

# Religiosity and Charity/Volunteering

## Summary

Religiosity is positively related to charitable giving and volunteerism. Individuals with higher levels of religiosity are more likely to engage in both organized volunteering and informal acts of compassion and, on average, give charitable donations more frequently and at higher levels.

- Church Attendance and Volunteerism.** Frequent church attendance is associated with the likelihood of volunteering. On average, individuals who reported a high frequency of church attendance, as measured on a six-point scale ranging from “never” to “more than once a week,” were more likely to engage in volunteer activities than those who reported a low frequency of church attendance, regardless of race.<sup>1</sup>
- Religious Commitment and Charitable Giving.** The strength of religious commitment is related to the tendency to donate to charities. Individuals who reported a high level of religious commitment were, on average, more likely to report high levels of overall charitable giving than those who reported low levels of religious commitment.<sup>2</sup>
- Church Attendance and Informal Acts of Compassion.** Greater church attendance is associated with a greater likelihood of performing informal acts of compassion. All other things being equal, compared to their more secular peers, religious respondents (those who attended religious service once a week or more) were more likely to help out with the homeless, give blood, and exhibit civility and honesty.<sup>3</sup>
- Church Attendance and Charitable Donations.** The level of religious service attendance is related to charitable giving. On average, individuals who reported attending religious services once a week or more were 25 percent more likely to give to charitable causes than those who reported attending religious services less than a few times a year.<sup>4</sup>
- National Levels of Church Attendance and Volunteerism.** Country-level religious devotion, measured by church attendance, is related to country-level rates of volunteer activity. Citizens of the most secular country were, on average, four times less likely to engage in volunteerism than citizens of the most religious country.<sup>5</sup>
- Salience of Religious Belief and Volunteerism.** On average, individuals who place a greater importance on religious beliefs are more likely to volunteer. Compared with peers who reported that they did not think that religious beliefs mattered as long as one was a good person, individuals who said that religious beliefs were important were 19 percentage points more likely to volunteer (51 percent vs. 32 percent).<sup>6</sup>
- Involvement in Church Activities and Volunteerism.** Compared with peers who do not participate in church activities, individuals who are involved in church activities tend to be more likely to volunteer in non-church-related volunteer outreach. Among a sample of 711

Asian-Americans, those who reported engaging in church activities (beyond religious service attendance) were, on average, 2.85 times more likely to engage in secular volunteering.<sup>7</sup>

- **Private Prayer and Acts of Service.** Those who engage in private prayer are more likely to be involved in service activities. Individuals who prayed were more likely to report being members of voluntary associations aimed at helping the elderly, poor and disabled when compared to those who did not engage in private prayer. Prayer increased the likelihood of volunteering by 20 percent.<sup>8</sup>
- **Importance of Religion and Seniors' Volunteerism.** Senior citizens who place a greater importance on religion tend to be more likely to volunteer. Among a sample of individuals age 70 and older, those who said that religion is important to them were 60 percent more likely to report volunteering than similar respondents who did not say that religion was important to them.<sup>9</sup>
- **Church Membership and Charitable Giving.** Membership in a religious congregation is related to charitable giving. On average, individuals who are members of a religious

congregation tend to give a higher percentage of their household income to charitable causes than their peers who are not members of a church.<sup>10</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 Marc A. Musick, John Wilson, and William B. Bynum, Jr., "Race and Formal Volunteering: The Differential Effects of Class and Religion," *Social Forces* 78, No. 4 (2000): 1539-1570.
- 2 Wolfgang Bielefeld, *Gifts of Money and Time: the Role of Charity in America's Communities*, ed. Arthur C. Brooks (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
- 3 Arthur C. Brooks, "Compassion, Religion, and Politics," *Public Interest* 157, (Fall 2004): 57-66.
- 4 Arthur C. Brooks, "Faith, Secularism, and Charity," *Faith & Economics* 43, (2004): 1-8.
- 5 Stijn Ruiter and Nan Dirk De Graaf, "National Contest, Religiosity, and Volunteering: Results from 53 Countries," *American Sociological Review* 71, No. 2 (2006): 191-210.
- 6 Arthur C. Brooks, *Who Really Cares: America's Charity Divide* (New York: Basic Books, 2006): 31-52.
- 7 Elaine H. Ecklund and Jerry Park, "Asian-American Community Participation and Religion: Civic Model Minorities," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, No. 1 (2005): 1-23.
- 8 Matthew T. Loveland, David Sikkink, Daniel J. Myers, and Benjamin Radcliff, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, No. 1 (2005): 1-14.
- 9 Lona H. Choi, "Factors Affecting Volunteerism Among Older Adults," *Journal of Applied Gerontology* 22, No. 2 (2003): 179-196.
- 10 Virginia A. Hodgkinson, *Faith and Philanthropy in America*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990).

