

Solidarity is the idea that people stand together with a shared commitment to support one another, especially when facing challenges, injustice, or hardship. The word comes from the Latin root *solidus*, meaning firm, whole, or united. When people act in solidarity, they are recognizing that their strength increases when they cooperate and defend each other's interests rather than acting alone.

At its most basic level, solidarity means unity based on shared purpose or shared experience. Unity means people coming together with a common understanding or goal. Purpose refers to the reason people are acting together. Solidarity can exist in families, communities, workplaces, political movements, and even among nations. Wherever people feel connected enough to support each other, solidarity can form.

One way to understand solidarity is to contrast it with individualism. Individualism emphasizes personal independence and self-reliance. Solidarity emphasizes collective responsibility and mutual support. Collective responsibility means members of a group recognize that the well-being of one person affects the well-being of others. Mutual support means individuals help each other rather than competing against one another.

Solidarity often emerges when people realize they share a common struggle. For example, workers in a factory might discover that each of them faces similar conditions—long hours, unsafe equipment, or low wages. Individually, each worker might feel powerless to change those conditions. But when workers unite, they gain collective power. Collective power means the combined influence of a group acting together.

Historically, solidarity has been especially important in labor movements. A labor movement is an organized effort by workers to improve wages, working conditions, and workplace rights. When workers form unions—organizations that represent employees—they rely heavily on solidarity. If workers remain united, they can negotiate more effectively with employers. If workers break solidarity and act individually, the employer's bargaining power becomes much stronger.

One of the most famous examples of solidarity occurred in Poland during the 1980s with a movement literally called "Solidarity." This was a trade union and political movement formed by workers at the Gdańsk Shipyard. Under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, workers demanded political reforms and labor rights from the communist government that controlled Poland at the time. Millions of people joined the movement, showing how solidarity among workers could evolve into a powerful national force for political change.

Solidarity is not limited to labor issues. It can appear in many forms of social movements. Civil rights movements, for example, often rely on solidarity among groups who seek equal treatment under the law. Equal treatment means the law applies fairly to everyone regardless of race, gender, religion, or background. When individuals show solidarity with others experiencing discrimination, they help strengthen the broader effort for justice.

Solidarity also plays a role in international relations. Nations sometimes express solidarity with other countries facing natural disasters, military threats, or humanitarian crises. Humanitarian refers to actions intended to promote human welfare and relieve suffering. For example, countries may send aid, medical teams, or resources to help people affected by earthquakes, famine, or war. This type of solidarity reflects the belief that global communities share responsibility for protecting human dignity.

In everyday life, solidarity often appears in smaller, quieter ways. When neighbors support a family that has lost a home to fire, when communities raise funds for someone facing medical expenses, or when classmates defend someone who is being bullied, those actions express solidarity. The underlying idea is that no one should face hardship alone when others are able to help.

Sociologists—people who study how societies function—often describe solidarity as one of the forces that hold societies together. A society is a group of people who share institutions, culture, and systems of cooperation. Without solidarity, societies risk fragmentation. Fragmentation means breaking apart into isolated individuals or competing groups that no longer trust each other.

The French sociologist Émile Durkheim studied solidarity extensively. He argued that societies develop two main forms of solidarity: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity appears in simpler societies where people share similar lifestyles, work, and beliefs. Because everyone performs similar roles, social bonds form naturally.

Organic solidarity develops in more complex societies where people perform specialized roles. Specialization means individuals focus on specific types of work—such as doctors, teachers, engineers, or farmers. Even though these individuals perform different tasks, they rely on one another's work to sustain society. This interdependence—meaning people depend on each other's contributions—creates another form of social cohesion.

Solidarity also carries a moral dimension. Moral refers to principles about right and wrong behavior. When people act in solidarity, they are often expressing the belief that fairness and compassion should guide human relationships. Compassion means recognizing another person's suffering and wanting to alleviate it.

However, solidarity can sometimes be complicated. Strong solidarity within one group can sometimes lead to exclusion of others. Exclusion means leaving certain people outside the circle of support. For example, strong loyalty within a political group might cause members to distrust or reject people who hold different beliefs. For solidarity to contribute positively to society, it often needs to remain inclusive rather than narrowly defined.

Another challenge arises when solidarity requires sacrifice. Supporting others sometimes involves giving time, resources, or personal risk. Workers on strike, for instance, may temporarily lose income to pressure employers for fair conditions. A strike is a coordinated work stoppage used to force negotiations. Solidarity among workers is crucial during strikes because if some workers return to work while others strike, the effort can collapse.

Solidarity is closely tied to trust. Trust means believing that others will act honestly and support the shared goal. Without trust, people hesitate to cooperate because they fear being taken advantage of. Strong solidarity typically develops in communities where people believe others will stand by their commitments.

Communication also plays a role. People must understand each other's experiences and needs in order to build solidarity. When groups learn about each other's struggles—whether through conversation, education, or shared experiences—they are more likely to form bonds of support.

Modern technology has created new forms of solidarity as well. Social media allows individuals across the world to express support for causes, raise awareness about injustice, and coordinate action. While online solidarity can spread ideas quickly, many scholars argue that lasting solidarity still depends on real-world relationships and sustained commitment.

Ultimately, solidarity is about recognizing that human lives are interconnected. Interconnected means linked together in ways that affect one another. When people understand that their well-being is tied to the well-being of others, they become more willing to cooperate, defend fairness, and support those who are struggling.

In this sense, solidarity represents one of the core forces that allows communities, movements, and even entire societies to function. It transforms isolated individuals into groups capable of facing challenges together, reminding people that strength often comes not from standing alone, but from standing together.