactions among individuals that extended beyond the confines of family and clan, necessitating innovative mechanisms to bind society together and support people who were impacted or exploited by these changes (Vandeveld, 2024). Durkheim observed that an improper and unregulated division of labour, which may engender conflict between labour and capital, could result in anomie. This state of anomie may precipitate numerous issues that adversely affect those who provide the labour. A salient example he identified was the increase in suicide rates among workers (Durkheim, 1951). This informed his development of the theories of mechanical and organic solidarities, which elucidate the various forms of cohesion that bind societies together. Solidarity, as a mechanism through which humans are interconnected, is thus regarded as one of Durkheim's significant contributions to academia. Many scholars, across sociology as well as other disciplines, have expanded upon his theory of solidarity, applying it to their own research in various contexts (Hawkins, 1979; Herzog, 2018; Mishra & Rath, 2020; Schiermer, 2014; Thijssen, 2012; Thompson, 2012). It is upon this foundation that we examine how contemporary societies and groups may apply his theories of solidarity to foster cohesiveness as a means of mending a fracturing world. By drawing on Durkheim's framework, we underscore the continued relevance of his theory to contemporary global issues.

According to Durkheim (1933), mechanical solidarity arises in traditional, homogeneous societies where individuals share similar work, values, lifestyles, and individual rights not different from those of their group. This form of solidarity is rooted in the collective conscience, binding individuals through shared beliefs and practices, and it is possible to the degree to which individual personality can be integrated into group personality (Durkheim, 1933; Thompson, 2012). The greater the extent to which a given society is homogenous, the greater the strength of its solidarity (Durkheim, 1933). Conversely, organic solidarity develops in complex, heterogeneous societies characterised by a high division of labour, where solidarity is based on the interdependence of individuals performing specialised roles, fostering cohesion through mutual reliance on each other's skills and contributions (Durkheim, 1933). This form of solidarity makes society more capable of collective action and allows individual freedom and autonomy (Herzog, 2018; Schiermer, 2014; Thijssen, 2012). However, Durkheim suggested that as societies gravitated increasingly towards organic solidarity, "collective representation progressively [became] less well defined" (Durkheim, 1972, p. 49). This seems to have alluded to the consequences of today's societal polarisation, as group representation is crucial in determining the collective good, and there are many competing interests among different groups.

Contemporary manifestations of solidarity reflect both forms, sometimes in a complementary manner. Mechanical solidarity is evident in grassroots movements and protests, where individuals unite based on shared grievances or common identities, such as racial, gender, or indigenous rights. These movements are not just about shared grievances but about the power of collective action. They draw on a collective sense of injustice, aiming to create a unified front against perceived oppressors or systemic inequities. In contrast, organic solidarity is more apparent in the sophisticated strategies required to address global issues such as climate change, economic inequality, and political instability. Here, solidarity involves networks of

cooperation among diverse groups with specialized knowledge and skills. For instance, online activism leverages technological expertise, academic circles contribute through research and advocacy, and labour unions mobilise workers for collective bargaining and strikes. Having said this, some of the issues highlighted can also cut across both mechanical and organic solidarity.

The interplay between mechanical and organic solidarity highlights the complex nature of contemporary solidarity practices. Grassroots movements and protests rely on the emotional and moral cohesion typical of mechanical solidarity, while broader, systemic challenges necessitate the functional interdependence characteristic of organic solidarity. This duality underscores the need for solidarity to be both inclusive and strategic, fostering unity while embracing diversity and specialisation to tackle complex global problems effectively (Adair, 2008; Mishra & Rath, 2020).

Durkheim's framework provides a critical lens through which we can understand the dynamics of modern solidarity. It elucidates how traditional forms of unity based on common identities coexist and complement the more complex, interdependent forms of cooperation required in today's globalised social landscape. Integrating both types of solidarity can help develop robust strategies to address contemporary societal challenges (Hawkins, 1979; Wilde, 2007).

3. Methodological Approach

Methodologically, this article is conceptual in nature, drawing on scholarly works that examine solidarity and its potential to foster inclusivity in an increasingly polarised world. The question of what constitutes a conceptual article has been raised by many and thus warrants us to shed light on it and why we have adopted such an approach for our article. In highlighting the relevance of what constitutes a conceptual article, we draw insights from the works of Whetten (1989), Cropanzano (2009), and Gilson and Goldberg (2015). Whetten asserted that seven critical questions needed to be answered when evaluating a conceptual article. These include: (a) what's new? (b) so what? (c) why so? (d) well done? (e) done well? (f) why now? and (g) who cares? (Whetten, 1989, p. 494). For Cropanzano (2009, p. 1306), the most important question to be answered when evaluating a conceptual article is when such articles "underscore commonalities that build coherence."

In evaluating our article, we assert that it meets the established criteria discussed by Whetten above. Notably, it underscores the resurgence of issues or new issues such as racism, migration, the Gaza war, etc., that necessitate solidarity, which is consequently significant for questions (b) and (c). Concerning questions (d) and (e), we argue that historical examples demonstrate how transnational solidarity has been employed to overthrow apartheid in South Africa, although some lingering consequences of these exist until now. For questions (f) and (g), these are relevant as global outrage and participation in these matters through various forms of solidarity strategies, as discussed later in this article, provide illustrative examples. In response to Cropanzano's call, we emphasise that the diverse strategies of solidarity can operate in a complementary manner, as they collectively address issues of injustice, oppression, and inequality, thereby creating coherence through their shared characteristics and impact.

To achieve the above, we engage with existing scholarship on social movements, including those leveraging digital platforms (Achmad, 2022; Peng et al., 2018; Russo, 2024; Stalder, 2013). The analysis involves

extracting key themes from academic literature and critically engaging with them. We examine both historical contexts and contemporary scholarship, practice, and activism related to solidarity, incorporating diverse geographical perspectives. This approach allows us to explore transnational issues that necessitate solidarity and how it has been mobilised to address marginalisation. Some of the themes identified include demonstrations, protests, and rallies as forms of solidarity; petitions as a form of solidarity; strikes as a form of solidarity; encampments as a form of solidarity; and online activism as a form of solidarity.

Although no primary data is collected, we refer to examples of solidarity in action to support our arguments. This enables us to maintain a conceptual and theoretical focus while connecting our analysis to broader trends in polarisation and marginalisation.

4. The Nexus Between Polarisation and Solidarity

The concept of solidarity has garnered significant attention across various fields of study, reflecting its multifaceted nature and critical role in contemporary society (Mordacci, 2024a, 2024b; Pongiglione, 2024). Solidarity, understood as unity or agreement of feeling and action among individuals or groups with a common/shared interest, is a powerful mechanism for social cohesion and collective action (Vandevelde, 2024). Our analysis of previous scholarship is guided by a few questions: What justifies the need for solidarity? In other words, would solidarity still be required if every individual, or group in society were to live a comfortable life? It is evident that the need for solidarity would diminish if everyone were to experience their ideal existence. This implication points to the existence of global and local issues that have compelled individuals or groups to act in solidarity to address such challenges, as highlighted in the introductory section of this article. The reasons for solidarity have been explored by recent scholars such as Roberto Mordacci, who noted that the most important reason for solidarity is respect (Mordacci, 2024a), and this respect is both for those we support and ourselves as well. It goes both ways. There is therefore the need for solidarity to support people or individuals who have been disrespected through structures that continue to degrade their human existence.

As we explore this section, it is essential to emphasise that solidarity is likely as ancient as humanity itself and has manifested in various forms across different societies. For example, in continental Europe, sociologists of the past underscored that the demand for solidarity emerged in response to the rise of “rough individualism and harsh capitalism” in evolving urban contexts (Vandevelde, 2024). Consequently, solidarity served as a stabilising force for individuals who perceived this emerging societal transformation as problematic and potentially marginalising for certain populations, leading them to utilise solidarity as a corrective measure (Vandevelde, 2024). Today, the necessity for solidarity remains closely aligned with the imperative to prevent forms of marginalisation that are either currently occurring or anticipated, yet whose effects are evident to those subjected to such injustices.

However, as we argue in this article, one of the factors serving as a challenge to contemporary solidarity as a mechanism for confronting marginalisation is polarisation. This is expected as we do not profess naivety in assuming that all individuals would perceive matters in the same way, thereby preventing the occurrence of polarisation. Our aim here is to demonstrate, drawing on previous scholarship, how the two concepts—solidarity and polarisation—have influenced each other and may have acted as a catalyst in this dynamic. By examining the existing body of scholarship, this section elucidates how solidarity operates at

different levels of society and the ways in which it both mitigates and exacerbates social divides. Before we return to solidarity, let us turn our gaze to polarisation briefly.

No society is homogeneous in ideas and character. Nearly every society is characterised by divisions, which may be rooted in ideologies, identities, class, race, gender, geography, and various other factors. Based on this assertion, it is therefore obvious that people are going to have different opinions, leading to a polarised world as we see today. Though heterogeneity in society might not be bad itself, some form of polarisation can be chronic and dangerous to harmonious cohabitation in society and, in fact, can lead to marginalisation for individuals or groups of people in society. And that is where the problem lies. While polarisation has attracted the attention of many scholars, there is a lack of consensus on its definition. Schedler (2023, p. 341) defines it as “disputes over the definition and decision of collective matters.” Polarisation could also be seen as a process in which politics is simplified by offering two conflicting choices (McCoy & Somer, 2021). It is about disputes over collective issues, decision-making, and actions.

Although polarisation manifests in different elements of society, one prominent area of polarisation in contemporary society is the realm of politics broadly perceived. This is because disputes between groups with competing expectations from the government, which usually manifest in resource allocation and political participation decisions, can polarise society (Schedler, 2023). Scholars have shown that political and cultural divisions within American society, for instance, have increased significantly since the 1970s (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008) and observed that polarisation has become worrisome since it can stress democracy in many countries (McCoy & Somer, 2021; Schedler, 2023), which may hinder collective actions.

Different dimensions of society can lead to polarisation, yet the intersecting effects are more impactful than such elements on their own. For example, things that polarise society, such as political parties, also form along the line of personal identities due to the stability and significance of group membership. Political leaders have employed divisive tactics along existing identity groups, along ethnonational and religious lines, for example, to consolidate their power and electoral advantage (McCoy & Somer, 2021). This appeared to manifest in recent American elections among Democrats and Republicans, where salient social identities such as race and religion converge with party affiliation (Iyengar et al., 2019). While diversity in society is not necessarily bad and reflects Durkheim’s idea of organic solidarity, polarisation can promote animosity between groups, which can extend to different social spheres outside the groups. For instance, Iyengar et al. (2019) have argued that the partisan affect among Republicans and Democrats in the USA shapes attitudes and behaviours external to the political realm, such as marriages, where Iyengar et al. (2019) found that some in both Republicans’ and Democrats’ sides do not approve of relations marrying a person from the other side (Iyengar et al., 2012, 2019). This suggests that collective action for the common good becomes difficult as deciding the public good itself becomes politically charged.

In the midst of the foregoing, where demand for the provision of common goods is required for solidarity among citizens of a nation or member states of a regional block (like EU member countries; see Sangiovanni, 2013), conflict over the common good can hinder solidarity. Solidarity is therefore more needed now than ever because of the increasing polarisation (especially political polarisation) in several countries across the globe. This is because the two influence each other.

Beyond political polarisation, which is more country or regional-based and sometimes with global diffusions, solidarity on a global scale has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the context of

transnational social movements and international activism. Global solidarity often manifests in responses to climate change, human rights abuses, and economic inequality, which transcend national borders. Scholars have highlighted the role of global solidarity in movements like Black Lives Matter and the global climate strikes, where individuals from diverse backgrounds unite under a common cause (Gleason, 2013; Van Gelder, 2011). However, the increasing interconnectedness also brings to light the tension between solidarity and polarisation. For instance, while global movements can galvanise widespread support, they can also exacerbate divisions, particularly when cultural or political differences come to the forefront (DiSalvo, 2015).

National solidarity is critical in fostering social cohesion within countries, particularly in times of crisis. It is a reciprocal obligation among citizens to mutually provide essential collective goods within a country (Schedler, 2023). During events such as natural disasters, economic downturns, or political upheavals, national solidarity can serve as a unifying force. For example, the widespread protests in response to austerity measures in various countries have shown how national solidarity can mobilise citizens against perceived economic injustices (Dixon et al., 2004). Nonetheless, national solidarity is not immune to polarisation. The rise of right-wing populism and xenophobia in several nations illustrates how national solidarity can be co-opted to promote exclusionary agendas, thereby deepening societal divisions (Szporer, 2012). As both a unifying and polarising force, this dual nature of national solidarity warrants a nuanced examination.

At the domestic level, solidarity is vital in community building and local activism. Grassroots movements, local protests, and community-based initiatives often exemplify mechanical solidarity, where shared values and collective identity drive collective action (Tabak & Wagner, 1997). Domestic solidarity is crucial in addressing issues that directly impact local communities, such as housing, education, and healthcare. However, the tension between solidarity and polarisation is evident even at this level. Local movements can become polarised along lines of race, class, and political ideology, leading to fragmented efforts and internal conflicts (Hammond, 2013).

The relationship between solidarity and polarisation is complex and multifaceted. On one hand, solidarity bridges the divide and fosters a sense of collective purpose. On the other hand, the very act of uniting individuals around a cause can also highlight and deepen existing divisions. For instance, online activism, while effective in mobilising support and raising awareness, can also create echo chambers that reinforce existing beliefs and polarised opinions (Stewart & Schultze, 2019). Similarly, strikes and protests, though powerful tools for expressing solidarity, can polarise public opinion and provoke a backlash from opposing groups (Dixon et al., 2004).

Scholars argue that the effectiveness of solidarity in overcoming polarisation depends on the strategies employed and the inclusivity of the movements. Inclusive approaches that seek to understand and integrate diverse perspectives are more likely to foster genuine solidarity and reduce polarisation (Sameh, 2014). Conversely, exclusionary practices that marginalise dissenting voices can exacerbate divisions and undermine the goals of solidarity movements (Hjelm, 2021).

The literature on solidarity reveals its critical role in addressing global, national, and domestic issues. However, the inherent tension between solidarity and polarisation presents significant challenges. Understanding this dynamic is essential for developing strategies that enhance solidarity while mitigating

polarisation. Our study seeks to extend this literature by adding new trends and ways of garnering solidarity in contemporary times.

5. Strategies, Manifestation, and the Practice of Solidarity

In this section we examine the various contemporary issues that have led people to form alliances based on solidarity. It is important to emphasise that solidarity is not merely a theoretical concept, but also a practical strategy employed to effectively address these issues. To this end, Mordacci (2024b, p. 1) asserts that “in many areas of social and political action the idea of solidarity seems to offer a nuanced and practical framework, going beyond the stricter but more abstract requisites of justice or fairness.” Additionally, we recognise that solidarity can serve as both an ultimate objective and a method to achieve a desired outcome. For example, while solidarity can lead to outcomes that effectively resolve specific problems, it also holds the value of increasing awareness, mobilising resources, and engaging with individuals in positions of power, among other important functions.

While we seek to underscore the fundamental value of solidarity, we also acknowledge that there are differing conceptualisations of this concept and while some are critical, others might not be. As aptly articulated by Mordacci, solidarity can be categorised into critical and uncritical forms. However, we contend that the primary purpose of solidarity, borrowing from Mordacci, is to foster a sense of collective responsibility and mutual support. Thus, “solidarity is critical when it is based on the recognition of oppression and injustice, which are a violation of the principle of respect, as something that ought to be contrasted as a moral and political community” (Mordacci, 2024a, p. 2). In the following sections, we provide a thematic analysis of various strategies that are employed by people acting in solidarity. This section also shows contemporary illustrations of solidarity as an expansion of Emile Durkheim’s theory of solidarity.

6. Demonstrations/Protests/Rallies as Forms of Solidarity

Over the years, demonstrations and protests have gained recognition as effective methods of fostering solidarity. They bring together individuals who are directly impacted by a specific issue, as well as those who are not immediately affected but support the cause of those impacted (Baker, 2019; Kirchhoff, 2021; Kron & Lebuhn, 2020). In such instances, the shared concern acts as a unifying force.

Protests play a crucial role in democratic societies, serving as a vital mechanism for citizens to express their grievances and advocate for change. Through protest, individuals and groups can highlight social injustices, demand accountability from their leaders, and influence public policy. One of the primary functions of protest is to raise awareness about issues that may be overlooked or ignored by mainstream media and political institutions. By mobilising communities and drawing attention to specific causes, protests can galvanise public opinion and encourage dialogue around pressing concerns. This heightened awareness can lead to greater civic engagement, as individuals become more informed about the issues affecting their lives and communities. Moreover, protests can serve as a check on governmental power. When citizens take to the streets to voice their dissent, they remind elected officials that they are accountable to the people. This form of direct action can compel policymakers to reconsider their decisions and policies, fostering a more responsive and responsible government. Additionally, political protests often bring together diverse groups of people, creating coalitions that transcend demographic boundaries. This solidarity can strengthen

movements and amplify their messages, making it clear that the call for change is not isolated to one group but is a broader societal demand.

A pertinent illustration of globalised and national solidarity that we use for illustrative purposes is the anti-apartheid movements. These movements manifested through demonstrations and protests, both domestically within South Africa and internationally. Apartheid was a system of institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa that was implemented by the National Party government from 1948 until the early 1990s (Giliomee, 2003). It was designed to maintain white domination while extending racial separation. The policy classified the population into racial groups—white, Black, Coloured, and Indian—and enforced strict residential, social, and economic segregation (Giliomee, 2003). Apartheid laws restricted non-white people's rights, including where they could live, work, and go to school, and prohibited interracial marriages. The ideology behind apartheid was influenced by various factors, including the segregationist practices of the American South, and was justified by proponents as a means to preserve cultural and racial purity and to promote separate development for different racial groups (Giliomee, 2003). This system of governance faced resistance from oppressed communities in South Africa which eventually attracted international solidarity, which contributed to its overthrow.

Anti-apartheid social movements can be characterised as both mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity, depending on the perspective from which one examines them. From a national standpoint, the anti-apartheid movement aligned with mechanical solidarity, as the Black and non-white populations in South Africa felt oppressed and marginalised by the system and united to resist it (Durkheim, 1984/1997; Thijssen, 2012). This collective action was based on their shared experience of oppression and marginalisation. Conversely, we can apply Durkheim's theory of organic solidarity to the transnational social movements and networks that collaborated to ensure the system's downfall. The various communities, groups, and individuals globally may not have directly experienced racial marginalisation; however, their shared commitment to the principle of humanity prompted them to act collectively to combat such marginalization (Herzog, 2018; Mishra & Rath, 2020; Schiermer, 2014; Thijssen, 2012).

We see other examples such as global demonstrations that have taken place in response to the mismanagement of the economy and austerity measures with dire consequences on the lives of ordinary people (Ancelovici, 2015; Klandermans & Van Stekelenburg, 2016), migrant deportation (Abrams, 2016; Hinger et al., 2018; Patler, 2018), and racial discrimination, protested by Black Lives Matter demonstrations across the globe (Shuman et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2023). Our review indicates that individuals in developing countries are against economic mismanagement, dire economic conditions, and the adverse effects of austerity measures on ordinary citizens (Auvinen, 1996; Maganga, 2020). The foregoing suggests the combination of mechanical and organic solidarity to overcome marginalisation in both local and global contexts.

7. Petitions as a Form of Solidarity

Petitions have evolved as a means of expressing solidarity and supporting various causes (Sameh, 2014; Shadiqi et al., 2020; Strange, 2011; Yuen & Tong, 2021; Zaret, 2019). This is particularly notable in academic circles, where signatures carry weight and serve as a platform for scholars to voice their opinions and work together for common or divergent goals (Demirkır, 2021; Irish, 2019; Tutkal, 2023). This has become pronounced during the era of limitation of academic freedoms, workloads, and casualisation of academic staff. During and after

Covid-19, some universities decided to axe some disciplines as they did not see them as viable. In a similar vein, academics again canvassed signatures to support their colleagues who lost their jobs and to implore the universities to rescind such decisions. Although only some members of academia were affected, those who were unaffected by the downsizing policies demonstrated reciprocal obligation towards their affected colleagues to ensure they had the collective good of job security and academic freedom.

Academia, as a centre of knowledge, critical thinking, and social consciousness, has always been at the forefront of societal issues. Scholars understand the power of unity and recognise that their collective voice can make an impact, draw attention to pressing matters, and drive positive change. Signatures provide a tangible and visible way for academics to publicly align themselves with specific ideals, movements, or campaigns. The academic community is diverse, consisting of individuals with expertise in various disciplines. As a result, signatures have the potential to bring together experts from different fields who share concerns about a particular problem. For example, in the face of an environmental crisis, scientists, economists, sociologists, and policymakers may all add their signatures to a joint declaration calling for urgent action. By leveraging their professional authority, their combined signatures enhance the impact of their message, extending its reach beyond traditional academic circles to the general public and policymakers. The type of solidarity exhibited among academics as a cohesive unit can be classified as mechanical solidarity, as posited by Durkheim. However, when professionals or experts from other areas join in providing support for their cause, this solidarity can be characterised as organic solidarity.

8. Strikes as a Form of solidarity

Strikes have historically been a powerful way for workers to show their unity and fight for better working conditions, fair wages, and improved rights (Dixon et al., 2004; Szporer, 2012; Tabak & Wagner, 1997). This type of protest allows workers to demonstrate their solidarity and send a strong message to employers and policymakers that their grievances cannot be ignored (Dixon et al., 2004; Szporer, 2012; Tabak & Wagner, 1997). Strikes can take many different forms, from small-scale walkouts to nationwide or industry-wide shutdowns. They disrupt business operations, highlighting workers' importance in producing and delivering goods and services. By withholding their labour, workers show the economic impact they have and force employers to address their demands. In addition to their economic impact, strikes also build a sense of solidarity among workers. They stand together, recognising that they all face similar challenges and are working towards a common goal. This collective action fosters camaraderie and boosts morale, empowering workers to fight for their rights. Furthermore, strikes often gain public attention and support. They become focal points for social justice movements, receiving media coverage and amplifying workers' voices. This puts pressure on employers and policymakers to address workers' concerns. Solidarity strikes, where workers from different industries support each other's causes, create a broader movement that increases the chances of successful negotiations and positive outcomes. While strikes may cause disruptions and temporary inconveniences, they are crucial in driving social change and improving working conditions. They represent unity, strength, and determination, emphasising that workers are not alone in their struggles. As a form of collective solidarity, strikes have the potential to promote fairness, justice, and equality in the workplace, ultimately benefiting the entire workforce and society as a whole. The type of solidarity exhibited among workers in a particular industry as a cohesive unit can be classified as mechanical solidarity, as posited by Durkheim. However, when other workers of other industries join their strike in solidarity with their colleagues' cause, this solidarity can be characterised as organic solidarity.

9. Encampment as a Form of Solidarity

In recent years, encampment has emerged as a potent strategy of solidarity. It is an overt form of protest wherein individuals congregate, often in outdoor spaces, to assert their demands and foster a sense of community. While encampments have been utilised throughout history, they have garnered renewed attention and significance within contemporary social and political movements. Encampments offer a gathering place for marginalised groups to congregate, mobilise, and amplify their voices. For instance, across various university campuses in the Western world, we have noticed encampments as a form of protest against the ongoing war in Gaza by students. In addition, the Occupy Wall Street movement, which commenced in New York City's Zuccotti Park in 2011, sought to challenge economic inequality (Gleason, 2013; Van Gelder, 2011). The potency of encampment lies in its capacity to establish a visible and tangible presence (DiSalvo, 2015; Van Gelder, 2011). The physical space becomes a beacon, attracting supporters and bystanders alike (Hammond, 2013). Passersby cannot disregard the encampment, stirring curiosity, dialogue, and, in certain instances, engagement. This visibility raises awareness regarding noteworthy social and political issues that may otherwise be overlooked or dismissed. Individuals who may not ordinarily interact with one another are brought together through a shared struggle. The encampment transforms into a collective refuge, a sanctuary wherein individuals can find support, fellowship, and a sense of belonging. Shared experiences forge connections, fostering trust and resilience in adversity. Encampment serves as a quintessential example of organic solidarity. This phenomenon arises from the collective mobilisation of diverse groups and individuals worldwide who advocate for the Palestinian cause, recognising the marginalisation experienced by this community. Their activism functions as a means of addressing and overcoming such marginalisation.

10. Online/Digital Activism as a Form of Solidarity

Online activism, also known as cyberactivism, is a powerful tool for expressing solidarity and advocating for social and political causes. It leverages the internet and digital platforms, allowing people from diverse backgrounds to connect and unite for a common purpose (Ainomugisha & Mwesigire, 2024; Stewart & Schultze, 2019; Uwalaka, 2024). One advantage is the ability to quickly and efficiently reach and mobilise many people. In recent times, we have seen young people in Africa using this strategy, including Ghana (#FixTheCountry, 2022), Kenya (#OccupyParliament and #RejectFinanceBill 2024), and Nigeria (The #EndSARS revolution), to mention but a few. Through social media platforms, activists can disseminate information, share stories, and raise awareness about various issues (Bodunrin & Matsilele, 2024; Stewart & Schultze, 2019). This creates a virtual community of supporters, fostering solidarity among individuals who may have otherwise been isolated in their advocacy efforts. Online activism also democratises social and political participation, as it lowers barriers to entry (Saka & Ojo, 2024). Anyone with an internet connection and a device can engage in online initiatives, making them more inclusive and accessible. This inclusivity fosters a sense of solidarity by showing that people from all walks of life can come together for a common cause. Additionally, online activism provides a platform for marginalised communities to amplify their voices. It enables historically underrepresented groups, such as racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities, to share their experiences, advocate for their rights, and demand social justice (Saka & Ojo, 2024; Stewart & Schultze, 2019). Online activism promotes solidarity by uniting these communities, highlighting shared struggles, and creating a sense of collective empowerment. The type of solidarity exhibited among youth groups in Ghana, Nigeria, or Kenya, as well as other online activism can both be categorised as mechanical as well as organic solidarity.

11. Conclusion

In this article, we examined the enduring relevance of solidarity as a framework for addressing global challenges in an increasingly polarised world. Motivated by the pressing need to combat marginalisation, injustice, and systemic inequalities, we explored solidarity's dual potential to unite communities and exacerbate divisions. Drawing on Durkheim's theories and integrating emerging concepts like digital solidarity, we highlighted the diverse manifestations of solidarity, its interplay with polarisation, why it should be considered by policymakers, and its practical applications in addressing issues such as climate change, racial inequality, and economic justice.

Our article adds to the existing literature by re-emphasising and underscoring the need for inclusive and collaborative approaches that bridge societal divides while leveraging solidarity's transformative potential. Future research could investigate the ethics of solidarity, its effectiveness in bridging divides, and its role in addressing catastrophic and existential risks. Expanding the study of digital solidarity and exploring the conditions under which solidarity fosters inclusivity will further deepen our understanding of its potential to navigate complex global challenges.

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Conflict of Interests

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