

Solidarity in social policy – the extent of drain risk

A study focusing on the two dominant political blocs in Sweden

Abstract

Solidarity is expected to be expressed in concrete action in specific situations. In modern welfare states, however, it has been made abstract in order to appeal to all citizens. Abstraction increases the risk that solidarity is drained of its meaning. Our hypothesis is that the *extent* of this risk differs between the two dominant political blocs in Sweden, the Social Democratic and the Conservative. It is examined through an analysis of how often solidarity is invoked in traditional newspapers representing these two blocs. When invoked in newspapers from the Social Democratic bloc, we interpret solidarity as being “inclusive”, which is what their ideology refers to. When invoked in newspapers from the Conservative bloc, we interpret solidarity as “exclusionary”, which is implied in their ideology. According to our theory inclusive solidarity is reciprocal and thereby reduces the drain risk, while exclusionary solidarity is characterized as a one-way relationship, which increases the drain risk. The study was carried out during a period when the government changed from Conservative to Social Democratic. According to our hypothesis this would increase the appeal of inclusive solidarity. However, our findings indicated the opposite, an increase in exclusionary solidarity. The conclusion is that the risk of solidarity drain is *independent* of which political ideology is in power.

Keywords: Abstract solidarity, drain risk, political blocs, traditional newspaper, Sweden

ACCORDING TO SEVERAL researchers, solidarity have received little scholarly interest, including in sociology (Stjernø 2005; Banting & Kymlicka 2017). This is despite its importance in terms of social order, conflicts, social integration and that “citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law” (Calhoun 2002:153). It shows the need for further studies.

Solidarity means that members of a group or citizens of a society feel sympathy and responsibility for each other and are expected to support and promote each other. In a modern democratic society, solidarity also means that everyone has the right to mutual recognition (Habermas 1990; Brunkhorst 2005). Banting and Kymlicka (2017) refer to three different dimensions of solidarity in their analyses: a civic (for example, mutual tolerance), a democratic (for example, support for basic human rights and equalities)

and a redistributive solidarity (for example, support for redistribution towards poor and vulnerable groups). They consider that redistributive solidarity is the dominant tradition in Europe, driven by trade unions and the Social Democratic movement.

This tradition affects our study, albeit with three considerations. The first is that we emphasize redistribution, but call it social policy – that is to say, a redistributing social policy “in the broadest sense”, which can include labour policies, health care and so on (Habermas 2001:77). It draws attention to the state’s basic function to redistribute rather than just regulate. The second concerns the existence of another tradition of solidarity, based on Christian charity, which has also had political impact within Conservative ideology (Liedman 2015).

The third consideration comes from Habermas’s perspective on solidarity, which is central in our analysis. The perspective means that we more clearly highlight the fundamental nature of solidarity – that is, as an intersubjective relationship, created via mutual communication. However, it appears in different ways, depending on where it operates between the individual and the system. When solidarity works in everyday life, mutual communication is central for its legitimisation (social solidarity). When solidarity works in the political sphere there are two steps in its function. First, there is a legitimization of the citizens’ various interests, achieved via mutual communication. Then, there is a balancing of these via morality (universal) to a collective will, achieved through acceptance of the law (civic solidarity). If the political sphere offers these possibilities social integration will be strengthened, because that sphere is “normatively held together solely by civic solidarity -the abstract, legally mediated form of solidarity among citizens” (Habermas 2004:9). Finally, when solidarity works in the system, the legitimized claims are transformed into legality, making solidarity institutionalized and labelled as justice. “The only kind of democratic process that will count as legitimate, and that will be able to provide its citizens with solidarity, will be one that succeeds in an appropriate allocation and a fair distribution of rights” (Habermas 2001:77), i.e., a redistributive solidarity.

Our purpose is to examine a mechanism which affects abstract solidarity, namely the *drain risk* (Banting & Kymlicka 2017; Pensky 2008; Brunkhorst 2005). More specifically, we want to know whether the two dominant political blocs, here called the Social Democratic and Conservative, affects the extent of the drain risk due to their different solidarity perspectives. Bloc refers to groupings of parties with common values on certain issues (Nationalencyklopedin 2024). However, to deal with the bloc phenomenon, we operated with two aspects: 1) ideology, and 2) the extent of use in newspapers. Concerning the first, we focused on how the two dominant parties in each bloc, i.e. the Social Democrats and the Moderates, describe solidarity. Concerning the second, we focused on the most important newspapers that are those, who connected themselves to each bloc. Drain, or erosion, refers here to a process that undermines solidarity and diminishes it. There can be several reasons for this – for example, when equality or fair distribution is ignored, when citizens are denied support for their survival, or when society does not deliver what is promised (Banting & Kymlicka 2017; Brunkhorst 2005). This aim generates the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the two political blocs express solidarity?
2. To what extent have the two political blocs referred to solidarity in three social policy implementation areas: activation policy, sickness insurance policy and migration policy?
3. Do writers in the newspapers express solidarity in line with their respective political ideologies?

The study is important since draining of solidarity can undermine social integration, which is a cornerstone of Swedish social policy laws. The study may also highlight the degree of trust that can exist for the solidaric ambitions of Swedish social policy, also from an international point of view (King & Ross 2010; Rothstein 2017). Finally, studies of solidarity can provide a general knowledge of how it works in contexts of professional social policy (Lundälv 2020).

Research on solidarity in politics

In this section we present some previous analyses of solidarity, from which our own perspective can be further clarified. The first is that of Émile Durkheim, who realized the importance of solidarity for social cohesion more than a hundred years ago (1883/1933). He claimed that members of traditional society bonded with each other because they shared the same conditions of existence, the same society. It made the individual diffuse, while a similarity in consciousness united them, generation after generation. Such a community was founded on *mechanical solidarity*. However, when the industrial society emerged, it became based on a division of labour where everyone took responsibility for their part in production. It made them more dependent on each other. To keep all these different actors and groups together, a social community was developed which gave room for personal development and a collective awareness. Instead, an *organic solidarity* arose, which is the basis for most analyses of solidarity today.

A sociological example is the study “Crisis of solidarity? Changing welfare and migration regimes in Sweden” (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2016). It emphasizes that the welfare state’s solidarity project, together with a strong collective agreement system, aimed to equalize wage differences in a multicultural context. However, the study shows that this inclusive ambition of the Swedish model has failed, as a gap has arisen between the citizens’ formal and substantive rights. For example, ethnicity has become a sorting instrument for employment, with so called “occupational ghettos”, meaning that ethno-culturally and racially codes can be highlighted when Swedish values are demanded and because certain groups’ participation and political influence have decreased (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2016:130).

Another example is a recent dissertation in sociology about intentionality and solidarity, which examined “... How Collective Intentionality Shapes Solidarity on Different Levels” (Kirgil 2023). Although collective intentionality is central to solidarity and social action, it is not clear, according to the author, how this “we-feeling” shapes solidarity on macro-, meso- and micro levels. The study has a general focus

outside Sweden, including data from the US, showing that social interaction was functioned as a mediator between political leaders and the citizens. The leaders awakened or provoked collective intentionality by, for example, emphasizing unity, vulnerability, action, and community boundaries. Democrats emphasized that government as well as citizens should be involved and engaged, while republicans highlighted a more top-down approach to governmental action. However, political leaders' narratives on the distribution of governmental and civic roles did not follow party lines. The results showed that collective intentionality in solidarity could not be built through speech acts only but had to be based on shared "we-experiences", community and trust.

The collective nature of solidarity has also been noticed by the sociologist Daniel Persson Thunqvist (2022) in his study "Collective forms of altruism. On altruistic 'professional heroes' based on Durkheim". He was inspired by the importance of altruism during Covid 19, where the connection to organic solidarity and civic duties were invoked, "such as living in quarantine and maintaining social distancing" (2022:55). The author particularly emphasizes Durkheim's civic solidarity, which applies to all members of society regardless of group affiliation. It strengthens equality, and conflicts should be overcome in consensus. However, the author found that a central question remained unanswered, namely how altruism, despite a mediating morality, also support exclusion and pressure.

The sociologist Kerstin Jacobsson (2006) highlights morality as the mechanism behind social integration. In her study "Durkheim's moral sociology and the welfare state in a late modern society" she refers to his statement that "acting morally is to act so that social solidarity in society is maintained. The state's task is to regulate what is required for the maintenance of social solidarity" (Jacobsson 2006:4). Although Durkheim's perspective is considered to promote conformity, the author argues that it has an openness to collective life creating itself. Thus, there is room for a certain pluralism, for example thought structures, collective beliefs, prejudices and other social knowledge, norms of correct behaviour, and laws and regulations (2006:26).

Finally, we will also highlight a work by Burelli and Camboni (2023). They wanted to examine the decline and loss of importance of solidarity through a functionalist reinterpretation in the study "The function of solidarity and its normative implications" (2023). It shows that political solidarity is important for the endurance of politics. Therefore, they argue, work needs to be done to maintain institutions that promote solidarity.

Theoretical concepts

The starting point for our study is the *abstract solidarity* that arose when concrete, personal communities were transformed into larger societies built on citizenship. This solidarity developed in the modern, democratic national states and implies that you defend a person's equal rights without knowing that person. It is a "legally mediated solidarity between strangers", which can maintain cohesion and mutual trust through its combination of positive law, administrative means and "an intersubjectively

shared context of possible mutual understanding” (Habermas 2000:159; Brunkhorst 2005:2,76). Despite its abstract nature, this form of social integration is thus realized in a “form of politically socializing *communicative context*”, meaning reciprocal communication between equals in the life world (Habermas 2000:159). However, the power of a reciprocal language and how it creates solidarity has long been overlooked in sociology (see Habermas 2018:60–79). Even Durkheim “neglected the consequences of linguistic mediation”, making it possible to specify grounds for action for the situation in question (Habermas 1987:57). He overlooked the point that “communicative action is a switching station for the energies of social solidarity. Not only for coordination but here mostly for socialization” (Habermas 1987:60). Mutual understanding is based on the fact that each participant can say yes or no to demands without being excluded from the group. Thus a “truth” is produced, based on the participants’ arguments, that will strengthen integration, legitimacy, and solidarity. “We understand a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable” (Habermas 1984:297, 1997, 2000). If this intermediate, intersubjective procedure is ignored, problems arise, some of which are identified in the studies mentioned above – for example, a legitimacy gap, shortcomings in terms of collective intentionality, uncertainties about how morality and solidarity work, and why solidarity can decline.

Thus, abstract solidarity works in the system as justice that takes into account each individual’s dignity and right to freedom. It shows that invoking rules for distribution of solidarity is not enough; they must also be legitimate. If not, solidarity is an empty statement without obligations and causes uncertainty about what can be expected (Banting & Kymlicka 2017; Rothstein 2017). It can be perceived as meaningless, unreliable, false, and manipulative – for example, if some get less than others because they do not “count”, or when distribution is based on pure grace, selfishness, unreasonable behaviour, or rigid rules (Forst 2014:22). Further, when citizens are treated “as objects with which it is not necessary to communicate” or officials “abuse the law” it can “strengthen inequalities” and “generate a radical dis-solidarity” (Brunkhorst 2005:82-83; Kihlström 2020). From this theoretical reasoning, two different types of solidarity are possible: inclusive and exclusionary.

Inclusive solidarity refers to “the welfare of consociates who are intimately linked in an intersubjectively shared form of life” (Habermas 1990:244). It means a “feeling of reciprocal sympathy and responsibility among members of a group which promotes mutual support” (Wilde 2007:171). By addressing everyone in the community it contributes to both social and system integration.

Exclusionary solidarity can be used in a narrow or a broad sense. The first addresses those who meet certain criteria, for example non-migrants, as the Radical Right in Europe do (Lefkofridi & Michel 2014; Banting & Kymlicka 2017). We use the broad sense here, which denotes a solidarity that addresses non-migrants too, but which also has other shortcomings – for example, unfairly and inappropriately prioritizing some citizens at the expense of others (enabled by a dysfunctional administration), tendencies to one-sided or strategic communication more generally, deafness to the right to validation (saying yes or no without sanctions), or using the word solidarity

because it just sounds positive. Of course, this broad sense makes it more difficult to apply, but easier to identify more causes of drain risk.

We argue that inclusive solidarity, based on mutual communication, is more resistant to draining risks than exclusionary solidarity, based on one-sided communication to maintain demarcation of *some* citizens' opinions. Thus, inclusive and exclusionary solidarity will be used to identify two forms of solidarity.

Empirical concepts

To identify the extent of the drain risk we have examined Swedish social policy, where solidarity principles are well established (Olsen 2008; Drake 2001). To do so, we chose two clearly defined groups, attributed to each of the two dominant political blocs – Social Democrats and Conservatives. They are our so-called “sensitive concepts” (Bryman 2011:348). With their help, we expect to be able to discern differences in extent when it comes to invoking solidarity.

The *Social Democrats* come from a tradition with an inclusive solidarity (King & Ross 2010). Their programme is based on a mutual dependency between people, where solidarity is the core. Under the section “Freedom, equality and solidarity”, it states that “standing in solidarity with one another is based on the assurance that everyone is doing as best they can and contributing according to ability” and that “solidarity is a force for increasing freedom in society, since no one is free until everyone is free” (<http://partiprogram.se/socialdemokraterna> 2014).

The *Conservatives* comes from a tradition oriented towards neoliberal and anti-immigrant politics. For example, the Moderates state in their party programme, under the section “Solidarity without Borders” that it is “in the democracy’s idea community and not in communities of interest that our international solidarity grows” (<http://partiprogram.se/moderaterna> 2013). In analysing the impact of this form of solidarity, King and Ross (2010) say, along with Kildal (2001), that this “new policy is less concerned with mutual recognition than with mutual obligations, less concerned with justice than with personal morality” (Kildal 2001:16). They concluded that while social democracy secures social inclusion, neoliberalism reinforces social exclusion.

The researcher Liedman (2015) also highlighted these differences in a media article. He found them coming from two roots of solidarity – the one expressing the labour movement’s ambitions, the other Christian charity. The latter creates a reduced solidarity since it mainly includes those with the right nationality and ethnic background. According to Liedman, this identity policy has attracted the Conservatives during certain periods.

By attributing an inclusive solidarity to the Social Democratic bloc and an exclusive solidarity to the Conservative bloc, we can, based on the possible difference that emerges, interpret the impact of bloc politics on the drain risk of solidarity.

Methods

Design

The study is descriptive and based on documents from which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected. The quantitative analysis has focused on numbers, described in figures, bar charts and tables, while the qualitative analysis describes the respective solidarity perspectives in text and quotes.

The documents studied are traditional news media, motivated by the fact that “media and news media in particular are the core of the public sphere” (Carlsson & Weibull 2018:14). The survey was conducted at two different times, in 2013 and in 2017. Between these times, the Social Democrats took over government power at the same time as immigration increased significantly.

To uncover the extent of drain risk, we used three types of data, two quantitative and one qualitative. The first was expected to show the extent (in number) of references to solidarity in the two main blocs of political orientations, the Social Democrat, and the Conservative. The second data type was expected to show the tendencies more specifically in social policy by focusing on activation policy, sickness insurance policy and migration policy – that is to say, three of its most important areas. The third data type was qualitative and intended to illustrate whether the newspaper writers’ expressions of solidarity were in line with the political perspective the newspaper in question represented. Writers, in this study, refer to opinion makers (debate writers, political journalists) as well as journalists.

Data collection

The data were sampled from two years: 2013 and 2017. There were two reasons for this. First, they represented a time during which government power changed between the blocs and during which complex social problems such as activation policy (work and employment), sickness insurance policy and migration policy became challenging for the welfare state and its solidarity ambitions (Strömbäck, Andersson, & Nedlund 2017). Second, they represented a limited time, which made the analyses manageable.

Our database was sampled by a search of the national newspaper database Retriever Research (Mediearkivet) (Retriever Research, <https://www.retriever.se/product/mediearkivet>) of *all* daily newspapers in Sweden. The first step (1) revealed a total of 12580 newspaper articles published in 2013 (n = 5961) and 2017 (n = 6619) containing the word “solidarity”. In the second step (2) we divided this into the 12 most important newspapers and grouped them by their political perspective (n = 2938). There were four Conservative (also including Liberal) newspapers (*Göteborgs-Posten*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, and *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*) and four Social Democratic newspapers (*Aftonbladet*, *Arbetsbladet*, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*, and *Dala-Demokraten*). Additionally, four independent newspapers (*Helsingborgs Dagblad*, *Söderhamns-Kuriren*, *Värnamo Nyheter*, and *Mora Tidning*) were presented.

A change, which requires special attention when reading Table 2, is that *Helsingborgs*

Dagblad was merged with *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* in 2014, between our measurement periods. This change was negligible in relation to the distribution between the blocs (see note under Table 2). One consequence of the merger was that *Helsingborgs Dagblad* changed its political orientation and went from independent to independent Liberal. The merger was described by the newspaper as giving both newspapers a wider range and thus a stronger voice on the national level (Avellan 2014).

Also important to keep in mind when the scope of the concept of solidarity is analysed below are possible differences in the reach of the newspapers per day. The Conservative bloc reaches just over half as many (2.7 million) as the Social Democratic bloc (4.2 million) (ORVESTO Konsument 2022). Numbers for the independents were very small here, so they are left out of consideration.

In the third step (3) we searched among these 2938 articles for those that contained a combination of the words solidarity + activation policy, sickness insurance policy and migration/immigration. This data we divided into articles which combined the concept of solidarity with the terms “activation”, “sickness insurance” and “migration”/“immigration” respectively, thus obtaining three areas of social policy, which greatly reduced the number of articles. In that step, we also identified different types of articles and chose to retain five types for analysis: newspaper articles, debate articles, readers’ voices, political leaders, and political chronicles. This significantly reduced the amount of material, as texts such as feature articles, reports, notices, book reviews and cultural chronicles were omitted. The quantitative material for analysis thus comprised 688 articles (n = 386 from 2013 and n = 302 from 2017) which were retrieved as PDFs identical to the printed versions (<https://www.retriever.se/product/mediarkivet/>). See Table 1

Table 1. Numbers of articles collected from newspapers in Sweden in 2013 and 2017.

(1) All daily newspapers		(2) 12 selected daily newspapers		(3) 12 selected in three policy areas	
By year		By year		By year	
2013	2017	2013	2017	2013	2017
12580		2938		688	
5961	6619	1204	1734	386	302

Source: Retriever Research (Mediearkivet).

The qualitative cases were by their nature limited to a very small number. Only 18 articles were chosen from the 688, representing the two blocs: Social Democratic (n = 9) and Conservative (n = 9) news media which contained the word “solidarity”. Although both 2013 and 2017 were represented, differences between the two periods were not interesting because the sample was so small. In accordance with Miles and

Huberman (1994:28), our sampling strategy is called “a convenient one”. This kind of sample is often small with weak credibility, but can be useful to get a quick indication or tendency based on some clearly defined criteria. In our case, it was the newspapers political bloc affiliation that gave nine writers in each. They provided a first insight into how inclusive and exclusionary solidarity was expressed and whether they matched the political nature of the newspapers. The articles were short, never more than one page.

Those that best illustrated the two forms of solidarity have been cited in the text and presented in the reference list, where they are marked with double asterisks (**).

Methods for analysis

The quantitative material was analysed with inspiration from content analysis (Krippendorff 2013; May 2011) using systematic classifications in two steps. *The first step* included a code schedule focusing on the year and the distribution of the perspective among the 12 most important newspapers. *The second step* selected policy areas – activation policy (unemployment), sickness insurance policy and migration policy – and comprised the various statistical data calculations. The three policy areas were identified by using different keywords central to each area. For activation policy, the keywords were “work”, “job”, and “employment”; for sickness insurance policy, the keyword was “sickness insurance”; and for migration policy, the keywords were “immigration” and “migration”. A quantitative sample can be generalized and replicated (Krippendorff 2013).

The third step focused on the 18 articles that formed the qualitative data. It illustrated the writers’ view of solidarity, which was (1) analysed in terms of inclusive or exclusionary solidarity orientation and then (2) whether this orientation was aligned with the paper’s political affiliation. To do so, the articles were printed out and read by the two researchers independently of each other, and then examined in accordance with the guidelines for concentration of meaning (Kvale, Brinkmann, & Torhell 2014; Miles & Huberman 1994). This process can involve a number of steps. However, our material was not more than one page. The interpretation was strictly focused on the text alone, so, for example, the party affiliation of an writer was not interesting. The text was coded as inclusive solidarity if the word “solidarity” was central to the message presented, if it was explained and reflected upon, or if it was linked to action ambitions, to recognition of the other or to human rights. It was coded as exclusionary solidarity if the word “solidarity” was explicitly oriented to a limited group, or if it was mentioned only in passing without connecting it to a particular context or ambitions. If used solely as supporting another message it was also coded it exclusionary because we saw it as an exploitation of the word’s positive charge without further obligations. The relationship between the focus of the article and the use of the concept of solidarity was also taken into account for the results. If there were any doubts about interpretations, these were discussed within the research group.

Validity and reliability

The assessment of whether one investigated what was intended is central in both quantitative and qualitative studies. Concepts to secure this are validity and credibility/reliability (Hallberg 2002). We argue that these requirements have been met as the study's various samples are carefully described at each stage (Miles & Huberman 1994) and the period of investigation includes a shift in political power. Criteria for sorting the quantitative data are also clearly presented and the concepts for analysis are theoretically supported. Finally, the study was limited to identifying which tendencies the data indicated. Based on that, we claim that the study meets reasonable methodological requirements.

Limitations of the study

There are several limitations. One is that the study was based on print media and not on authentic speech. Another is that we only identified directions during a period rather than safe positions. Focusing only on traditional media, which has experienced declining audiences, is also a more general limitation. If social media had been included, the results would probably have been different.

Results

1. To what extent do the two political blocs express solidarity?

When the material was organized by political perspective, interesting findings emerged – see Figure 1, which presents the distribution of use of the word solidarity among the 12 most important newspapers. The Conservative/Liberal newspapers used solidarity in their articles to a greater extent than the Social Democratic newspapers (544/448 for 2013 and 984/666 for 2017). Both blocs increased their use from 2013 to 2017, the Conservative/Liberal twice as much as the Social Democratic newspapers. The differences remained and even increased so that the Conservative/Liberal newspapers used the term much more in 2017. This is despite the Social Democrats having taken over government power and a stronger economy that could have paved the way for more solidarity. Although they could have taken advantage of this in order to develop the welfare system, they did not invoke solidarity, unlike during the early labour movement (Hinnfors, Spehar, & Bucken-Knapp 2012).

The concept of solidarity seemed important for both political blocs. While Social Democrats link it to *a right*, a political obligation to provide work, so-called “work for all”, the Conservatives (in a neoliberal model) link it to *a moral requirement*, an obligation for the individual to actively seek employment, a so-called “work line”. The first is connected to inclusive solidarity, the second to exclusionary (King & Ross 2010:54). In addition, it is important to distinguish between solidarity and morality. Solidarity refers to a common political way of life, while morality refers to the right to equal freedom for the individual (Habermas 2013).

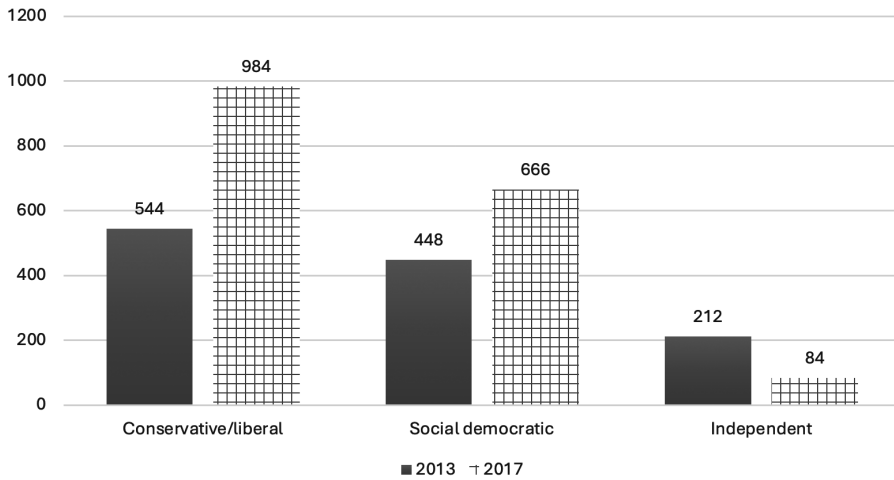


Figure 1. Mentions of solidarity from different *political perspectives* in newspapers in Sweden during 2013 and 2017. Number of news items (n=2938). Source: Retriever Research (Mediearkivet).

Presented below is a more detailed breakdown of the 2938 articles (where solidarity is mentioned) regarding (1) bloc affiliation and (2) their respective newspapers, a total of 12. See Table 2.

Here, an interesting nuance *within* the bloc we call Conservative is made clear, namely that the “Liberal phalanx” is behind the bloc’s high numbers. Without that, the Conservatives would have been significantly below the Social Democrats. One explanation for the strong presence of the Liberal phalanx is that there are more newspapers espousing this perspective. Other explanations, for example a greater interest in solidarity, is not examined in our study. However, as a curiosity, we can see that the Social Democratic bloc and the Liberal phalanx are roughly on the same level, with the difference that the former reaches out to almost twice as many people per day as the latter.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of a total of 2938 articles mentioning solidarity from different political perspectives (blocs) and including the 12 chosen newspapers in Sweden during 2013 and 2017.

Newspaper	Year 2013	Year 2017	Total
	Number (%)	Number (%)	
Conservative	142 (40.5)	209 (59.5)	351
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i>	142 (40.5)	209 (59.5)	351
Liberal	402 (34.2)	775 (65.8)	1177
<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	170 (42.4)	231 (57.6)	401
<i>Göteborgs-Posten</i>	106 (35.4)	193 (64.5)	299
<i>Sydsvenska Dagbladet</i>	126 (100)	0	126
<i>Sydsvenska Dagbladet+</i>			
<i>Helsingborgs Dagblad</i>	0	351 (100)*	351
Social Democratic	448 (40.2)	666 (59.8)	1114
<i>Aftonbladet</i>	170 (35.2)	313 (64.8)	483
<i>Arbetsbladet</i>	78 (55.3)	63 (44.7)	141
<i>Norrländska Socialdemokraten</i>	80 (35.6)	145 (64.4)	225
<i>Dala-Demokraten</i>	120 (45.3)	145 (54.7)	265
Independent	212 (71.6)	84 (28.4)	296
<i>Helsingborgs Dagblad</i>	104 (100)	0	104
<i>Söderhamns-Kuriren</i>	44 (51.8)	41 (48.2)	85
<i>Värnamo Nyheter</i>	38 (65.5)	20 (34.5)	58
<i>Mora Tidning</i>	26 (53.1)	23 (46.9)	49

*Between our two survey years 2013 and 2017, a merger took place between the two newspapers *Helsingborgs Dagblad* and *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*. This may result in the number in 2017 (n=351) having some uncertainty in it as there may be duplicate articles.

Source: The Retriever Research (Mediearkivet).

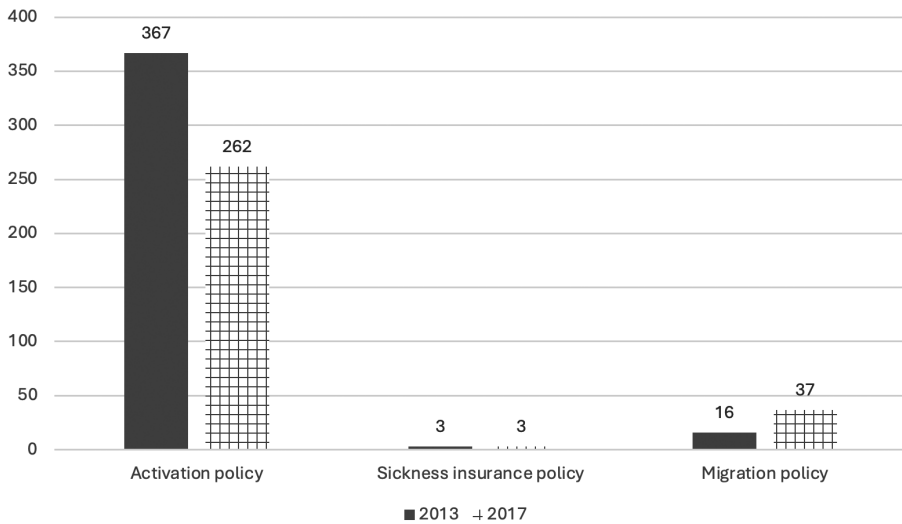
2. To what extent have the three areas of social policy implementation referred to solidarity?

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the concept of solidarity between the three areas of social policy between 2013 and 2017. Two interesting tendencies emerge. The first concerns the extent of the use of the concept of solidarity in the respective areas in total, for both years. It shows that the activation policy (unemployment) areas dominated in total, with 629 mentions compared to migration at 53, and to sickness insurance at 6. The second tendency concerns changes between 2013 and 2017 in mentions of solidarity. The findings indicated that its use in activation policy decreased in 2017, sickness insurance policy was at the same level – very low

level both years, while its use in migration policy increased a little in 2017, albeit from a low level.

The outcomes mirror social policy changes in general. Unemployment fell sharply in 2017, and probably reduced the debate somewhat. It could also have affected the activation policy's connection to the market: to profit interests, income security, and changed conditions. On the other hand, use of the concept of solidarity in the migration sphere increased. This could be a result of the migration peak in 2015, when many children arrived without parents, which was a challenge to manage.

Figure 2. Mentions of solidarity in the three areas of social policy in Sweden during 2013 and 2017. Number of news items (n = 688).



Source: The Retriever Research (Mediearkivet).

From Table 3 below, we can see the distribution between the blocs concerning the extent to which solidarity is mentioned within the three social policy areas. In 2013, the Conservative (191) dominates over the Social Democrats (125), with activation policy as the main focus. For 2017 it is the same trend, Conservative (171) and Social Democrats (80). Activation policy remains the focus and the difference between the blocs has increased (from 60 in 2013 to 91 in 2017).

In 2017 the Conservatives mentioned solidarity in relation to migration policy a little more than in 2013, while the Social Democrats ignored that area in terms of solidarity in 2017.

Table 3. Use of the concept of solidarity in articles in 12 newspapers in Sweden within the three social policy areas: activation policy, sickness insurance policy and migration policy from different political perspectives (blocs) in Sweden during 2013 and 2017 (n=688).

	Year 2013 Number (%)	Year 2017 Number (%)	Total
Conservative/liberal			
Activation policy	191 (52.7)	171 (47.2)	362
Sickness insurance policy	0	1 (100)	1
Migration policy	8 (19)	34 (81)	42
Social Democratic			
Activation policy	125 (61)	80 (39)	205
Sickness insurance policy	3 (60)	2 (40)	5
Migration policy	5 (100)	0	5
Independent			
Activation policy	51 (82.3)	11 (17.7)	62
Sickness insurance policy	0	0	0
Migration policy	3 (50)	3 (50)	6

Source: Retriever Research (Mediearkivet).

3. Do writers in the newspapers express inclusive and exclusionary solidarity in line with their newspapers’ political ideology?

The 18 articles represent an individual level that illustrates how inclusive and exclusionary solidarity can be expressed in a newspaper. The result is presented in stages, first through some examples of the two perspectives, then whether the writers’ expression matches their newspaper’s political orientation.

Inclusive solidarity

In a Conservative (Liberal) newspaper, a writer responded to the welfare system’s market orientation, whose privatization forced individuals to manage on their own, with: “For us, solidarity, equality and human worth are the foundations of our policy. All freedom is based on no one being without freedom” (Gahnström 2013). The same writer summed up a kind of universal solidarity from the obligations of the system: “Solidarity means that we, according to our ability, contribute and fund these basic needs, whether or not we need to utilize them right now. At some stage of our lives, we all need education, healthcare or other help and services” (Gahnström 2013). We interpret these statements as inclusive as they draw attention to the need for equality, human dignity and freedom, and extensive, concrete efforts according to the individual’s ability.

Another leader article in a Social Democratic evening newspaper argued for the necessity of developing solidarity in society. The article focused on the labour market uncertainty for young people, supported by a creeping system change that “puts pressure on their lives in the future”. This vulnerability creates anger, not against the system, but against other young people who compete for the assignments. The writer’s solution was a new solidarity movement, capable of going beyond egocentric needs in favour of a community struggle for better conditions: “When you’re afraid of losing your job, both solidarity and humanity can be abandoned. Focusing on one’s own body and isolation becomes a distraction, making us forget there is a world beyond ourselves that can change” (Swedin 2013). The writer referred to the former labour movement, which could “organize the workers, educate, create self-awareness and fight for common goals”, and called for a solidarity which could enable understanding of the situation of the new subclass (Swedin 2013). Solidarity, as it is expressed here, represents the classic Social Democratic position where social integration is central. Based on concerns that it is neglected, there is a strong demand for renewal.

Calls for a new solidarity also came from an almost despairing writer who saw the consequences of reduced social welfare in society in increased suffering among children and young people. He formulated his criticism as follows: “We know what sort of society this disarmament creates; suburbs where you have higher unemployment, greater morbidity, and shorter life. A school that doesn’t impart basic knowledge, and where the standard has gone from being at the top of Europe to becoming one of the worst” (Sternlycke 2013). The writer believed that there was no solidarity in society and that it was therefore important to actively work for this. He continued: “We must return to more solidarity and move away from individualistic and competitive thinking. We can’t continue lowering taxes and increasing subsidies for those who are already well off while giving nothing to those who are less well-off. The lack of morals and righteousness costs us money” (Sternlycke 2013). The fear of a society without solidarity, where cuts lead to exclusion, where children and young people suffer, is palpable in this writer’s text. The statements point to society’s difficulty in mastering its complexity, which opens the door for “internal destabilization” (Habermas 2023:42).

Another politician expressed inclusion in the following way: “The starting point for my and the Left Party’s commitment is solidarity, which is a classic concept in the labour movement. We are backing each other up. We are jointly discussing solutions. We believe that we can thereby build a better society where everyone is given space and human rights” (Källman 2017). Some also highlighted reciprocity and care for each other in everyday life by calling for more social initiatives, for solidarity welfare, and for the reintroduction of solidarity thinking about the common good. The need for a collective will, secured through an active participation and trust in each other is central for these writers, as it is in theories about social integration and the maintenance of constitutionally secured justice.

It is also requested by another writer who wanted to reintroduce “an approach where solidarity, consideration, respect and tolerance will prevail in Sweden.” That could create a situation “where all are equal in an open and free society, where all have

the same opportunities to develop themselves and live in respect and solidarity with each other” (Degerman 2013). Here is a longing expressed for something that seems increasingly distant: freedom, equality and mutual respect. However, the most personal expression of solidarity, which, at the same time confirms the innermost essence of solidarity, came from a Social Democratic-oriented writer and poet: “We always carry the solidarity within us”, meaning that human nature is basically inter-subjective and cooperative. “What we call society’s responsibility, I believe is its ultimate source of empathy and thus cooperation. I can feel your feelings. You mine. I can identify with you, you with me. And then there are meetings between people, especially real physical meetings face to face between people; it’s not enough to meet on social media, because that communicates too little of what we are” (Greider 2017).

Exclusionary solidarity

Solidarity was considered to be exclusionary when it was used as a statement or only mentioned in passing. It also applied if it lacked context, if the solidarity was expressly limited to a group or if it only supported another message. An example of this came from a former Conservative minister debating the global goals for sustainable development adopted by the United Nations: “Companies and organizations try to formulate their own initiatives, and the interest, in particular among young people, in issues of sustainability, global solidarity and better social national cohesion is central. I do not think it is enough for the National Action Plan presented at the UN High Level Summit in New York this July” (Carlsson 2017). Here, the abstract solidarity is at the global level, which dilutes the concept and makes it non-binding. In accordance with Lefkofridi & Michel (2014) that strategy has been used by the Radical Right in Europe when referring to an exclusionary solidarity.

In this next example, it is unclear in another way what is meant by invoking solidarity. When a city in Sweden agreed to welcome refugees three reasons were mentioned: the need for increased numbers of residents, the desire for more taxpayers, and most importantly the need to show solidarity with other people. The municipal director told the reporter that “*solidarity was the strongest argument*” when the municipal council made its decision (Henriksson 2013). However, the lack of any further explanation of solidarity allowed the writer to use it as a political slogan which is difficult to protest against. In other words, the writer was keeping the door open for different interpretations.

Solidarity could also indicate a reference to an older phenomenon, against which the current situation could be analysed. For example, a writer was concerned about the extremely rapid change processes, now governed by individualists: “If we are subjected to some form of discipline, it is just the movement from the collective to the individual, that alone is strong, instead of that word solidarity, which belonged to the ‘people’s home’ (*folkhemmet*)” (Nilsson 2013). Here solidarity is linked to the old Social Democratic tradition, which has become less viable in modern societies. However, the writer made things easy for himself by just mentioning the word solidarity without specifying whether he wanted that solidarity. Another writer was angry because the

government supported so-called “undocumented children’s rights for care and education” even though these children had no permission to stay. The writer claimed that a country should not be governed by feelings, “by humanism, the Child Convention or solidarity” (Anonymous Trelleborger 2017). The writer indicated that allowing social workers to break the law would be expensive and place a financial burden on taxpayers. However, that the law alone can be enough for an orderly society is firmly dismissed in analyses of solidarity. In accordance with Habermas (2023) it may work for a time, but if citizens’ mutual dependence and concern for each other (solidarity) is not maintained, society will soon fall apart.

Matching between the writers’ expressions and the newspapers’ political orientation

The 18 articles selected covered 9 Social Democratic and 9 Conservative newspapers. When analysed, interesting results emerged. Both blocs were open to expressing an inclusive as well as an exclusionary solidarity, meaning they did not demand complete obedience to their political ideology. However, there was a certain predominance of inclusiveness in the Social Democratic newspapers and likewise a certain, somewhat higher, predominance of exclusionary solidarity in the Conservative newspapers. In the Social Democratic newspapers, five writers expressed inclusive solidarity and four exclusionary solidarity; in the Conservative ones, six expressed exclusionary and three inclusive solidarity.

Table 4. The writers’ expressions compared to the newspapers’ political orientation.

	Social Democratic bloc	Conservative bloc	Total number of articles
Inclusive solidarity	5	3	8
Exclusionary solidarity	4	6	10
Total number of articles	9	9	18

Source: Retriever Research (Mediearkivet).

However, overall, exclusionary solidarity was expressed a little more often (10) than inclusive solidarity (8). This may be for a number of reasons: for example, the writer did not feel the need to explain what solidarity meant; it was a positive word that simply reinforced one’s statement, or they wanted to leave the meaning open and thus avoid linking themselves too strongly with the old “people’s home” tradition. Conversely, this was often heard from the Social Democratic bloc, who expressed both a longing for the old solidarity in the “people’s home” and also a need to develop a new one, providing hope and trust when problems in society were growing.

The findings in our study also indicate that the concept of exclusionary solidarity lacks the more aggressive, strategic meaning, which mainly focuses on ethnicity, often used by the Radical Right in Europe (Lefkofridi & Michel 2014). Exclusion in that

context is often built on stereotypes about immigrants, e.g., that they take advantage of our welfare; they do not want to work or accept our culture (Lefkofridi & Michel 2014). However, these views also exist nowadays in Sweden, for example in social media. It is likely they were not established in traditional newspapers when our study was carried out.

Conclusions

Solidarity is founded in an intersubjective interaction between individuals where one can recognize the other in oneself, which gives the motivation to support one another. In modern welfare societies, solidarity must become abstract in order to function in societal systems and institutions (Brunkhorst 2015; Habermas 1990). However, these are exposed to efficiency demands and rationalization, which can make it tempting to disregard citizen participation. This paves the way for a solidarity drain risk. We claim that this drain risk is lower for inclusive solidarity, which perpetuates reciprocity, than for exclusionary, which use one-sided communication – a hypothesis we examined in relation to the two political blocs in Sweden.

To test it we used three questions. The first concerned the extent to which the two blocs expressed solidarity. The findings indicated that solidarity was expressed much more often by the Conservative/Liberal bloc than by the Social Democrats – a tendency evident in 2013 and which increased during 2017. It is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the Social Democrats took over government power in 2014, that immigration increased tremendously in 2015 and that the economic situation was extremely good. This could have provided both space and good reason to express inclusive solidarity, a strong motivation in the early labour movement, but instead exclusionary solidarity dominated and even increased (Hinnfors, Spehar, and Bucken-Knapp 2012).

The second question concerned the extent to which our three areas of social policy referred to solidarity. It focused on possible changes between 2013 and 2017, and on possible changes between the different areas of activity, related to the blocs. Concerning changes between the two years, findings showed that in 2013 the activation policy area clearly dominated compared to the sickness insurance and migration areas. Mentions decreased in 2017 for the activation policy area, while mention sickness insurance policy were at a very low level both years. Mentions for migration policy increased a little in 2017, but also from a very low level. This may be due to the peak of migration in 2015, when a large number of children arrived without parents. The outcomes mirrored social policy changes in general, in which the unemployment fell sharply in 2017. It probably reduced the interest in solidarity when new opportunities for financial security were offered by the market.

Concerning differences between the blocs, the Conservatives dominated over the Social Democrats regarding mentions of solidarity during 2013, with a small increase during 2017 and still with activation policy as the focus. In total the Conservatives mentioned solidarity with reference to migration policy a little more in 2017 than in 2013, while Social Democrats ignored that area completely in 2017. One explanation

may be that many citizens began to question the high immigration in 2015, which made appeals for solidarity too risky a project for the Social Democratic government.

The third question examined whether the writers' expressions of inclusive and exclusionary solidarity were in line with their respective newspapers' political ideology. To find out, we had to identify the writers' expressions of solidarity and then compare them to the newspaper in question. The result showed only some agreement with the respective newspaper's ideology. Overall, a predominance of exclusionary solidarity was evident. Reasons for that could be that the word "solidarity" was easy to use when all were familiar with its meaning; it had positive connotations, which reinforced the writer's statement; or it was a strategy to leave its meaning open. However, it was notable that including solidarity often included a longing for the old solidarity of the "people's home" (*folkhemmet*) or for a new version – a more neutral one, offering hope and trust in modern society (Olsen 2008).

Findings in our study also indicate that the writers' use of exclusionary solidarity lacked the more aggressive, strategic meaning that focuses on ethnicity, often underpinned by stereotypes – for example, immigrants take advantage of welfare, do not want to work, or do not want to accept the country's culture. This meaning of exclusionary solidarity is often used by the Radical Right in Europe (Lefkofridi & Michel 2014). It is likely these views were not established in traditional newspapers when our study was carried out, although they exist nowadays in Swedish social media.

Overall, the results of the study show that our hypothesis was not confirmed. The conclusion is that the risk for solidarity drain within social policy is independent of which political ideology is in power. The Social Democratic bloc failed to argue for solidarity and the Conservative bloc used the term without further specification. Solidarity within social policy thus appears to be used in a way undermining responsibility, which in the long run can drain its meaning.

Implications

The results encourage reflections and raise some questions. The reflections mainly concern the concepts of inclusive and exclusionary solidarity, which were given a deeper meaning, inspired by Habermas. From that perspective, the fundamental difference between inclusion and exclusion is the type of communication. *Inclusive solidarity* is founded in communicative action, meaning that the participant, through a mutual understanding, intersubjectively validates whether claims are true, right and truthful. It offers a shared definition of situations and goals, which can coordinate social actions and strengthen solidarity (Kihlström 2020:12; Kihlström & Israel 2002:212). *Exclusionary solidarity* is founded in strategic action, meaning that the participants are "following rules of rational choice" and instead prioritize their own interests using one-way communication. This disempowers those who do not accept such terms, which undermines solidarity (Habermas 1984:285; Kihlström 2020:13).

In the short term, within the political and institutional sphere, both forms can give the impression of being successful. However, in the long run, it is only inclusive soli-

darity, based on the acceptance of all in a society that succeeds in holding a democracy together. Thus, our perspective has made it possible to uncover an early, but serious, drain risk in solidarity.

The result also raises questions. Does the Swedish model, with a strong state, support a solidarity model that harmonizes more with the rationalization and efficiency ambitions of systems and institutions than with individuals' perception of what solidarity means? Could it then go too far in supporting an exclusionary solidarity? Borevi's study (2017) which examined diversity and solidarity in Denmark and Sweden implies this. Although both countries had "strong links between national identity and the welfare state" and have historically emphasized popular nationalism, the Second World War was a watershed (Borevi 2017:371). For instance, in Sweden, the slogan "Sweden for the Swedes" (Borevi 2017:371) was coined in 1921 by the Swedish Social Democratic politician Per-Albin Hansson in response to accusations from the opposition that the Social Democrats were betraying their own country due to involvement in international solidarity (Åsbrink 2018). However, today this slogan is characterized as racist, after being used by far-right organizations to promote anti-immigrant policies. Sweden became more state-centred, where the political institution promoted solidarity, while Denmark saw national solidarity as a process emerging from the societal level, from "the People" (Borevi 2017:372). Does this mean that the Swedish model inadvertently promotes the development towards an increasingly exclusionary solidarity?

Arguments supporting this tendency are that the Social Democrats did not increase their expression of inclusive solidarity during the study period, despite having both space and good reason for it. The Conservatives/Liberals, on the other hand, could have been limited in their use of the term, but instead they increased their usage. All in all, it gives the impression that both seem to invoke solidarity without reflection – that is, mechanically and randomly. In the long run, this can endanger societal cohesion. In accordance with Rothstein (2017:310) the best way to counteract this is a just "institutional design", meaning one which strengthens the citizen's sense of correct and fair treatment.

The results could also indicate a strategy to use vocabulary that attracts everyone precisely by virtue of its universality and because it does not require immediate realization. Abstract solidarity invites that. Researchers studying solidarity and personal responsibility in the Covid-19 pandemic drew attention to this in a study, which indicated "an inflationary use of the term while not explicitly acknowledging and discussing the limits of solidarity" (Zimmermann, Buyx and McLennan 2023:7). They claim that solidarity loses its positive effects and undermines people's motivation if it is invoked without being anchored in legally functioning institutions. Media and decision-makers should be aware of this and be prepared to discuss the limits for solidarity, when invoked in difficult situations in the future.

The idea of using special words for attracting people is not new. In a study of Radical Right parties (RRP) in Austria and France, attempts were made to attract the working-class voters by using special words. They claimed support for the welfare state by connecting it to what they called "exclusive solidarity", which excluded im-

migrants because they saw them “as a threat to the welfare state” (Lefkofridi & Michel 2017:234).

However, in social debates, it is not only the state but also civic society that can make it difficult to be open to more inclusive solidarity issues. Social workers and women in social policy in Sweden, for example, have had such difficulties. This is despite the fact that they have historically worked actively both to develop social policy and to get involved in various social organizations for peace, justice and solidarity (Lundälv 2018; Lundälv 2020). Further, a Finnish study focused on social work experts’ and social workers’ public influence through opinion articles in the public sphere (Fast 2021). It shows that opinions in Finland include knowledge and awareness of economic factors, life situations and circumstances surrounding the social insurance system. However, issues of solidarity and their importance have not received much attention. Rather, more attention was paid to social workers’ working conditions and questions about the profession.

Another more drastic challenge for solidarity is described by Levy (2017) in his article “Against Fraternity”, where he proposes that solidarity is simply not important anymore. We do not need it in orderly, modern societies where citizens are “moral strangers to one another, united only by shared circumstances to inhabit a common political jurisdiction” (Levy 2017:108). There is no deeper social unity behind our actions but only a simple desire to function in daily life. However, we have no data indicating such attitudes, and in our results, solidarity still seemed to be important in Swedish social policy, in one form or another.

Further studies

Studies about the media reporting of social policy issues, not only in Sweden but also in other European countries, would also be interesting. For example, how are solidarity and solidarity issues expressed in the media in different countries? How is solidarity communicated in social work? Also, how is solidarity communicated by different generations, notably in social media?

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Author presentation

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