

PARTICIPATING CITIZENS: U.S.-EUROPE COMPARISONS IN VOLUNTEER ACTION

By Helmut K. Anheier, Lester M. Salamon, and Edith Archambault

While prominent instances of private philanthropy regularly meet the public eye in the United States and elsewhere, we know little about the "big picture." Are giving and volunteering a relatively constant phenomenon that varies little between the US and Europe, or are there big differences reflecting other social and political characteristics of societies? Specifically, are there differences in the amount of giving and volunteering between countries which have traditionally put high premiums on individualism and local civic responsibility, compared to those which have favored public solutions?

As part of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, we have undertaken national surveys of giving and volunteering behavior in France and western Germany.¹ These surveys can now be compared to similar studies conducted by the Gallup Organization for Independent Sector in the US.

In comparing the results of these surveys, however, certain caveats must be introduced. First, both Germany and France have developed far more complete public systems of social welfare protection than the US. Problems that are left for private charitable support in the US are therefore more commonly handled, and handled more completely, through state support in Europe.

This does not mean, however, that the European countries have no nonprofit sector as it is known in the US. To the contrary, Germany has one of the most highly developed nonprofit sectors in the world. But its nonprofit sector relies more heavily on general public support through government than on private charitable giving.

The second caveat applies when comparing religious giving in the US and

Germany. In the US, giving to religious institutions (churches, synagogues, mosques) represents over 60% of all the giving reported. In Germany, however, religious contributions flow through a different channel. In a sense, they are collected through the state in the form of an obligatory church tax (7-9% surcharge tax) that is levied against the income of those who indicate they are church members and distributed to the religious group designated by the individual. This means the contributions to churches in Germany do not show up in the kind of surveys we have conducted. Comparing the results of surveys on giving in Germany with those in the US without regard for this difference can thus produce misleading conclusions. It is uncertain how much those with religious affiliation would in fact give if no tax existed. To address this concern, we have, in certain instances, incorporated estimates of religious contributions into the German data.

Big Variations by Country

Table 1 offers an overview of major dimensions of giving and volunteering in the three countries. Excluding the church tax in Germany, our survey found that about 7 out of 10 Americans had donated money in the previous 12 months, compared with about 4 out of 10 in the two European countries. The average sum of money donated during the last year amounted to \$851 in the US, \$120 in Germany, and \$96 in France. Thus, not only is the overall proportion of givers in the population significantly higher in the US, but the amounts given differ even more. The average US contribution outweighs the French and German ones 7 or 8 fold. And, whereas half of all individual donations in the US are \$300 or higher, the median German and French donations are about \$40—13-15% of the US figure. In additions, Americans donated about 1.2% of their annual income—and for

contributors the figure is almost 2%. By contrast, Germans donated 0.3% of their income—one-fourth the US figure. In France, the level is just 0.15%, half the German proportion and one-eighth the US share.

As noted earlier, however, the figures reported above are somewhat misleading because of the religious contribution structure in Germany. Although one might question whether the church tax is a truly voluntary contribution, it is nonetheless important to consider the tax, so as to avoid misleading conclusions about the level of giving across different countries. In 1990, the German Catholic Church and Protestant Church each received \$4.1 billion in church taxes. If we use our survey data to estimate the total sum of donations for the western German population, we arrive at about \$2.6 billion. This sum amounts to 33% of the church tax total, roughly similar to the share of total giving that religion represents as reported on the Gallup surveys in the US. If that much had actually been volunteered in lieu of the obligatory tax, we find that the German giving would in some instances surpass United States giving. The proportion of givers would jump to at least 90%, assuming that 86% of the population are members of either the Catholic or the Protestant Church; the average donations would increase substantially and, likewise, the proportion of income donated would inflate by a factor of 3.6 to 1.12%—a figure close to the US figure of 1.2% for all respondents.

Differences in levels of volunteering are, if anything, even more pronounced than those for giving behavior. About every second American, every fifth Frenchman, and every seventh German reported volunteer activities in the previous 12 months. While Americans volunteer far more than Europeans, we find that volunteering is relatively more frequent

TABLE 1
VOLUNTEERING AND GIVING: THE US REALLY IS DIFFERENT

	US	Germany	France
Percent of respondents who volunteered previous 12 months	49%	13%	19%
Percent of respondents who contributed previous 12 months	73	44	43
Average sum of donation for previous 12 months for givers	\$851	\$120	\$96

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization (US) for the Independent Sector, latest that of 1991; Zentrum fuer Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen & Gesellschaft fuer Marketing-Kommunikations-und Sozialforschung mbH (Germany), 1992; and I.L.S. Survey for Laboratoire D'Économie Sociale and the Fondation de France (France), 1991.

among French respondents than among their German counterparts, thereby reversing the order we observed for donations. However, while volunteering seems slightly more frequent in France, German volunteers seem to work longer hours. In fact, German volunteers devote more hours on average than their counterparts in the US and in France (i.e., 235 hours per year vs. roughly 200 hours). It is worth noting that the US figures are heavily influenced by volunteering at churches, which, compared to France and Germany, represents a significant share of the total. This form of volunteering may be defined differently in Europe.

Scope of Giving and Volunteering

Table 2 (p.18) provides a breakdown for the incidence of giving and volunteering by fields or areas, following in large measure the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations.² Looking at giving first, we find that three fields dominate in the US: religion, social services, and health, followed by education and research. One out of every two respondents in the US reported contributions to religion; every second respondent, too, supported social service activities; and every third supported the health sector. In Germany, by contrast, a different, more evenly spread pattern prevails, whereby religion, international activities, and health and social services are the most frequent targets of contributions. In France, with the exception of health, no other field stands out to the extent that religion and

social services do in the US. What we find is a pattern whereby the two European countries reveal more secular giving behavior, specifically France. As we will see below, religion represents one significant part of the differences in giving we observe between the US and both France and Germany. This is particularly true when we take account of the *amounts* given rather than just the numbers of givers.

Volunteering reveals somewhat different concentrations across fields. Like giving, volunteering in the US is most common in the areas of religion, social services, and health although education, culture and recreation also represent important areas for volunteer activity. In the two European countries, the fields of culture and recreation dominate, followed by religion and advocacy in Germany, and social services, education and religion in France.

Religious and Non-Religious Giving

Religion emerges as one of the significant differences in giving patterns between the US and the two European countries in our study. Leaving the issue of the German church tax aside, six out of ten dollars in US contributions are made for religious purposes, as opposed to three out of ten in Germany and two out of ten in France. Looking at religious giving as a share of annual income, we find the same pattern repeated. Whereas US givers donate 1.91% of their income, about

60% of this represents religious contributions (0.95% of annual income). For Germany, the share of religious giving as a percentage of annual income is 0.33% or somewhat more than a third of the 0.85% donated totally. Finally, in France, we find that the religious component of giving represents only one fifth of total contributions, which amount to 0.39% of annual income. The average and the median sum of religious contributions are fairly close to those for total giving. In sum, while the US shows much higher levels of giving overall, the three countries are somewhat closer when we consider non-religious giving. This pattern is also the case, albeit somewhat less pronounced, for volunteering, where France emerges as the most "secular" in orientation: Religious volunteering represents about 6% of all volunteer hours, compared with a share of about one-fourth for the US and Germany.

Who Donates and Volunteers?

Table 3 (p.34) reveals several striking similarities and differences across countries in terms of who donates and volunteers. In all three countries we find that women are more likely to make contributions than men but men volunteer more often than women. At the same time, however, such differences within each country are never larger than 10%, which seems to indicate that, overall, giving and volunteering levels do not differ greatly along gender lines.

TABLE 2
PROPORTIONS OF THE PUBLIC GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING, BY SECTOR

Sector	Giving			Volunteering		
	US	Germany	France	US	Germany	France
Culture & Recreation	16%	9%	2%	13%	6%	9%
Education & Research	21	2	8	15	1	2
Health	33	13	23	13	1	2
Social Services	50	13	10	27	1	3
Environment	16	9	2	9	1	1
Advocacy	12	3	2	5	2	1
Philanthropy	16	1	1	9	*	*
International	4	15	7	2	*	1
Professional	16	2	2	7	1	1
Religious w/o church tax	51	24	9	27	3	2
Religious w/church tax	NA	over 90%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Other	3	3	1	3	1	1

* Less than 0.5%.

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization (US) for the Independent Sector, latest that of 1991; Zentrum fuer Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen & Gesellschaft fuer Marketing-Kommunikations-und Sozialforschung mbH (Germany), 1992; and I.L.S. Survey for Laboratoire D'Économie Sociale and the Fondation de France (France), 1991.

Religious affiliation, too, seems to have little effect on giving and volunteering. Specifically, Catholics and Protestants show very similar patterns: The catchall category *Other and None*, which combines "other religions" and "atheists", while somewhat lower overall, does not strikingly deviate from the general picture.³ What seems to matter, however, is the degree of religiosity, measured by the frequency of church, mosque or synagogue attendance. Here we observe a significant drop in levels of giving and volunteering as levels of religious activity decline. One reason for this is that much religious giving actually occurs in church. Those who do not go, therefore have less of an opportunity to give.

Occupational characteristics reveal that giving and volunteering tend to be lower for blue collar workers than for self-employed, white-collar workers and professionals. Moreover, the economically inactive portions of the population, most notably homemakers and retirees, reveal higher shares of givers than blue-collar workers. What we find is that

across the three countries giving appears as a dual phenomenon: on the one hand, it seems linked to professionals and white-collar employees, and on the other, to housewives and the elderly. Giving is less associated with blue-collar status.

Looking at the relationship between levels of education and giving and volunteering, we find that both activities increase with the level of education. Respondents in the US are nearly twice as likely to give if they have completed a college degree (advanced level) than those with elementary education only (less than high school). Moreover, the former are over three times as likely to volunteer when compared to the latter. In France, we find similar, though less pronounced, trends. The exception is Germany. While the relationship between volunteering and educational level is similar to what we observe in the other two countries, we find the reverse for giving. The data suggest that the share of givers in Germany declines as people become more educated. It seems most plausible to assume that this deviation is the result of the

lower share of givers among tenured civil servants and a higher frequency of givers among homemakers and the elderly. Since the former tend to be better educated than the latter, this would help account for the reverse relationship.

Finally, let's consider the relationship between giving and income. Research in the US suggests that lower-income groups tend to donate the highest share of their income, followed by higher-income groups, and then middle income groups, which tend to give the lowest proportion on average.⁴ This results in a curvilinear relationship between income and contributions. To some extent, this relationship is borne out by the US data: As incomes initially increase, the share of donations declines and begins to increase slightly, albeit fluctuating, for higher incomes. This, however, is typically not the case for the two European countries. Here the share of contributions is relatively stable for the three lowest income groups (ranging between 1.16% and 1.52% for

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TABLE 3
THE DEMOGRAPHY OF PUBLIC GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING

		Giving			Volunteering		
		US	Germany	France	US	Germany	France
SEX	Male	70%	40%	39%	53%	16%	21%
	Female	74	50	46	47	11	18
RELIGION	Protestant	74	44	56	51	12	6
	Catholic	76	49	48	48	12	21
	Other/ Nonc	64	39	34	42	19	17
CHURCH ATTENDANCE	Frequent	84	58	62	62	18	27
	Less frequent	63	43	47	37	10	20
	Rarely/Never	57	29	40	31	14	17
OCCUPATION	Professional	86	66	49	70	18	28
	Self-employed	85	47	48	59	19	27
	White collar	77	42	47	58	15	23
	Blue collar	66	39	21	45	15	15
EDUCATION	Not employed	68	50	50	38	10	15
	Primary	48	47	39	20	9	11
	Secondary	73	46	44	46	16	21
	Advanced	84	41	53	67	21	30

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization (US) for the Independent Sector, latest that of 1991; Zentrum fuer Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen & Gesellschaft fuer Marketing- Kommunikations- und Sozialforschung mbH (Germany), 1992; and I.L.S. Survey for Laboratoire D'Économie Sociale and the Fondation de France (France), 1991.

Germany and 0.43% and 0.63% for France), but drops off for middle incomes, and remains at low levels for higher income groups. Thus, the well-to-do in Europe tend to give relatively less than lower-income groups.

Overall, we found substantial differences between the United States and the two European countries in giving and volunteering. Levels were higher in the United States—absolutely and relatively. The German church tax matter aside, the religious dimension of giving and volunteering is clearly far greater in the US than in the two European democracies.

Endnotes:

¹ Lester M. Salamon and Helmut K. Anheier, "Toward an Understanding of the International Nonprofit Sector: The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1992, pp. 311-324.

² Lester M. Salamon and Helmut K. Anheier, "In Search of the Non-profit Sector II: The Problem of Classification," *Voluntas*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1993, pp. 267-309.

³ Because of the religious and denominational differences among the three countries, it is possible to make reliable comparisons for major religious groups only.

⁴ Gerald Auten and Gabriel Rudney, "The

Variability of Individual Charitable Giving in the US," *Voluntas*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1990, pp. 80-97.

Helmut K. Anheier is assistant director and Lester M. Salamon director of the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at the Institute for Policy Studies, The John Hopkins University, Edith Archambault is professor of economics at the Sorbonne, Paris, France