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Victimhood narratives in social discourses and political campaigns

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Victimhood is typically associated with vulnerability, weakness, and moral patiency – both in the eyes of third parties and in the eyes of victims themselves. Thus, victimhood is often a liability that people should generally be motivated to avoid or prevent. That said, victimhood can sometimes also be an asset: claiming victimhood can imply an entitlement to demand restitution, compensation, or even retribution. Thus, victimhood can have a mobilizing effect, especially when it is associated with a social categorization (i.e., collective victimhood), which is why victimhood narratives are used as a rhetoric figure in social discourses and political campaigns. In this presentation, we will explore the prevalence of victimhood narratives in political campaigns and its potential to escalate social conflicts, and we will refer to psychological theory and research to discuss (a) the toxic interpersonal and intergroup effects of collective victimhood narratives and (b) personal dispositions to attend and respond to these narratives.

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