2

Risking Solidarity

SALLY J. SCHOLZ

Solidarity often emerges or becomes evident in contexts where social or political relations are unequal or otherwise affected by structural injustice, in reaction to domination or in efforts to curtail dominating influences, in response to vulnerability and systemic oppression or as an immediate collective effect of times of crisis. Solidarity is a collective moral relation and *political* solidarity is "a committed unity of peoples on a range of interpersonal to social and political levels," who understand their actions for a cause as connected to those of countless others.[1] Individuals associate their efforts and well-being in the context of collective movement for social change, believing that others similarly act on a recognized interdependence with all others engaged in the collective whole. In other words, individuals choose to connect their efforts within the particular context, mediated by a cause or goal for social change, to be mutually interdependent with the actions and effort of others similarly committed to the cause. This may manifest in a concentrated endeavor or an ongoing campaign that requires multiple overlapping supportive actions.

Often characterized with expressions of "standing with" or "standing for" something – taking a stance on an issue – the core point of "standing" in solidarity is that people in solidarity need to know that there are others similarly engaged. A relationship of solidarity, however tenuous, is a unique social relation that is accompanied by risk: What sorts of risks are assumed in

An earlier version of this paper was presented for the "Meaning(s) of Solidarity" Workshop at Goethe Universität at Frankfurt am Main, Germany, November 19, 2021; and at the "Solidarity: We Know It When We See It" Workshop in Gothenburg, Sweden, March 25, 2022. Thanks to all participants for their helpful remarks.

[1] Sally Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), p. 58.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

solidarity? Do all participants accept comparable or equitable risk? And what are the potential losses for those who commit to the arrangement?

Participants in solidarity willingly assume some collective risk, forming a union meant to mitigate individual risks from the larger society within which it forms, or they accrue risk together in an effort to bring about change; but solidarity also carries its own set of risks that participants accept with the belief that collective action in solidarity offers a better prospect for social change than "going it alone." Risk is part of what we undertake together. However, as I hope to show, the outwardly-facing collective risk, which is often the most common form of risk associated with movements for social change, is only one part of the risk of solidarity; understanding that helps to uncover reasons for complicating claims about equality, burden sharing, reciprocity, and shared fate in conceptualizations of or assessments of solidarity.

Importantly, the account of risk sketched in Section 2.2 assumes that solidarity is more than merely action. It is a moral relation that encourages an examination of the interconnections between situations and actions. Outwardly facing, individual and collective action in solidarity contributes to efforts to transform social conditions or situations of injustice. That outwardly-facing scrutiny also entails a personal examination of how individual actions or privileges might be contributing factors to injustice. Inwardly facing, solidarity directs actors to examine the cooperative and communicative actions among participants, to scrutinize their own participation, and to critically reflect with others on how or whether the solidary relation lives up to the values it strives to achieve in combatting injustice in the wider community.[2]

Protection and the pooling of risk, like in insurance plans, has been used to characterize the solidarity of the welfare state and even the early roots of worker solidarity in workers' mutual aid societies.[3] This *civic* solidarity at least appears to control the amount of risk any one person faces by balancing it among the associated participants. Solidarity of the welfare state tends to be described according to two aims: protection against social risk and reduction

[2] Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, pp. 71–112.

[3] E.g. David Miller, "Solidarity and its Sources," in Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 61–79; Adam Gearey, *Justice as Welfare: Equity and Solidarity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012); Andrea Sangiovanni, "Solidarity in the European Union" (2013) 33 *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 213; Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen and Jyri Liukko, "Producing Solidarity, Inequality and Exclusion through Insurance" (2015) 21 *Res Publica* 155; Zsófia S. Ignácz, "Similarities between European and National Solidarity: An Empirical Thought Experiment about Attitudes towards Redistribution" (2021) 1 *Sozialpolitik.Ch* Article 1.3.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

of social inequality.[4] In political solidarity, the pooling of or protection from risk has not been a central idea. That may be attributed to the more informal and temporary nature of political solidarity in contrast to civic solidarity or it may be because participants in political solidarity contribute to the movement in vastly different ways.[5] Regardless of the reason, I think thinking about the types of risk involved in solidarity for social change adds an important conceptual tool for understanding the uniqueness of the solidary relation. Unpacking the different facets of risk helps to reveal the distinct relations of solidarity while also suggesting paths for expanding solidarity, fostering trust, and avoiding pernicious practices of domination within the solidary relation. This approach might also contribute to understanding and assessing other forms of solidarity and thereby contribute to social scientific approaches to solidarity as well. I argue that risk in the solidary relation may be understood according to at least four facets: collective risk, personal risk, social risk, and relational risk.

In this chapter, I use two examples of political solidarity to set the stage and then present the four facets of risk evident in the relation. These four facets are not meant to exhaust the possible types of risk in the solidary relation but understanding what is at stake in each and how they might interact, I argue, reveals the importance of the willingness to share equitably contextualized social risk, attentive to the impact on personal and collective susceptibility to harm, and also acknowledging the relational risks that are taken on in solidarity relations. I am here alluding to the distinction between collective responsibility and shared responsibility. Solidarity is often affiliated with the literature on collective responsibility insofar as it indicates a relation of a collective within which positive responsibility cannot be separated. Shared responsibility, on the other hand, is usually understood as distributed. I problematize this distinction within the relation of solidarity, indicating that the risk may be both collective and shared and that the responsibility to ameliorate and alleviate risk for fellow participants is part of a process of collective rebalancing. The facets of risk might further provide a tool to augment other measures of assessing solidarity such as burden sharing. In addition, as I demonstrate, understanding the facets of risk contributes to a more nuanced conceptualization of the moral and epistemological relations of solidarity, moving beyond

[4] Ignácz, "Similarities between European and National Solidarity," 4; Philip Van Parijs, "Concluding Reflections: Solidarity, Diversity, and Social Justice," in Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 420–426.

[5] Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, pp. 59–61.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

approaches that present solidarity as either a symmetrical or asymmetrical relation relying on sharing of fate or deference.[6]

2.1 TWO LIVED EXAMPLES

To understand the facets of risk, it may be helpful to situate the discussion with two examples. Although the examples focus on the actions of a few, I offer them not as a way to scrutinize the behavior of some participants but rather as means of isolating and discussing facets of risk that impact others in solidarity. The first example is recounted by Chandra Russo in her qualitative exploration of solidarity along the Migrant Trail Walk.[7] The Migrant Trail Walk is an annual walk through the US–Mexico borderlands to, among other things, raise awareness to the tragedy of migrant death. Together with the "No More Deaths" movement that aids migrants by providing vital necessities like water along the border, the walk is described as both an expression of "solidarity with the migrants" and collective action in solidarity, advocating "for positive change in the borderlands." From the beginning, the Walk has included former migrants as well as students, long-time human rights activists, and people of faith; they give witness to the suffering of migrants and the vulnerabilities of those who seek to cross the border without papers, but they also aid migrants along the way, actions for which some participants have faced arrest and prosecution. The week of the walk is described by participants as "a strong witness to the commitment and passion of all involved to work for change."[8] Walkers commit to a solidary relation across ideological and motivational differences and come from diverse backgrounds, journeying as a community in solidarity, sharing stories and assisting migrants along the journey "in defiance of the borders that attempt to divide us."[9] The walk itself, in other words, is just one part of a multifaceted solidarity movement to bring social change.

As Russo explains, during one march, "a self-selected group decided to risk arrest at Border Patrol headquarters by staging a 'die-in.' … Those who organized this piece of 'guerilla theatre' believed it to be an important means

[6] E.g. Sangiovanni, "Solidarity in the European Union"; and Avery Kolers, *A Moral Theory of Solidarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)

[7] Chandra Russo, *Solidarity in Practice: Moral Protest and the US Security State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[8] Richard Boren et al., "The Migrant Trail: Our History," available at https://azmigranttrail.com/history-of-the-migrant-trail/ (last accessed May 10, 2023).

[9] Azmigranttrail, "The Migrant Trail: Our Vision" (May 19, 2015), available at: https://azmigranttrail.com/2015/05/19/our-vision/ (last accessed May 10, 2023).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

of amplifying the walk's message, dramatizing the state's violence and tragedy of migrant deaths."[10] The "die-in" proved controversial. In contrast to the "die-in" participants' aim, their act was not seen as an action in solidarity with the other walk participants or on behalf of the migrants who make the perilous journey. Not only were the Migrant Trail Walk organizers not informed of the planned performance, the media coverage of the die-in obscured the real issues that other activists on the Walk sought to highlight. Performed by white people with citizen status, the die-in also brought renewed scrutiny to areas of the border used by migrants. Although the die-in participants may have risked arrest, their actions actually heightened the risk for many migrants who make the journey unsupported by activists and without the shield of racialized citizenship. It also put the Migrant Trail Walk itself into some jeopardy and may have had negative repercussions on other migrant advocates and aid organizations that assist migrants crossing the borders.

Intuitively, I want to say that there is something wrong with the actions of actors in solidarity who, even while exposing themselves to risk, exacerbate the vulnerability and heighten the risk for other solidary actors, or perhaps worse, heighten the risk for the people on whose behalf they claim solidarity without their involvement or consent. In the example, one could cite the communicative failures in not discussing the actions with the Migrant Trail organizers, the epistemic failures in not knowing that white actors staging a die-in is racially problematic, the social and moral failures in not accurately assessing privilege in acting in a performative manner that directed attention away from the cause of ending migrant death through policy reform and directed scrutiny toward the border and those making the crossing. Each of these (and more) can be used to think through the potential problems for actors and actions in solidarity. In addition, thinking about the variety of risks involved, understanding that solidarity entails collective, personal, social, and relational risk for each participant, and thinking about how these risks are distributed might have kept the performers from acting on their plans for the die-in or transformed the action in positive ways.

In contrast, consider a participant from the first year of the Migrant Trail Walk, Daniel Strauss. Initially participating as a college student learning about migration, Strauss remained in the border region through the summer to work with the organization "No More Deaths," offering humanitarian assistance by providing water and food; Strauss returned in subsequent summers to continue volunteering. One summer, together with fellow humanitarian actor Shanti Sellz, he was arrested while transporting three migrants in need of

[10] Russo, *Solidarity in Practice*, p. 156.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

medical attention. Although the case was eventually dropped, Strauss and Sellz – and many others – were criminalized for acting on humanitarian needs.[11] They risked a possible jail sentence of 15 years, impacting themselves and their families; their actions in solidarity to meet the needs of vulnerable migrants and advocate for change in the borderlands may be seen as a willingness to sacrifice and renounce privilege, the actions are also perhaps more extreme than some solidary actors are willing or able to take.

These contrasting examples bring to light the variety of risks entailed in relationships of solidarity, especially those focused on social change. Participants in solidarity engage in transformative action; they seek to transform something or some aspect of the wider social world in which they live, and, in connecting their actions with others, they understand the prospects of collective actions. Their very commitment to the cause is individually transformative as well.[12] The die-in participants took substantial personal risk in their efforts to raise awareness, a personal risk no one asked them to take that was motivated by solidarity, but their actions had an adverse impact on the collective action, the social standing of others, and the solidarity relation itself. Strauss, Sellz, and others criminalized for their solidarity, also took substantial personal risk. The impact of their actions on the collective action, the social standing of others, and the solidarity relation might be complex but is generally not immediately adverse. In both cases, the distribution of risk across a variety of different facets factors into the assessment of the solidary action.

As these examples illustrate, there are numerous risks involved in solidarity. Protection against risk may be dissected into protection against external harms (which may be collective or individual), personal harms, social harms, and relational harm. Participants accept the costs of a relationship with others in solidarity because they believe that acting collectively is necessary and that "going it alone" will not bring about the transformative change required. Solidary actors assume the costs of the relation in spite of sometimes lacking direct knowledge of the needs of and risks to other participants in solidarity. However, as the examples illustrate, the varying facets of risk affect participants differently depending on their personal situation, social status, and engagement in the collective. Awareness of the facets offers a framework for assessing individual and collective action. Actively rebalancing risk within the relation is one of the practices of trust building in solidarity.

[11] Associated Press, "Volunteers Fight Arrests for Aiding Illegals," *Deseret News* (April 2, 2006), available at: www.deseret.com/2006/4/2/19946256/volunteers-fight-arrests-for-aiding-illegals (last accessed May 10, 2023).

[12] Sally Scholz, "Persons Transformed by Political Solidarity" (2010) 8 *Appraisal* 19.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

2.2 FACETS OF RISK

Political solidarity musters or collectivizes individual commitments for social change. Albeit precarious, standing with others in political solidarity aims not only to bring about social change but also to secure consociates against potential social vulnerabilities impinging on abilities in the context of the solidary relation. In other words, the collective relation will affect people differently given their social position and ability to commit to the cause. Participants expect not to be abandoned if and when the collective action gets difficult, but the expectations within solidarity extend beyond lack of abandonment. Committing to solidarity, members of the collective believe that acting together is likely to ensure a better situation, and perhaps a better outcome, than acting separately. Commitment to a cause compels solidary actors to align their individual efforts to the collective whole, knowing that others are similarly committed. Individuals contribute what they are able given their situations, including vulnerabilities as well as material and social powers. In doing so, participants accept the risk of solidarity. Risk here means the potential for harm or loss, or exposure to possible danger, precarity, or uncertainty. Although there are positive ideas associated with risk or risk taking behaviors, I want to focus on the potential negatives. The solidary relation includes not only a relation to others in solidarity, but also a relation to a larger social whole or others not or not yet aligned in solidarity, and a relation to a goal.[13] Each of these relations (and perhaps one's relation to the self) are impacted by a solidary commitment.

Each of the examples here features a collective project of border policy reform, safety for migrants, and humanitarian aid. The solidarity is both among fellow advocates, some of whom are migrants seeking a path to citizenship, and between advocates or activists and migrants. Both illustrate some participants assuming significant personal risk of arrest and punishment as they act to advance the cause of solidarity. In addition, the actions in solidarity have an impact on the social standing and relations between and among activists, many of whom are also migrants experiencing the precarious existence of life on the move.

So, while political solidarity is often conceptualized according to the (1) collective risk undertaken together, individual participants also face the (2) personal risks or potential for harm as they contribute to advancing the cause. Part of what is factored alongside the collective risk and the personal risk is the impact of solidary commitment on an individual's or group's social

[13] I unpack these relations and associated moral obligations in Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (2008).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

standing, status, or power within a larger social whole, or what may be called (3) social risk. Finally, given that it is a relationship built on commitment to others similarly committed, risk-taking in political solidarity also impacts the (4) relationship of solidarity itself.

2.2.1 *Collective Risk*

The clearest and most immediate risk is associated with the project or goal of the solidary relation. The hoped-for transformation might itself involve some risk-taking in the collective action. This is clearly seen in the classic example of solidary action: workers' collective action; the unity in taking a stand for workers' rights or higher wages requires that all equally risk the possibility of loss of work and, in early workers' movements, violent retribution. Collective risk is also evident in the solidarity to which the Migrant Trail Walk gives witness. In walking together, the participants assume a collective posture against accepted social roles or norms, they find support and even safety in their collective. Whereas the workers' solidarity requires symmetrical risk taking, the Migrant Trail Walk demonstrates asymmetrical risk taking; hence at least some of the debates in studies of solidarity pertain specifically to the collective risk.

Collective action of this sort often involves accepting methods that one might not pursue on their own. That is what is meant by the outward-facing collective risk: the potential for harm in collectively responding to injustice; the risks entailed in the activism engaged for a cause. The experience of outward-facing collective risk varies depending on the form solidarity takes, the level of commitment of participants, and the external exigencies that mediate their involvement.[14] Nonetheless, the willingness to assume collective risks may be understood as a will, universally shared within solidarity, that each participant is able to contribute in a way that realizes their potential as solidary actors.

2.2.2 *Personal Risk*

In both examples, relatively socially privileged individuals engaged in personally risky action that resulted in the involvement of the police. In the case of the die-in, the activism might have important performative value in raising awareness to the phenomena of border death, whereas the case of driving migrants to a medical facility is a direct method of addressing the same issue

[14] Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, p. 60.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

by seeking to prevent border death. In bringing police (and media) attention, however, both examples impact the lives of other activists, at least some of whom may not be protected by the relative social privilege enjoyed by those who engaged in personally risky action. These other activists might experience increased vulnerability because of the personally risky activism of others. The increased police scrutiny might hinder the collective efforts or damage the solidary relation as well.

Individual vulnerabilities, themselves often the result of unjust social structures like racism, sexism, citizenship status, as well as shifting circumstances within and outside the social movement, can expose solidary actors to varying levels and types of personal risk. Participation in solidarity could exacerbate the potential for harm and other costs for some members. Those who propose methods that entail greater personal risk as a means carry something like a heightened burden of proof to demonstrate that the methods or actions do not unduly burden others or exacerbate the personal vulnerability of others in such a way that their ability to participate is hindered.[15] Others may need to accept more personal costs in order to balance the collective, social, and relational costs carried by others in solidarity. This is why some accounts of solidarity point to sacrifice as an element of solidarity.

Moreover, solidarity does not necessarily entail taking personal risk, but the commitment to solidarity includes a critical assessment of the personal risks assumed by others. In other words, as a relation with others, solidarity includes some commitment to those others. Although often cast as assistance or mutuality, I am suggesting it also be understood as an assessment of the potential for harm or loss in the personal well-being of others. The solidary relation may call upon participants to help redistribute the costs and burdens of solidarity. This critical process is reflective rather than presumptive or punitive, it is open rather than arrogant. In the two examples, Strauss and Sellz of "No More Deaths" had even discussed the personal risks with their migrant passengers, noting that they could not hide them and that the passengers would be arrested if caught.[16] They had not expected to be arrested themselves for offering humanitarian aid, but they accepted that cost as part of the price of solidarity with fellow activists for humanitarianism at the border. The open, reflective process of identifying potential risks was an important part of the relation itself.

[15] Sally Scholz, "Solidarity as a Human Right" (2014) 52 *Archiv des Völkerrechts* 149.
[16] Associated Press, "Volunteers Fight Arrests for Aiding Illegals."

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

2.2.3 *Social Risk*

Collective action to bring about social change in solidary relations also includes *social* risks or potential for harm or damage to social relations as a result of solidarity. Social risk may be understood as the indirect adverse impact of the collective commitment of solidarity on participants' outside relations and social standing more generally. Some people may suffer the burden of unjust distribution of social risk within the solidary relation. Those who are oppressed or most affected by injustice may not be in a position to risk more than they already do to survive. Their lives, social existence, livelihoods, or other social relations may mean that they are unable to contribute much to collective struggles; those people who are privileged in relation to a particular form of oppression or injustice might risk that privilege and the security that accompanies it but are better positioned to bear the costs of the solidary struggle.[17] Navigating the effects of social risk on the lives of participants brings to light the possibilities of living differently within the solidary relation as well.

Identifying the social risk and how the burden of that commitment might fall unjustly on some members or how individual actions can violate the expectations of solidarity, is an important critical-reflective process within the relations of solidarity. The willingness to share social risk tends toward the social conditions within the solidary relation that will protect fellow participants against vulnerability while also working for the outward-facing cause. Given the context of political solidarity, challenging unjust or oppressive social conditions, the willingness to equitable share social risk implies the need for continual reevaluation of the distribution of social risk among the participants in solidarity.

On one level, we can see the impact of shared social risk in solidaristic relations as a measure of harm for redistribution: individuals who join a cause that addresses an injustice affecting some members, for instance, aim to transform those social conditions so that the latter may be full members of society; shifting some of the burdens in solidarity away from those affected members so that they can all actively engage in efforts for social change that alters the conditions of injustice. Committing to a cause in solidarity means that individual members use their power to struggle for that cause, accepting

[17] See, for example, Skye Cleary, *How to be Authentic* (New York: St. Martin's, 2022), pp. 244–45; and Iris Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model" (2006) 23 *Social Philosophy and Policy* 105.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

that one may be exposed to collective risk in the struggle but that it is better to face the struggle collectively.

In contrast to what I have been suggesting here, the sharing of risk in *civic* solidarity more closely resembles the sharing of risk in insurance plans. Indeed, civic solidarity is conceived as a means of sharing risk so that individuals will not be hindered by vulnerabilities in their exercise of civil, political, social, and economic rights. The willingness to share risk equitably in political solidarity presents some important differences. In insurance, individual participants pay their fair share into a pool so that the pool can cover a much larger sum needed for an "insurance event" should the need arise.[18] Insurance secures protection against a foreseen but unintended event. Insurance companies – or the state – act as third parties that also seek their own good. Social risk in political solidarity is not primarily aimed at protection against a harmful event. Instead, the willingness to share equitable social risk pertains to minimizing the effects of social inequality within the solidary relation. Individuals contribute what they are able given their situations, including vulnerabilities as well as material and social powers.

2.2.4 *Relational Risk*

A fourth facet of risk is the potential for harm or loss from the solidary relation itself. In some symmetrically structured solidary relations, this may be the same as collective risk, as in the case of the solidarity of workers. However, relational risk need not be reduced to collective risk even when the relationship is otherwise equal. As the other facets indicate, solidarity might include the possibility of harm or danger for some participants, while relational risk highlights the fact that the solidary relation itself might pose a hazard for some participants. The inwardly-facing or relational risks of solidarity are multiple but perhaps most evident when personal risk-taking adversely affects others in the relation, that is, when the actions of some pose a risk to the sustained collective relation and future possibilities of solidarity. According to Russo, the "die-in" posed just such a danger. Russo explains that the "die-in" "ended up having a divisive effect within the group" and obscured "the very issue these activists hoped to highlight."[19] The methods employed by some jeopardized the relation between fellow solidarity actors and the relation to the cause they all shared.

[18] Lehtonen and Liukko, "Producing Solidarity, Inequality and Exclusion through Insurance," 158.

[19] Russo, *Solidarity in Practice*, p. 156.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

A mark of solidarity is that participants commitment to the cause and the relation entails a commitment to navigate through disagreement whenever possible. Disagreement about practices, methods, and expectations of solidarity bring the bonds themselves to the fore. These differences can divide solidary actors, creating the potential for conflict or contestations. Alicia Garza discusses a commitment to a process of facing disagreement, discussion, and listening that brought to light the effects of actions on individual participants and the harm to the collective bonds within the Black Lives Matter movement. They saw the need to identify the relational risk, along with the collective risk that they undertook together, and how the burden of that commitment might fall unjustly on some members, or how individual actions within the relation violate the expectations of solidarity. This internal process is important to the commitment to the cause of challenging society-wide injustice and violence, it created space and affirmed humanity of participants.[20] Garza emphasizes the connection between the commitment to a goal and the commitment to the solidary relation even while conceding the potential for harm within the relation itself. Political relations like solidarity likely also foster some interpersonal relations. Some of those will be supportive and mutually beneficial, hence the emphasis on "mutuality" found in many accounts of solidarity. But some interpersonal relations might be abusive or domineering.[21] Indeed, social movements have imploded because of the hazards of the relation usurping the focus on the cause.

Existing individual vulnerabilities may be worsened; individual particularity must be considered as the impact of the relation and the effects of actions-in-concert transform the participants, the collective, and the social whole. The solidary relation, with awareness of inward-facing risks, risks that accrue to participants within the relation itself, flexes its solidarity by readjusting to the needs of fellow actors so that single participants are not unduly harmed by the relationship or by the collective risks taken together. The potential for harm associated with the solidary relation ought to be equitable but ensuring that requires assessing the dynamic effects of the solidary relation on individuals within the relation, including personal risk and social risk, and readjusting the distribution of the burdens of the relation of solidarity when necessary. That is not to say that such solidarities will be successful at either achieving the end or goal of the cause or sustaining the praxis that marks the solidarity group. Nor does it mean that individuals will not act in ways that put others in the solidary

[20] Alicia Garza, *The Purpose of Power* (New York: One World, 2020).
[21] Clare Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

relation at heightened risk. But it is to say that the commitment to solidarity involves not only the commitment to a shared cause or goal, but also active measures employed to preserve the bonds of solidarity as much as feasible. I would argue that it also means that individuals will not "go rogue" in a way that puts fellow solidary actors at heightened risk. Domination can appear when some parties abandon solidarity, potentially creating an external relation of dominance against those within the solidarity.

2.3 SUMMING UP RISK

Elsewhere I caution against inequitable distribution of social risk and connect it with other dangerous vicissitudes of the solidary relation, as when social risk is unjustifiably limited, or strategically withdrawn.[22] In these cases, relations of solidarity might heighten the danger to some, especially those participants who are vulnerable to other injustices within the social whole. Revealing how risk may be structurally maldistributed aids in unpacking the expectations of solidarity. My aim in the current discussion is merely to complicate the facets of risk in order to both show how solidarity impacts parties differently and demonstrate some of the critical powers available in assessing the balance of risk and vulnerability among solidary actors. That insight extends beyond political solidarity to other forms of solidarity as well.

The two examples presented in this chapter reveal the interplay of risks and the impact on different parties within the solidary relation. The guerilla theatre of the die-in might have been construed as brave personal risk for a cause, but it impacted the collective project in adverse ways and jeopardized the social existence of migrants seeking to cross the border. Analyzing the case understanding solidarity as "burden sharing" alone would not account for the intuition that the die-in participants violated some aspect of the relation to fellow participants. The controversy damaged the solidary relation as well and made humanitarian aid workers along the border question the commitment of the Migrant Trail Walk participants. The actions of Strauss and Sellz similarly involved personal risk for a cause and might be understood as negatively impacting the collective struggle; however, their commitment to the well-being of those with whom they act in solidarity, rather than destroying trust, demonstrated a commitment and fostered trust. They shared in the prospect of arrest that migrants face along the border, jeopardizing their own social position in the effort to protect others from the vulnerability of undocumented

[22] Sally Scholz, "Pernicious Solidarity," in Juri Viehoff and Andrea Sangiovanni (eds.), *The Virtue of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), pp. 194–219.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

status in a scorching desert. In this case, "burden sharing" might be a valuable tool for making sense of the solidarity with migrants and fellow activists along the border, but that too seems incomplete. The burden that is shared is the personal risk of arrest, but the solidarity is also about the larger collective political action to transform border policies. Deference, which is sometimes used to conceptualize the disposition of solidary actors of privilege, also comes up short; the migrants offered to hide but Strauss and Sellz, rather than deferring to that position, indicated that they could not protect the migrants they were transporting from arrest. Their solidarity was characterized by an open willingness to share in the potential for social harm rather than to employ evasive actions that might have been aligned with the desired action of the migrants and more personally risky. Political solidarity is difficult; rather than judge whether individual actions are right or wrong in solidarity, the examples suggest it would be more productive to turn the critical examination to how the solidary relation impacts the balance of different facets of risk and fosters or impinges on trust in the relation.

Although I have focused on the facets of risk in political solidarity, other forms of solidarity similarly exhibit different, sometimes overlapping, elements of risk. Assessing solidarity – for example, social, civic, or international solidarity – using some of the complex relations of risk, moving beyond measures of shared fate or straightforward burden sharing, reveals a bit more about why solidarity is unique, how multiple expectations are combined in the relation, and why single-axis accounts of solidarity's normative obligations may not suffice.

Participants in solidarity accept the costs of a relationship with others in solidarity. They aim to reduce the potential for harm or loss experienced among fellow participants present in external relations while also mitigating risks internal to the solidarity itself. Of course, the facets of risk become most visible when they are violated, complicating the use of risk within decision making, but acknowledging the presence of risk and being aware of varying facets and distribution patterns might be useful in building trust, thereby fostering solidarity and avoiding domination within the relation.

Individuals put their power in the service of the whole rather than seeking advantage over the group or any part thereof. Creating the critical mechanisms to assess the distribution of various forms of risk within solidarity contributes to avoiding domination. The willingness to assess and share risks in the solidary relation – standing with others – means that one will not abandon the solidary group when the potential for loss emerges; and that the reflective commitment to assess the distribution of risks guides at least some actions in order to maintain the solidarity.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

Movements for social change engaged in political solidarity to end injustice, oppression, or tyranny, create loosely formed solidary relations. Within this solidary collective, participants strive to enact the just relations that are absent in the situation they challenge. But domination sometimes seeps into even the most thoughtful or intentional solidarity community. Seeking to articulate a social relation that precludes domination, Jean-Jacques Rousseau eloquently asserts that "each, by giving himself to all, gives himself to no one."[23] Rousseau put equality and nondomination within the social body at the center of his body politic. The expectation is that, in committing to a social body, requiring the alienation of rights to all others in order to get them back with the full force of the community within the Rousseauian framework, no one would be unduly subject to other people or to vulnerabilities created by the organization of that structure. Complete avoidance of dominant positioning within movements for social change is likely not possible; indeed, most solidary movements or communities recognize this and factor it into the collective risk of acting together. The key is that dominant positioning – putting some actors in powerful positions over others – should not become so entrenched as to cement relations of domination and subjection, infecting the solidary relation with injustice. Equitable sharing of social and relational risk point to that readjustment to avoid domination. Looking at solidarity through the lenses of personal, collective, social risk, and relational risk reveals at least some of the transformative aspects and potential of solidarity.[24] The individual participant is transformed by the collective but also transforms the collective.

In the context of political solidarity, failure is often assessed according to whether a goal is achieved. But scrutinizing the willingness to share social risk, the impact of collective risk on individual participants, the demands of personal risk, and the potential hardships accruing because of the solidary relation could provide an alternate assessment of success. The personal and collective transformation that results reveals something about the solidary relation both in reference to the goal of solidarity (without the requirement of completeness in attaining the goal) and in reference to the solidary relation. Solidary actors expect to contribute their efforts to the collective effort. They need to know that others are similarly engaged in a relation for which and

[23] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Social Contract," in Victor Gourevitch (ed.), *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 50.

[24] Scholz, "Persons Transformed by Political Solidarity"; Russo, *Solidarity in Practice*, p. 130 and 138; and Meghan Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 126.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

within which they are willing to take risks and be transformed. They also ought to be able to trust that fellow actors in solidarity do not exploit or take advantage of the relation. Solidarity action will not protect one from repercussions of that action from those outside the solidary community, but the commitment at least implies that participants will strive to readjust the distribution of risk (of all sorts) among participants.

2.4 FOSTERING TRUST AND NAVIGATING DISAGREEMENT

Considering the facets of risk as part of the complex relations of solidarity opens the way for thinking about the development of trust in the relation. Empirical research on solidarity supports the notion that people are more likely to act if they know that others will act too; appeals to altruistic or even humanitarian claims alone will not likely generate the political response necessary for effective mobilization for social change. Bo Rothstein's study of social solidarity for civil society affirms that "forward-looking predictions" about whether fellow participants will act similarly rather than free-ride are more important for maintaining solidarity and building trust than identity, feeling, or even past commitments to social justice. Rothstein describes the "social trap": "this is [the] situation where all agents will be worse off because even if they know they would all gain from cooperation, lacking trust that the others will cooperate, they will themselves abstain from cooperation."[25] Rothstein also notes the positive impact of expectations on forward-looking action, which he thinks universal policies and institutional structures ensure in civic solidarity arrangements: "forward looking strategic thinking in the sense that *what agents do, depends on what they think the other agents are going to do*."[26] Rothstein's remarks emphasize the value of assessing the complex facets of risk and can be applied to political solidarity as well. Free riding on the collective risk is hazardous for some more than others; reciprocity of personal risks is not always desirable or feasible; and social and relational costs of solidarity for some ought to be countered with the sharing of more collective and social risk by others. Forward-looking action that stubbornly attends to the impact of the collective commitment to solidarity in and on the respective lives of participants builds trust within the relation.

[25] Bo Rothstein, "Solidarity, Diversity, and the Quality of Government," in Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 309.

[26] Rothstein, "Solidarity, Diversity, and the Quality of Government," p. 309.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

Reciprocity alone does not adequately capture the dynamic interplay between situations, needs, efforts, and causes within political solidarity, although counterfactual reciprocity comes closer: "I help you now that you are in trouble because you would have helped me had I been in the same trouble, and this even if I know that this will never be the case."[27] A willingness to share equitably social risk challenges reciprocity and expands the factors of counterfactual reciprocity. Such a willingness might reasonably be viewed as a form of balancing: assessing and exchanging risks within the solidary relation and evaluating the effects of collective risk and social risk on the ability to assume relational and personal risks, for instance. So too, engaging in collective risk and demonstrating commitment through personal or social risk has a bigger impact on the relation of solidarity among members than identity with or immersing oneself in the situations of oppression.[28] Concrete practices that engender trust, such as openly assessing risk and the distribution of social risk as well as collective risk, contribute to maintaining the cooperative bond of solidarity. Actors in solidarity have to be able to see that their "standing together" has a forward-looking goal, and they need to believe that others are similarly thinking both laterally toward them in the solidary relation and forward toward that which they can achieve together.

These are complex demands that distinguish solidarity as a relation from mere collective action or identity group affiliation. Solidary actors adopt a mode of thinking that considers the direct connections between action and injustice in their social criticism of existing society, but that also considers the forward-looking possibilities of something different which is lived in the relations with similarly committed others in solidarity. Equitable sharing of social risk allows an individual to assume or accept this complex, even burdensome, mode of thinking and being because of the belief that other solidary actors are similarly engaged.

Solidary groups do not need to seek consensus (and formal procedures of decision-making are relatively rare in loosely formed social movements). But the investment in an alternative solidary community focused on ameliorating injustice or seeking not to recreate injustice in the solidary relation itself implies that working together in spite of disagreement and through disagreement is better for our individual and collective well-being than otherwise. I would distinguish two basic forms of conflict within solidarity. The first is a pernicious form that shifts burdens unduly onto some participants as when relations of domination infect the solidary group. The second is a productive

[27] Van Parijs, "Concluding Reflections," p. 421.
[28] Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity*, p. 149.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

form of disagreement or conflict that opens space for the praxis of solidarity to continue to transform. In other words, the need to assess the distribution of various forms of risk within solidary relations means that concrete practices of attending to others (listening, observing lived realities, and seeking historical understanding, to name just a few) become important elements of the solidary relation and an individual's solidary disposition. Cleary captures this well in describing acting in solidarity: "Actions always take place amidst a haze of ambiguity and risk, so we have to do what we can to become aware of the paradoxes of action, to look for alternate points of view, to listen to people who disagree, to stay open to changing our minds when we discover we've made mistakes, but to leap in and act anyway."[29] Disagreement about method, especially when those methods heighten risk for some participants, demands work to maintain the solidary relation, even while continuing to address the cause for social change that unites participants. As Garza emphasizes, practices of repair demonstrate the challenge of conflict and the possibilities that emerge when conflict becomes an accepted element of solidary relation insofar as it helps participants reflect on, discuss, and perhaps recommit to the social.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The relation between solidary participants and the goal, and the relation among solidary participants, are analytically or conceptually distinguishable; however, within the work of solidarity, they are lived together. Individual actors commit to a shared goal and act toward that goal, understanding their actions in solidarity as actions-in-concert with all other participants. For the individual, the goal might inform the agency insofar as it sets the agenda for decision-making. For the group, the lived experience of agency in solidarity works toward the shared goal. Agency and goal unite in the relation of solidarity itself. That is the crucial point: solidarity is distinct from merely collective action because a relationship, however tenuous, is maintained beyond a given action or even a given set of actions. A workers' union, not merely a collective action of striking, evinces a relation of solidarity. The strike demonstrates an opportunity or moment for intense critical reflection when social risk is perhaps most evident and the willingness to share social risk equitably is most needed. Notice that this is slightly different than the notion of "mutual advantage" which is often used within discussions of solidarity. Rather than thinking through what advantage we can all share, we shift to

[29] Cleary, *How to be Authentic*, p. 248.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

think about how the distribution of risks – collective, personal, social, and relational –affects consociates.

One objection to the account sketched here is that the emphasis on assessing risk and considering the vulnerability of others at least implies a conscious choice open to negotiation and deliberation. In response, I would argue that the willingness to accept and share social risk in solidarity, like the assumption of risk in other moral relations, surely is sometimes consciously chosen, but participants also sometimes find themselves assuming social risk without their consideration of the choice. Just as one can be swept up in friendships or loving relations – or perhaps a better analogy is being swept into a situation of rescue, realizing that one is committed to the relation without choosing it, one may be swept up in solidarity. The commitment is lived or experienced. The appearance of a voluntary choice to engage in solidarity is found especially in asymmetrical solidarity relations, where powerful actors join with those who suffer oppression or injustice in a shared commitment to a cause. But, in other relations, risk emerges with the collective commitment wherein individual actors are motivated by a number of diverse compulsions.

In a related vein, it might be suggested that the focus on risk reduces solidarity to an interpersonal relationship or even an individual disposition. On the contrary, as I have sketched the facets of risk here, the solidarity is a moral relation entailing networks of relations between and among participants, the goal of solidarity, and outside others. Understanding solidarity as a moral relation in this manner does not invite the critique that the self-interest of human beings makes solidarity impossible because of the reluctance to tie one's lot to that of others. Centering social risk, the willingness to share and the equitable distribution of risk, shifts the question about self-interest. Self-interest becomes an aspect of risk factored into the social risk of solidarity. This does not, of course, mitigate the powerful incentives to act in self-interested ways outside of solidarity. But it does allow us to begin thinking about solidarity as consistent with, rather than opposed to, self-interest.

Focusing on the risk of relationships within political solidarity, and the prospect of fostering such relations in expansive movements for social change, offers another way to think about solidarity in addition to the action-in-concert to accomplish a cause for social change. Assessing risk guides praxis, avoids domination, and establishes trust. Risking solidarity – willingly accepting to share equitably risk related to working collectively for a cause or goal – not only transforms the individual and the group, solidarity transforms politics. Acting in solidarity creates new communities or new collective imaginaries that redefine social and political relations, offering new and creative accounts of what constitutes membership or participation, while also navigating or

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004

negotiating conceptions of legitimate expectations of solidaristic others.[30] In doing so, the risk of solidarity is disruptive and destabilizing; it recreates politics anew, risking stability in favor of a participatory self-critical relation that dares to provide a new model of how to engage together across differences while also critically constituting or reconstituting the ties that bind. Willingness to share equitably collective, personal, social, and relational risk in particular contexts is at the heart of solidarity.

[30] Maurice Stierl, "A Sea of Struggle: Activist Border Interventions in the Mediterranean Sea," in Ilker Ataç, Kim Rygiel, and Maurice Stierl (eds.), *The Contentious Politics of Refugee and Migrant Protest and Solidarity Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 47–48; Russo, *Solidarity in Practice*, p. 146; and Peter Hall, "The Political Sources of Social Solidarity," in Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 214.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 09:48:55, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009580588.004