

Charitable donation discrepancies: Why are some countries more generous than others?

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When it comes to charitable giving, some countries open their collective wallets more than others. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, people who live in countries that promote equality in power and wealth are more likely to donate money than those who live in societies that expect and accept inequality.

"Our research examines whether [cultural values](#) can explain the different levels of charitable giving between different [countries](#)," write authors Karen Page Winterich (Pennsylvania State University) and Yinlong Zhang (University of Texas, San Antonio).

Across several studies, the authors looked at the extent to which a country's overall power distance—the extent to which a society expects and accepts inequality in power or wealth—impacts prosocial behaviors like donating money, volunteering time, or helping a stranger.

Their findings indicated that people in countries with higher levels of inequality feel less responsibility for helping others. Examining the issue even further, the authors asked study participants to donate to a cause for which the need was uncontrollable (providing food after a natural disaster) versus controllable (offering nutrition and health education for obese and sedentary individuals).

When the need was uncontrollable, power distance did not have a negative effect on charitable behavior. Also, the authors noted that when individuals are focused on communal relationships, they saw a genuine

concern for others and a greater sense of responsibility to offer help.

As more and more non-profits rely on donations from individuals in developing countries, these organizations may benefit from emphasizing individual equality in donation appeals.

"It's not always the case that individuals in societies with inequality are less charitable. Rather, there are some conditions in which people feel less responsibility to offer aid due to the acceptance of [inequality](#) and are therefore less likely to engage in charitable behavior." the authors conclude.

More information: Karen Page Winterich and Yinlong Zhang. "Accepting Inequality Deters Responsibility: How Power Distance Decreases Charitable Behavior." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2014.

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