



National Context, Religiosity, and Volunteering: Results from 53 Countries

Ruiter, S. and De Graaf, N. (2006). National Context, Religiosity, and Volunteering: Results from 53 Countries. *American Sociological Review*, 71(2), pp.191-210.

Abstract

The authors of this paper aim to investigate how national religious context affect volunteering and if a religious environment affects the relation between religiosity and volunteering. They investigate the impact on religiosity of individuals, national religious context and their interplay on volunteering, whilst controlling for extraneous variables

The paper uses data sets from the European values survey/world values survey from 3 waves: 1981-1984, 1990-1993, 1999-2001 from 53 countries, tested using a hierarchical logistic regression model

Reiter and Graaf combine the knowledge of previous literature and studies to generate testable hypothesis which forms the empirical aspect of this paper. 7 hypotheses (hypothesis 4 is split into two sections 4a and 4b) were extracted from previous literature which will be summarised below.

Hypothesis 1: Church Members Volunteer More Than Non-Members:

Previous literature suggests church members tend to be more involved in volunteering and voluntary organisations often have religious backgrounds.

Also, suggested that over 1/3 of volunteers are active in religion – said to be because being part of such networks as the Church enhances the chance to volunteer because avid church members internalise the social norm of altruism more than non-members, and that church members are more likely to volunteer as the church network provides stronger recruitment and motivation functions.

When this hypothesis was tested the following findings were shown:

- All religious affiliates appear more likely to volunteer than nonreligious people
- Non-religious people are considerably less likely to volunteer
- Attending religious ceremonies influences chance of volunteering: people who attend church twice a week are 5 times more likely to volunteer than people who never visit church

Hypothesis supported and accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Differences in Volunteering Between Church Members and Non-Members Decline Strongly After Taking Church Attendance into Account

Previous literature suggests that regular churchgoers are more strongly connected to religious groups, making them more likely to be asked to volunteer. This suggests religious inclinations make little difference unless one becomes involved in the religious community

When this hypothesis was tested, the following findings were shown:

- Protestants have a higher expected probability to volunteer than Catholics



Hypothesis supported and accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Protestants Volunteer More Than Catholics

Previous literature suggested that protestants seem to volunteer more so than Catholics

It also suggests that the protestant Church is less hierarchical than the Catholic Church, this being the reason for the suggested difference in volunteer rates

When this hypothesis was tested, the following findings were shown;

- As previously stated, it was found that protestants have a higher expected probability to volunteer than Catholics
- Even after controlling for Church attendance, Protestants are still more likely to volunteer than Catholics

Hypothesis supported and accepted.

Hypothesis 4a: People who do religious volunteer work are more likely to volunteer for secular organisations as well

Previous research suggested that a 'spill over' effect was had.

The spill over effect meant that those involved in religious volunteering were also more likely to get acquainted with those volunteering for secular organisations Therefore, chances to volunteer for secular organisations should be high as well

When this hypothesis was tested, the following findings were shown:

- People who are involved in religious volunteering are almost 3.6 times more likely to do non-religious volunteer work as well

Hypothesis supported and accepted.

Hypothesis 4b: Conservative Protestants Lower the Overall Spill Over Effect for Protestants Compared to the Spill Over Effect for Other Denominations

Previous research has suggested that some protestant denominations strongly support volunteering for the Church, but actually discourage secular volunteering. For this reason, it is suggested that for conservative denominations of the Protestant religion, it is far less likely that those who volunteer for the Church will also volunteer for secular organisations. In turn, reducing the spill over effect for Protestants.

When tested, the following findings were shown:

- When Catholics volunteer for religious organisations, they are, compared to Protestants, more likely to do nonreligious volunteer work as well
- Catholics who are active in religious volunteering are over 4 times more likely to volunteer for non-religious organisations than Catholics who are not volunteering for religious organisations
- Contrary to this, the spill over effect was found to be significantly smaller for Protestants



- It was in fact concluded that the spill over effect is stronger for Catholics than for other denominations

Hypothesis supported and accepted.

The previously mentioned hypotheses all investigate individual religiosity and volunteering. The following hypotheses investigated national religious context and volunteering.

Hypothesis 5: The Chance to Volunteer Increases with the Devoutness of the Society

Previous research suggests that those raised by secular parents in devout countries are actually more religious than those who grew up with similar upbringings but in secular countries.

This is said to be caused by a greater exposure to religious culture in devout societies.

As previous research also suggested religious individuals are more likely to volunteer, this increased exposure to religion in devout societies is therefore likely to also increase exposure to volunteering and the chance to volunteer in devout societies.

When tested, the following findings were shown:

- The study found that, not only do frequent churchgoers volunteer more, but there is also a positive effect of devoutness of society
- It was found that national religious context had an additional positive effect, with people living in the most devout countries being almost 4 times more likely to volunteer than people living in the most secular countries.
- Consequently, it was found that people who never visit church but live in a devout country have a higher probability to volunteer than similar people living in secular countries.

Hypothesis supported and accepted.

Hypothesis 6: Individual Church Attendance Influences Volunteering Less in More Devout Societies

Previous research suggests religious parents in secular societies have to invest more to instil religious beliefs in children as they aren't as exposed to religion around them as they would be living in a devout society. This would make the effect of parental religiosity smaller in devout countries, making churchgoers in secular countries have the problem of insufficient volunteer involvement and building up and sustaining vibrant voluntary organisations on their shoulders.

If this idea is used to look more holistically at the effect of religious context and individual religiosity, it is suggested the chance to volunteer is strongly influenced by church attendance in secular countries

This being because in more religious countries, as religious exposure is greater, there is less requirement to get so involved. It may be said there is less individual responsibility to try and upkeep religion and religious actions in more devout countries when there are more people doing such.



Furthermore, if levels of volunteers are already high, added value of additional volunteers are lower.

When tested, the following findings were shown:

- The effect of church attendance was found to be smaller in more devout countries
- This implies that the differences between secular and devout people are substantially smaller in religious countries compared to secular countries.
- A graph of interaction showed that church attendance baely affects general volunteering in the most devout country, whereas the impact is strongly positive in the most secular country.
- This interaction effect suggests religious people who live in secularising countries might become more active in volunteering.

Hypothesis supported and accepted.

Overall Conclusions

There are significant effects of individual religiosity on volunteering – more religious individuals are more likely to volunteer, both in religious organisations and also with secular organisations with the spill over effect (although this effect is seen more with Catholics)

There is also a significant effect of national religious context – the more devout a country, the higher the rates of volunteering, with both religious and secular individuals

Individual and contextual effects strongly effect – this means the two interact to create a finding that strong individual religiosity in more secular countries is likely to cause more volunteering behaviours.

In this way, increased volunteering of religious people could compensate for the secularisation effect

Family religiosity was also found to be important – being more important for the religiosity of children in secular nations than in devout nations as parents have to invest more when there is less general exposure around the children in their day to day lives to religion. This reflects the previously stated interaction, as religious people have to invest more in volunteering when a nation secularises.