

You Look “Poor.”

If I Was Poor, I Wouldn’t Donate So Much...

Charitable Giving in the United States

Discussions about charitable giving often overlook an important point: **how generosity is measured**. Researchers typically measure giving in two ways:

1. **Total dollars donated**
2. **Percentage of income donated**

These two measurements can produce **different conclusions** about which groups give the most.

1. Total Amount Donated (Overall Dollars)

In the United States, **White Americans donate the largest total amount of money overall**.

- White individuals account for **about 72% of total charitable giving in the United States**.

When measuring **raw dollar amounts**, the ranking generally looks like this:

1. White Americans – largest total donations
 2. Black Americans
 3. Hispanic Americans
 4. Asian Americans
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2. Percentage of Income Donated

When researchers measure **how much people donate relative to their income**, the picture changes.

Studies consistently show:

- **Black Americans donate the highest share of their income to charity.**
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Simple Summary

Measure	Group That Donates Most
Total money donated	White Americans

Measure	Group That Donates Most
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Share of income donated	Black Americans
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Another important factor researchers emphasize is **religion**. Religious participation—especially **church attendance**—significantly increases charitable giving across all demographic groups.

Where Donations Go

Giving Patterns Among Black Americans

A significant portion of donations from Black Americans goes to **institutions that serve Black communities**, though not exclusively.

1. Churches (Largest Share)

The largest destination for donations from Black Americans is **churches**, particularly historically Black churches.

Research indicates:

- **About 9 out of every 10 donated dollars from Black households goes to churches or religious institutions.**

These churches often function as **community service centers**, providing:

- Food assistance
- Scholarships
- Housing support
- Community aid programs

Because many Black Americans attend **majority-Black congregations**, a substantial portion of this giving indirectly supports **Black community programs**.

2. Black Community Organizations

Another portion of donations goes to organizations specifically serving **Black communities**.

Researchers sometimes describe this pattern as “**kinship giving**,” meaning donations directed toward causes connected to one’s community.

Examples include:

- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

- Civil rights organizations
 - Community development groups
 - Scholarship funds for Black students
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3. General Charities

Black Americans also donate to **general charities**, similar to other Americans.

Common areas include:

- Human services organizations
- Education charities
- International aid
- Disaster relief

Surveys of affluent Black donors show that **education, religion, and human services** are the most common recipients.

Giving Patterns Among White Americans

White Americans generally donate to a wide range of charities, most of which are not defined by race.

Research shows their giving tends to support **broad civic and institutional causes.**

1. Religious Organizations

Religious institutions receive the **largest share of donations from White Americans**, as they do across most groups.

Typical recipients include:

- Churches
- Faith-based charities
- Mission organizations
- Religious humanitarian aid

Across the United States overall, **religion receives the largest portion of charitable donations each year.**

2. Education

Education is another major area supported by White donors.

Examples include:

- Universities and colleges
- Scholarship funds
- Private schools
- Libraries and research institutions

Many large university gifts come from **wealthy alumni donors**.

3. Health and Medical Research

A significant portion of donations from White Americans supports **health-related causes**, such as:

- Hospitals
 - Medical research foundations
 - Disease-specific charities (for example, cancer or Alzheimer's research)
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4. Arts, Culture, and Public Institutions

White donors have historically contributed heavily to:

- Museums
- Symphony orchestras
- Historical societies
- Cultural institutions
- Public broadcasting

This category receives **substantially higher support from White donors** than from other demographic groups, largely because these institutions historically developed within majority-White philanthropic networks.

5. General Humanitarian and Social Services

Many donations also support charities serving the **general population**, including:

- Food banks

- Disaster relief organizations
 - International aid groups
 - Homeless shelters
 - Community service charities
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Summary of White Giving

Category	Examples
Religion	Churches, missions
Education	Universities, scholarships
Health	Hospitals, medical research
Arts & Culture	Museums, orchestras
Social Services	Food banks, disaster relief

Most of these institutions **serve broad populations rather than a specific racial group.**

Structural Differences in Philanthropy

Researchers note an important structural factor.

Large philanthropic foundations and major donors in the United States have historically been **wealthier households**. Because of this, a large share of major philanthropic gifts flows into **large national institutions**, including:

- Universities
- Hospitals
- Museums
- Research foundations

These giving patterns reflect **historical wealth distribution and institutional development**, rather than simply individual generosity.