

Empathy May Be Overrated in an Election, and in a Leader

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The New York Times:

Is empathy an essential virtue for a presidential candidate?

The conventional wisdom is that a good candidate must be able to feel your pain. Bill Clinton was hailed by pundits as a virtuoso of empathy, supposedly riding that quality to triumph over George H.W. Bush, who was so often said to be short of empathy that he felt compelled to tell an audience, “Message: I care.”

...

Other researchers, though, argue that empathy isn’t as irrational as it seems. They see it as not just a knee-jerk reflex but as something we can control. Our empathy declines as the number of victims increases, an effect called “compassion collapse.” But maybe that’s because we realize we can’t do anything meaningful to help the larger group.

“Empathy can often be costly, entailing outlay of material resources, emotional effort and physical risk,” said Daryl Cameron, a psychologist at the University of Iowa. “If people recognize these costs, either consciously or not, they may strategically regulate their empathy away to avoid the costs.”

Read the whole story: [The New York Times](#)