

Understanding Effective Givers

Nick Fitz, Ari Kagan, Max Kroner-Dale
Center for Advanced Hindsight, Duke University
ari.kagan@duke.edu, nick.fitz@duke.edu

Background & Research Questions. Research has shown that some charities are hundreds of times more effective than others. Yet most people do not incorporate effectiveness into their donation decisions. And while much debate has focused on how best to convince people to do so, little work has been done to identify those who may already be open to effective giving. Many potential supporters may not have been exposed to evidence-based giving. Instead of persuading, it is far more efficient to first mobilize the (potentially massive) base. Indeed, some organizations are starting to emphasize this approach - a recent research agenda from The Life You Can Save explicitly aims to target “demographics that are likely to be receptive to effective giving concepts relative to the general population.” However, very little is actually known about receptive demographics. In a 2017 survey of the existing ‘effective altruism’ community, researchers found that most members were [white \(89%\)](#), [atheist \(81%\)](#), [age 20-35 \(81%\)](#) and [male \(70%\)](#). But is this representative of those receptive to evidence-based giving? To find out, we conducted a study to identify attitudes, behaviors, psychological traits, and demographic factors that predict support for effective giving.

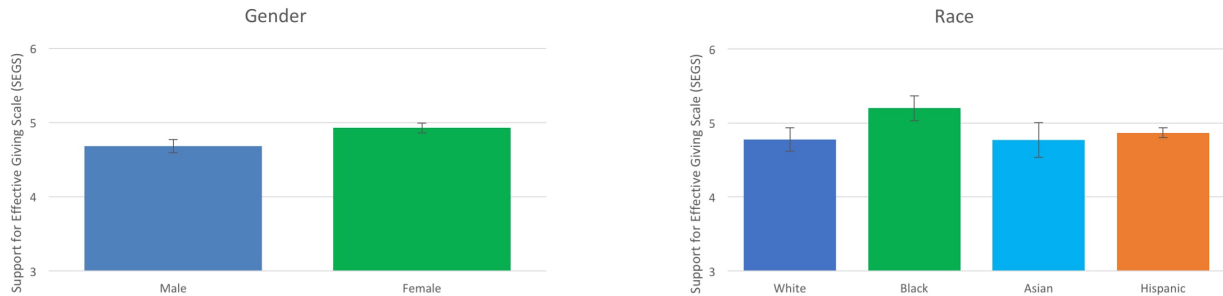
Sample, Design, & Measures. We recruited a national online sample of 530 Americans. Participants read and reflected on an introduction to evidence-based giving, and then completed our main outcomes of effective giving. Participants then completed a series of measures of their beliefs, behaviors, values, traits, sociodemographics, etc. The instrument, measures, and data are available upon request.

Primary Measures. To measure effective giving, we assessed several attitudes and behaviors; this summary presents results from a novel 7-item scale, the *Support for Effective Giving scale (SEGS)* [$\alpha = .92$], and an effective giving behavior allocation. The items in SEGS assess general interest, desire to learn more, support for the movement, and willingness to share information with others, identify as an effective altruist, meet others who support the movement, and donate money based on effective giving principles. To approximate giving behavior, we presented participants with short descriptions of three causes -- Deworm the World Initiative, Make a Wish Foundation, and a local high school choir -- and had them allocate \$100 between these groups and/or keeping it themselves.

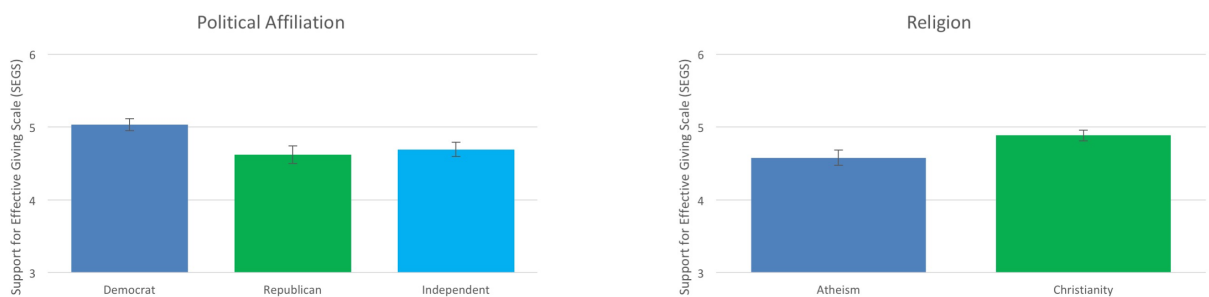
Secondary Measures. To measure beliefs, behaviors, and traits of people who endorse effective giving, we employed measures of: perceived social norms, charitable donation beliefs and behaviors, self-perceptions, empathy quotient ([EQ](#)), empathic concern & personal distress ([IRI](#)), the five moral foundations ([MFQ-20](#)), the five-factor personality model ([TIPI](#)), goal & strategy maximization ([MS-S](#)), updated cognitive reflection tests ([CRT](#)), sociodemographics (e.g., age, gender & racial identity, income), politics & religion, familiarity with ‘the effective altruism’ movement, and state residence.

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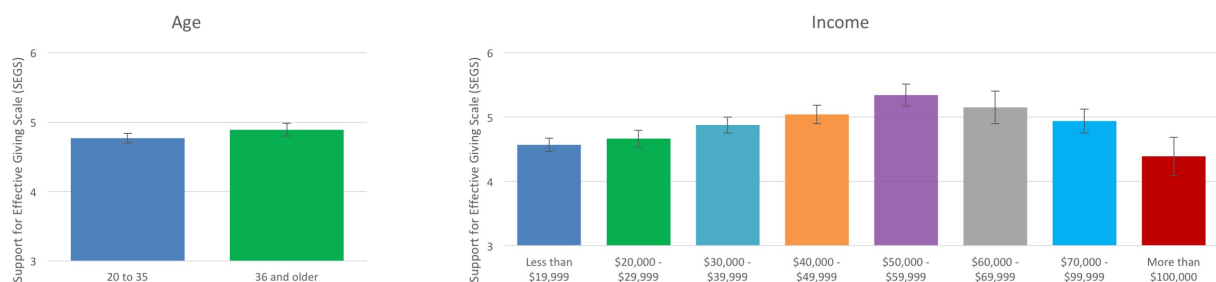
Results. Women demonstrate significantly more support for effective giving than men ($p < .05$, $b = .24$), an effect which remains even when controlling for higher past donation behavior. The mediation analyses revealed that this is due to higher empathy, goal maximization, and care for future generations. Those who identified as black were significantly more likely to support effective giving; moreover, those who identified as white scored no higher on SEGS than those identifying as Asian, Hispanic, or others.



As expected, democrats endorse effective giving more than republicans and independents. Somewhat surprisingly, Christians scored substantially higher on the SEGS than atheists.

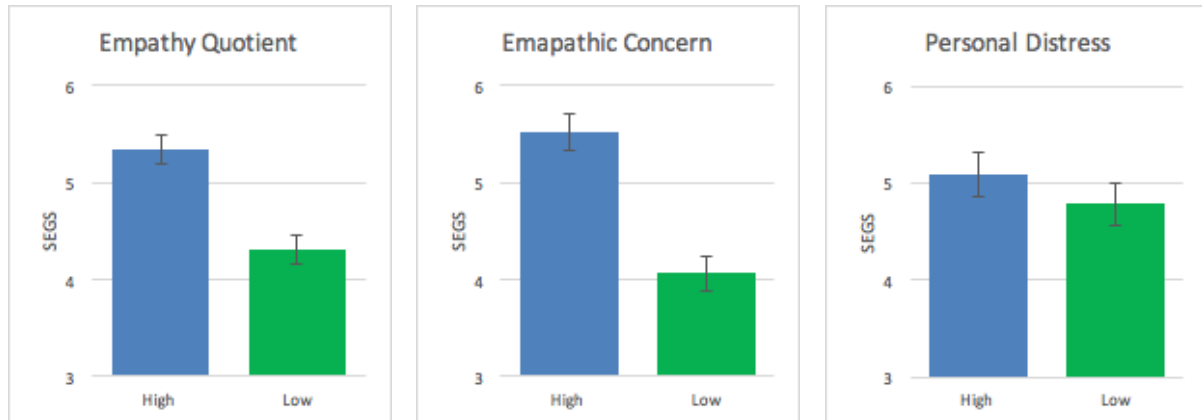


Finally, older Americans support effective giving as much as younger Americans, and income exhibits an inverted-U shape: those in the middle of the income distribution are most likely to endorse effective giving.

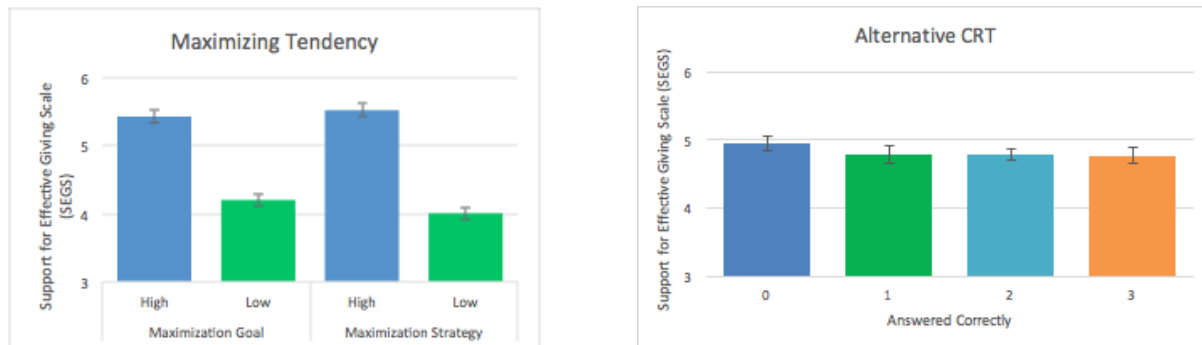


Though the composition of the current effective giving community does not yet reflect this (e.g., 89% white, 70% male), these data show that a diverse population is open to effective giving.

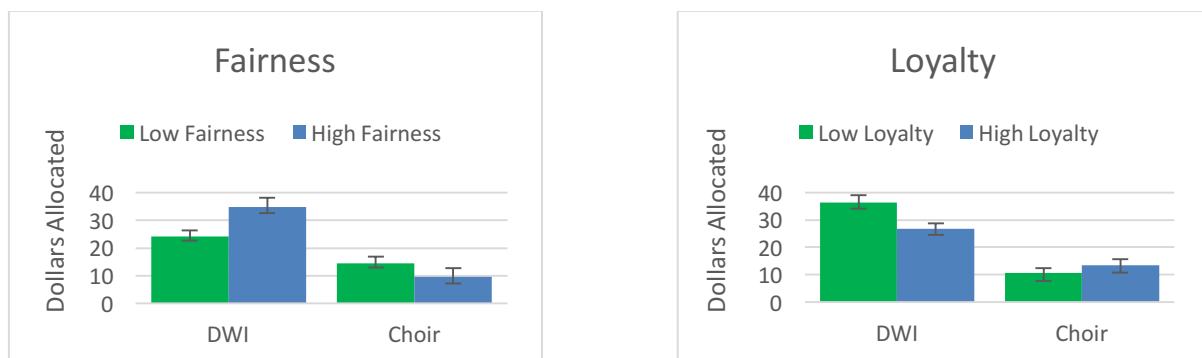
Participants' capacity for general empathy (EQ) was among the strongest predictors of support for effective giving. However, when broken down further, we see that this effect is driven by empathic concern (sympathy and concern for unfortunate others) rather than by personal distress (personal anxiety and unease in those situations).



As expected, both components of the maximizing tendency (goal & strategy) were strong predictors of support for effective giving. Quite unexpectedly, passing cognitive reflection tests, often a proxy for 'rational, system 2' thinking, has no effect on SEGs.



Participants' moral foundations - the care-harm ($b=.51$) and fairness-equality ($b=.44$) foundations in particular - were one of the strongest and most reliable predictors of effective giving. We found a revealing interaction: loyalty predicted giving to the local choir, while fairness predicted giving to DWI.



So far, the best overall model predicts 41% of the variance in support for effective giving.