

Partisan Differences in Nonpartisan Activity: The Case of Charitable Giving

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Abstract How do political identities shape seemingly non-political behaviors, such as consumption activity? This paper explores the extent to which political divisions impact apolitical behaviors, focusing on the case of voluntary donations to charitable organizations. Drawing on recent work showing partisans’ differing use of “conspicuous consumption,” we develop and test expectations as to how charitable activity may differ for Democrats and Republicans. Using three national surveys, including an original two-wave panel study, we find sizable differences in overall giving between partisans, with Republicans giving more to charity on average. We show that partisan differences in religiosity, and not differences in beliefs about government spending or desires to signal economic status, explain partisan gaps in giving. Our findings contribute to our understanding about the broader consequences of political fragmentation in the United States and provide further evidence for the social, as opposed to ideological, roots of political identity.

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Introduction

According to many observers, Americans are increasingly divided along partisan and ideological lines. Not only does a person's political outlook shape views of political events, but it also corresponds to decisions about where to live (Bishop and Cushing 2008), what to buy (Nunberg 2006), what television programs to watch (Vavreck 2011), and even what to name children (Oliver et al. 2016). Political cleavages have morphed into broader social cleavages, creating new differences in what were once seen as apolitical preferences and behaviors. How far do these differences actually extend, and with what substantive consequences?

While many have worried about the creeping influence of partisanship on consumption behaviors, systematic evidence on such divisions is actually rare (for a recent exception, see Oliver et al. 2016). A major obstacle to studying such divisions is the absence of individual-level survey data where political attitudes and non-partisan activities are simultaneously measured. Without this information, it is impossible to assess how large these gaps in apolitical activity really are, whether such gaps are driven by partisanship versus other factors, and what the mechanisms are by which these differences arise.

In this paper, we address these challenges by examining partisan differences in a substantively important, nominally nonpartisan activity: contributions to charitable organizations. Unlike existing studies of partisan gaps in nonpartisan behavior, we are able to use rich individual-level data, including an original panel study that exploits the 2012 election as a natural experiment, to test for differences in philanthropic behavior between Republicans and Democrats. These data allow us to adjust for a host of other observable characteristics that also explain—and potentially moderate—giving gaps between partisans, including religious identity, policy preferences, and the desire to signal economic status.

Building on recent work on partisans' differing use of “conspicuous consumption,” as well as prior work on the relationship between giving and ideology, we hypothesize that conservatives and Republicans will give more to charity than liberals and Democrats. We find strong support for this hypothesis: depending on the sample and measure of political identities used, we estimate that conservatives and Republicans give up to 160 dollars more to all charities per year, relative to liberals and Democrats. With this result, our paper presents novel empirical evidence for what many observers have long suspected: the influence of political identities on what were previously seen as apolitical activities. While Oliver et al. (2016) show evidence for such behavior in their examination of birth names at the neighborhood level, our paper corroborates their results using a more direct, individual-level measure of behavior. Our result is also consistent with Brooks (2006), who finds conservatism and charitable giving in particular are linked.

Having established these baseline differences in giving, we then turn to an exploration of the mechanisms by which they emerge. We consider and test three possibilities: religious identity, policy views, and economic status. Using a variety

of data and tests—including interactive specifications, alternative dependent variables, and a panel analysis—we find support for the religious identity explanation, and little support for the policy or economic status explanations. Relative to existing work, our analyses therefore lead us to different conclusions about the mechanisms by which giving differences occur. For instance, Oliver et al. (2016) find that religiosity does not explain partisan differences in consumption behaviors, while we find that it does; while they find a desire to signal economic status does explain these differences, we find it does not. Additionally, while Brooks (2006) concludes that views about the proper role of government account for differences in giving, we find they do not.

Indeed, contrary to Brooks (2006) but consistent with Oliver et al. (2016), our results support the view of partisan differences in “apolitical” activity as being rooted in apolitical differences between partisans—in our case, religious identity—and not disagreements over politics and public policy. Viewed this way, our study contributes to a growing literature on the social, as opposed to ideological, bases of partisan behavior (Achen and Bartels 2016; Iyengar et al. 2012; Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Mason 2015). While partisan divisions may be strong, and may also lead to real differences in apolitical activities, we find the roots of these differences in behavior are, in fact, also “apolitical” in the sense that they are not driven by disagreements over policy.

In addition to contributing to our understanding of partisanship, we examine an outcome with significant consequences for the economy and for social welfare. Charitable donations by individuals exceeded \$240 billion in 2013 alone, and most of the 1.5 million tax-exempt organizations depend on the generosity of private individuals. In substantive terms, giving by private individuals makes up 75% of total contributions and over 75% of yearly nonprofit revenues (Giving USA 2014).¹ Moreover, a common justification for having tax-exempt charities is to provide what many claim to be a more efficient, community-based alternative to government service provision. Charitable donations thus not only have a large substantive impact on the economy, but they are also a potential outlet for citizens to express their views on government service provision. While our results show that partisan divisions do indeed influence donations and thus the health of the nonprofit sector, we find little evidence that voters take advantage of charitable giving to express their broad views on service provision.

Charitable Giving as Social Signaling

Scholars have long recognized that consumption behavior is driven by more than the laws of supply and demand. At least as early as Veblen (1899), sociologists and other social scientists have remarked on the importance of “conspicuous consumption,” the idea that expressive motives often drive purchasing decisions.

¹ Giving USA has been producing annual reports on Americans’ giving patterns for over 60 years and is regularly referred to by respected news outlets such as the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* (Sandoval 2016). Since 2000, Giving USA’s reports are based on research conducted by the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University.

For instance, consumers will pay considerably more for luxury goods not merely because of their superior quality, but also to signal to others that they are wealthy. To take a more political example, a liberal consumer may pay more for products with a “fair trade” label to signal to others that they care about economic justice.

Similarly, the literature on philanthropic behavior has also noted an important social component to giving. Donors use gifts to boost their reputation (Tullock 1966), avoid social scorn (Becker 1974), and signal wealth in a socially acceptable way (Glazer and Konrad 1996). Participants in public goods experiments willingly incur costs in order to have their contributions recognized (Alpizar et al. 2007; Barclay 2004; Bateson et al. 2006; Bereczkei et al. 2007; Clark 2002), alumni donations to law schools are higher when donor names are publicized (Harbaugh 1998), and informing potential donors of an impending solicitation increases non-response (DellaVigna et al. 2012). Thus donors are well aware that by making contributions, they are also communicating something about themselves to others.

Why might political attitudes impact the seemingly apolitical social signals of consumption in general, and charitable giving in particular? As Oliver et al. (2016) note, for most consumption behaviors, there is little reason why contemporary ideological divisions, in and of themselves, should lead to differences in consumption. Unlike other ideological belief systems, such as communism or religious fundamentalism, neither liberalism or conservatism dictate specific consumption behaviors to their adherents. Instead, while ideologies do not proscribe specific consumer behaviors, the social and psychological components commonly associated with those ideologies may. For instance, liberals might adopt more feminine-sounding names for their children because they are psychologically drawn to “nurturing-feminine metaphors” (Oliver et al. 2016, pp. 60–61).

Unlike consumption in general or baby names in particular, charitable giving is sometimes emphasized in conservative ideology, while also being tied to non-ideological attributes that happen to differ across partisans. While we consider both the ideological and non-ideological factors separately, our first hypothesis is that Republicans and self-identified conservatives will donate more to charity, adjusting for income and other differences, than Democrats and self-identified liberals. We argue that these baseline differences in giving could arise for three reasons, all of them tied to the general principle of conspicuous consumption, but not all of them tied to political ideology in particular.

First, differences in charitable giving may arise due to differences in religious identity. A significant portion of all charitable donations goes to religious organizations, including individual houses of worship.² Additionally, Republicans are far more likely to attend church and be involved in organized religious groups compared to Democrats (Green 2010; Layman 2001). While both Democrats and Republicans may both have reputational aims when choosing to donate, those with strong ties to a religious community may feel acutely aware of these pressures (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). In particular, public demonstrations of giving—including

² In 2014, the Giving USA foundation estimated total donations at \$358 billion, with \$115 billion (32%) going to religious charities (Velasco 2015).

tithing requirements, collection plates, and congregational fundraisers—create an environment in which religious community members may feel obligated to donate.

Second, Republicans may give more in order to signal specific ideological beliefs. Public opinion studies show conservatives support spending on the poor in the abstract, but do not support government programs intended to help the poor in practice (Smith 1987; Campbell and Sances 2014). One interpretation of this result is that conservatives believe private service provision is more effective than government provision. Supporting this view, Huber and Paris (2013) show that respondents are twice as likely to associate soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and food banks with “assistance to the poor” than they are to associate government programs with such assistance, while others find conservatives more supportive of social provision via tax expenditures as opposed to direct spending (Faricy and Ellis 2013; Haselswerdt and Bartels 2015). Similarly, (Brooks 2006, 55) argues that preferences for government redistribution and charity are substitutes: those favoring government redistribution will donate less than those whose beliefs in the free market lead them to oppose such redistribution. According to Brooks, liberals use their political preferences for compulsory redistribution as a substitute for actual giving.³ Thus in this view, Republicans giving more may signal their views about compulsory redistribution.

Third, differences in giving may stem from donors’ desire to communicate economic status, akin to the purchase of any other high-priced good. Studies have found that perceptions of personal financial situations are positively correlated with giving (Havens et al. 2007; Schlegelmilch et al. 1997; Wiepking and Breeze 2012). People who consider themselves “financially better off than most other people” report higher donations to relief appeals (Bennett and Kottasz 2000); those who worry about their financial situation donate less, regardless of their actual financial situation (Wiepking and Breeze 2012); and alumni giving is higher among those with more confidence in the economy (Okunade 1996).⁴ These results indicate that individuals who feel they have more to donate, donate more—just as consumers who feel they have more money, consume more. In this view, giving is just like any other economic activity, and more expensive consumption helps to signal higher economic status. Thus, if conservatives have a higher desire to signal economic capital—perhaps because they are more comfortable with economic inequality and thus less averse to advertising their wealth to society (Oliver et al. 2016)—then this greater desire to signal economic capital should explain partisan differences in giving.

³ As Brooks writes, “People who favor government income redistribution are significantly less likely to behave charitably than those who do not” (Brooks 2006, p. 55). This view is also sometimes reflected in elite rhetoric. For example, Paul Ryan, the 2012 Republican vice-presidential candidate and now Speaker of the House, stated a Mitt Romney administration would fight poverty by supporting private charities (Achenbach 2012). Similarly, *Wall Street Journal* reporter John D. McKinnon defended Romney’s low tax burden relative to his personal income, arguing that “Republicans favor a world in which people pay fewer taxes and give more to charity, believing that private spending is more effective than that of the federal government” (McKinnon 2012).

⁴ There is also a well-known relationship between giving and actual, as opposed to perceived, income (Bekkers 2015; Eckel and Grossman 2003, 2004; Karlan and List 2006; Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; James and Sharpe 2007; Wiepking 2007; Giving USA 2009; List 2011; Reich and Wimer 2012).

Data and Measures

While many surveys ask about political attitudes and charitable activity separately, few ask about both. We have assembled what we believe are all national surveys that have asked both about charitable giving amounts and political attitudes. This includes our own original panel survey conducted around the 2012 presidential election. In this section, we summarize our data sets and how we measure key variables; we include more details and question wordings in the Online Appendix.⁵

The first data set, the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey (SCCBS), asks respondents how much they donated to charities, as well as about their general ideology. The SCCBS has the benefit of a large sample size, being comprised of samples of between 500 and 1,500 respondents from 41 communities.⁶ While potentially useful for analyzing the relationship between ideology and giving (Brooks 2006), the survey does not ask about partisanship, and uses a non-standard question wording to measure ideology.⁷ The SCCBS also only records ranges of donation amounts—\$0, between \$0 and \$100, \$100 to \$500, \$500 to \$1000, \$1000 to \$5000, and more than \$5000—rather than the precise amount.⁸ Nonetheless, the SCCBS offers a valuable first look at the relationship between political beliefs and charitable activity.

Our second data source is the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS). This nationally representative survey of roughly 1000 respondents includes detailed questions about charitable giving, while also capturing partisanship and political ideology. While the GSS has been fielded every few years since the 1970s, only the 1998 sample included questions about charitable giving, which recorded the raw amount donated between \$0 and \$99,999. The GSS differentiates not only between religious and secular giving, but also whether donations were made to individuals' own congregations, or to other religious causes.

Third, we fielded an original two-wave panel study conducted around the 2012 presidential election. This survey used a diverse national sample that was recruited

⁵ While the American National Election Study has asked about giving in the past, it does not ask about amounts donated, but only whether any donations were made; the ANES also does not distinguish between types of recipient organizations. In an analysis of different methods for asking about donations, Wilhelm (2007) concludes that survey questions asking about dollar amounts, as well as types of organizations, yield more accurate responses.

⁶ The SCCBS also included a nationally representative sample of about 3000 respondents. Our results are insensitive to which sample we use, but we rely on the larger sample as it includes more donors.

⁷ The SCCBS ideology question reads: "Thinking politically and socially, how would you describe your own general outlook—as being very conservative, moderately conservative, middle-of-the-road, moderately liberal, or very liberal?" By explicitly asking respondents to consider their views on social issues when answering the question, the SCCBS may have measured ideology with error. Consistent with this claim, in the Online Appendix we show that self-identified conservatives in the SCCBS have lower incomes than self-identified liberals, which is the opposite of what we find in our other two surveys.

⁸ To ensure that the SCCBS donation measures are comparable with our other two data sources, we convert these intervals to raw amounts by taking the midpoint of the two endpoints for each range, converting the scale to \$50, \$300, \$750, \$3000, and \$5000.

through Survey Sampling International (SSI).⁹ The two waves of the study bracketed the 2012 presidential election, with the first wave conducted in the weeks leading up to the election, and the second wave occurring in the weeks after the election.¹⁰ Like the SCCBS and GSS, we asked respondents about giving in terms of raw dollar amounts. Unlike the SCCBS and GSS, we asked respondents to report how much they expect to give—rather than how much they gave in the past year—to both religious and non-religious charities in the upcoming year, as well as their partisanship and ideology. Importantly, these panel data allow us to not only replicate the cross-sectional findings from the SCCBS and GSS, but also to track changes in planned giving in response to a shock to economic perceptions.¹¹

Our key independent variable is political identity, which we measure using both political ideology and party identification. As discussed above, the SCCBS only includes an ideology measure, whereas the GSS and SSI capture both ideology and partisanship. As partisanship is a more robust measure of political views than ideology (Converse 1964) and a consistent predictor of real-world behavior, such as vote choice and economic perceptions (Bartels 2002; Green et al. 2004; Gerber and Huber 2009, 2010), we present results using partisanship when it is available (the GSS and SSI surveys), and ideology when it is not (SCCBS). In all specifications, we collapse the original seven-point (or five-point, in the case of the SCCBS) political identity into three categories representing liberals/Democrats, moderates/independents, and conservatives/Republicans.¹²

To isolate the effect of partisanship from other factors that are also predicted to affect giving, we adjust for a number of control variables. Among these controls is income, which is known to correlate with both political conservatism and charitable donation amounts.¹³ We also control for demographic variables that may influence both giving and political identity, including gender, marital status, race, state or region of residence,¹⁴ family size, age, and education.

⁹ SSI recruits participants through various online communities, social networks, and website ads. SSI makes efforts to recruit hard-to-reach groups, such as ethnic minorities and seniors. These potential participants are then screened and invited into the panel. When deploying a particular survey, SSI randomly selects panel participants for survey invitations. We did not employ quotas, but instead asked SSI to recruit a target population that matched the (18 and over) census population on education, gender, age, geography, and income. The resulting sample is not a probability sample but is a diverse national sample. Several studies using SSI samples have been published recently in political science (Berinsky et al. 2014; Kam 2012; Malhotra and Margalit 2010; Malhotra et al. 2013).

¹⁰ The first wave of the survey was conducted between October 17 and October 31, 2012. The second wave of the survey was conducted between November 13 and November 27, 2012. 75% of the post-election surveys were completed by November 19, 90% by November 21.

¹¹ One concern with our measures of giving is that they rely on self-reports, rather than directly observed measures (Dawes et al. 2011; Bolsen et al. 2014). While we lack a direct measure, we note we find similar results when we use state-level measures of giving based on the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a high-quality survey of American families' economic resources and activity (Kim and Stafford 2000; Beckett et al. 1988; Duncan and Hill 1985). We present estimates of the relationship between state partisanship and state charitable contributions in the Online Appendix.

¹² We code “leaners” as identifiers with one group or the other, such that only respondents at the midpoint category are coded as moderates/independents.

¹³ We specify the effect of income to be linear, but including indicators for each income category gives similar results.

¹⁴ We use state when it is available (SCCBS and SSI) and region when it is not (GSS).

To measure respondents' strength of religious identity, we use the frequency of church attendance. In the SCCBS, religious attendance is measured using a five-point scale, ranging from less than a few times per year to weekly; the GSS uses a nine-point scale, ranging from "never" to "several times a week"; and our SSI survey used a nine-point scale similar to the GSS. Question wordings are included in the Online Appendix. We standardize the attendance variable by coding the minimum attendance as zero and the maximum as one in all three surveys.

To measure ideological differences of giving that are rooted in policy views, we use the "operational conservatism" scale employed by Ellis and Stimson (2012). In the GSS, we follow Ellis and Stimson by using ten questions asking about support for increasing government spending on various issues: education, health, the environment, national defense, welfare, cities, crime, drug addiction, aid to racial minorities, and foreign aid. The GSS asks whether respondents believe we are spending too much, not enough, or about the right amount on each. With the exception of national defense, where we (following the original study) code a preference for more spending as conservative, a respondent is coded as operationally liberal if they prefer more spending, and conservative if they prefer less.¹⁵ We sum up the responses to each of these questions, giving us a scale ranging from -10 to $+10$.

Our SSI survey includes different questions about government spending. For this survey, we use three questions tapping views about government's role, originally asked in the ANES. The first question asks if respondents believe the government should guarantee jobs and a good standard of living, or if they would rather the government let people get ahead on their own. The second question asks if the government should provide more services and more spending, or fewer services and less spending. The third question asks if the government should reduce income differences between rich and poor, or not. We combine these three questions into an operational conservatism scale ranging from -3 to $+3$.¹⁶ As with religious attendance, we standardize operational conservatism by coding the minimum sample value as zero and the maximum as one.

To test whether signaling economic status explains partisans' levels of charitable giving, we rely on measures of perceived economic status in both the GSS and the SSI surveys. In the GSS, the question asks if respondent's financial situation has been getting better, worse, or stayed the same in the past year. In our SSI survey, we asked respondents if they expect the nation's economy to get much better, better, stay the same, get worse, or get much worse over the next year. As an additional measure, the SSI survey also asked respondents how much they intend to spend on vacations in the next year.

Our main estimation strategy is to regress donation amounts on political identities in our three samples. In all three data sets, we use the sum of the respondent's reported contributions to all nonprofits as the main dependent variable. In some specifications, we separate total donations into donations to different types

¹⁵ We recode such that $+1$ equals a preference for less spending, 0 equals a preference for current levels, and -1 equals a preference for more spending.

¹⁶ Each question is originally on a seven-point scale. We first code responses above the midpoint as $+1$, below the midpoint as -1 , and at the midpoint as 0 . We then sum responses to the three questions.

of organizations, such as religious versus non-religious charities, and we use a model with a lagged dependent variable in the two-wave SSI data to assess individual-level change over time. To account for skewness and the large number of zero observations, we add one to the total amount donated and then take the natural log. We use ordinary least squares regression with robust standard errors, but other estimators give similar results.¹⁷

Partisan Differences in Charitable Giving

Table 1 presents the results of four regressions of log total giving on (depending on the survey) ideology or partisanship, as well as demographic controls. The first column presents results from the SCCBS, which asked about ideology but not party; the second and third columns present results using ideology and party from the GSS; and the fourth column presents results using party from our SSI survey.

The first column in Table 1 presents the relationship between ideology and giving, adjusting for income and other demographics, in the SCCBS. The coefficient on Conservative is 0.49, and is precisely estimated with a standard error of 0.04. Because the outcome variable is logged, however, this coefficient by itself has no substantive meaning. We therefore convert the difference to a dollar amount in the footer to the table.¹⁸ Doing so reveals that conservatives give about \$160 more to charity than liberals, all else equal.

Moving to the GSS, we find a similar result for conservatism in terms of the magnitude and precision of the coefficient—the estimate is 0.53 with a standard error of 0.20—while the dollar amount effect is lower than the SCCBS, at about \$60. Substituting in party for ideology in column (3) shows we can replicate the effect when we switch to an alternative measure of political identity: here the coefficient on Republican is 0.82 with a standard error of 0.18, and the estimated dollar amount difference is \$104.

Column (4) shows the results from the SSI survey. Here we present the results only for party to conserve space, though the results are similar when we use ideology. The point estimate on Republican is 0.49, with a standard error of 0.17. In substantive

¹⁷ Results are robust to specifications where we trim the 99th percentile of the giving variables (to account for outliers) and when using Tobit regressions (to account for the large number of zero donations). More details on our control variables, including how Democrats and Republicans differ across these dimensions, are available in the Online Appendix.

¹⁸ We compute this quantity as follows: first, we use the coefficient estimates to compute predicted values of log giving among a full sample of liberals, with one predicted value for each respondent (i.e., we use the “observed-value” approach for estimating substantive effects, as advocated by Hanmer and Kalkan (2013)). We then take the average predicted value, exponentiate it, and subtract one (given that we added one when we took the log). Call this \hat{Y}_0 . We then repeat this procedure, predicting values of log giving for a full sample of conservatives, taking the average predicted value, exponentiating and subtracting one. Call this \hat{Y}_1 . We then take the difference between \hat{Y}_1 and \hat{Y}_0 . See Boas et al. (2014) for another application of this procedure.

Table 1 Differences in charitable giving between conservatives/Republicans and liberals/Democrats

	SCCBS	GSS		SSI
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Conservative	0.49*** (0.04)	0.53** (0.20)		
Moderate	0.04 (0.05)	-0.07 (0.20)		
Republican			0.82*** (0.18)	0.49** (0.17)
Independent			-0.33 (0.25)	-0.34 (0.22)
Income	0.44*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.02)
Male	-0.10** (0.03)	0.14 (0.16)	0.19 (0.16)	-0.24 (0.16)
Married	0.23*** (0.05)	0.63** (0.22)	0.62** (0.22)	-0.68* (0.28)
Family size	0.12*** (0.02)	0.13* (0.06)	0.13* (0.06)	0.53** (0.20)
Age	0.03*** (0.00)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
High school	1.21*** (0.09)	-0.08 (0.20)	-0.06 (0.20)	-0.52** (0.19)
College	1.83*** (0.10)	1.01*** (0.23)	0.98*** (0.23)	0.61** (0.21)
Graduate	2.01*** (0.10)	1.12*** (0.25)	1.13*** (0.25)	1.03*** (0.23)
White	0.28*** (0.08)	-0.08 (0.35)	-0.27 (0.35)	-0.12 (0.26)
Black	0.47*** (0.09)	0.64 (0.40)	0.62 (0.40)	0.80* (0.39)
Constant	1.18*** (0.17)	-0.58 (0.62)	-0.33 (0.62)	0.31 (0.73)
Sample size	19,194	1,014	1,014	1,426
R ²	0.23	0.24	0.26	0.22
Effect size (\$)	156	62	104	32

Cell entries are estimates from linear regressions, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Regressions also include indicators for geographic region (GSS) or state (SCCBS and SSI)
 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

terms, this translates into Republicans donating \$32 more, per year, than Democrats.¹⁹

In sum, we find a good deal of evidence for the hypothesis that Republicans and self-identified conservatives give more to charity than Democrats and self-identified liberals. While the substantive effect sizes vary somewhat based on the sample, we

¹⁹ We find the same general results when, using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, we aggregate individual-level giving to the state level and use presidential vote share as a state-level measure of partisanship. These results are available in the Online Appendix.

consistently find that Republicans and conservatives donate more. This result comports with an existing analysis of the SCCBS by Brooks (2006), but we replicate and extend this finding by using additional surveys and by using partisanship instead of ideology. What is still unclear, however, is why these differences emerge. In the following section, we test three possible mechanisms.

Why Do Republicans Give More?

Religious Identity

Our first potential explanation is that Republicans give more due to their greater religious identity. A significant portion of all charitable organizations are either places of worship or are affiliated with a particular religion. Further, Republicans are far more likely to attend church and be involved in organized religious groups compared to Democrats (Green 2010; Layman 2001). Being enmeshed in these networks will increase social pressure on Republicans to donate more. Thus, the difference in charitable giving between partisans could result from the difference in religious attachments between partisans, and not policy preferences.

This perspective yields a few testable hypotheses. First, if charitable giving is a means for religious adherents to signal their identity, regardless of their party, it should be the case that religious attendance is associated with giving among both Republicans and Democrats at the same rate. In other words, religious attendance should have the same impact on giving among Republicans and Democrats. Second, if Republicans give more mainly because they are giving to more religious organizations, then we should see variation in the partisan giving gap across different types of organizations. In particular, the Republican advantage in giving should be more evident among religious as opposed to secular charitable organizations.

To test the first implication, we add religious attendance and an interaction between attendance and party to our basic regression specification. Because our measure of attendance varies slightly across surveys, we re-scale attendance in each survey such that zero equals the lowest observed value of attendance, and one equals the highest observed value. We present the results in Table 2. For each survey, we first present estimates from a regression where we add religious attendance and no interactions with party, followed by a specification that includes interactions.

Looking first at only the magnitude and precision of the estimates, columns (1), (3), and (5) show that religious attendance is indeed a powerful predictor of charitable giving in any of our surveys. The coefficients are at least five times as large as the party and ideology coefficients seen in Table 1, and are always highly statistically significant. Also of note, the coefficient on conservative/Republican is always greatly reduced compared to Table 1: it is not distinguishable from zero in the SCCBS and the SSI surveys, and it is a third of its magnitude in the GSS. This suggests that, adjusting for religious attendance, there is little or no difference in giving between partisans.

Table 2 Differences in giving conditional on religiosity

	SCCBS		GSS		SSI	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Religious attendance	2.52*** (0.04)	2.19*** (0.08)	4.23*** (0.21)	4.69*** (0.30)	4.30*** (0.20)	4.39*** (0.29)
Conservative/Republican	−0.02 (0.04)	−0.20*** (0.06)	0.34* (0.16)	0.72** (0.25)	−0.20 (0.15)	−0.12 (0.21)
Moderate/Independent	−0.16*** (0.04)	−0.37*** (0.06)	−0.21 (0.21)	0.17 (0.30)	−0.30 (0.19)	−0.30 (0.25)
Con/Rep X Attend		0.43*** (0.10)		−0.85 (0.44)		−0.21 (0.41)
Mod/Ind X Attend		0.51*** (0.10)		−1.00 (0.60)		0.00 (0.61)
Income	0.42*** (0.01)	0.42*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.16*** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.02)
Male	0.10** (0.03)	0.10** (0.03)	−0.15 (0.14)	−0.14 (0.14)	−0.21 (0.13)	−0.21 (0.13)
Married	0.14** (0.04)	0.13** (0.04)	0.29 (0.18)	0.29 (0.18)	−0.28 (0.24)	−0.28 (0.24)
Family size	0.05** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.17 (0.17)	0.17 (0.17)
Age	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
High school	0.97*** (0.07)	0.96*** (0.07)	−0.05 (0.16)	−0.03 (0.16)	−0.39* (0.16)	−0.39* (0.17)
College	1.47*** (0.08)	1.46*** (0.08)	0.62** (0.21)	0.63** (0.21)	0.35 (0.18)	0.35 (0.18)
Graduate	1.62*** (0.08)	1.62*** (0.08)	0.51* (0.23)	0.52* (0.23)	0.62** (0.20)	0.63** (0.20)
White	0.32*** (0.07)	0.31*** (0.06)	0.08 (0.29)	0.09 (0.29)	0.20 (0.22)	0.20 (0.22)
Black	0.20* (0.08)	0.21** (0.08)	0.15 (0.33)	0.10 (0.33)	0.51 (0.32)	0.49 (0.32)
Constant	0.85*** (0.15)	0.97*** (0.16)	−1.12* (0.49)	−1.31** (0.50)	−0.54 (0.63)	−0.56 (0.64)
Sample size	19,194	19,194	1014	1014	1426	1426
R ²	0.36	0.36	0.47	0.47	0.42	0.42

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Regressions also include indicators for geographic region (GSS) or state (SCCBS and SSI)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Turning to the interactions, in column (2) we see that in the SCCBS, among those with the lowest levels of religious attendance, conservatives actually give *less* than liberals. The estimate is about -0.20 , with a standard error of 0.06. There is also a

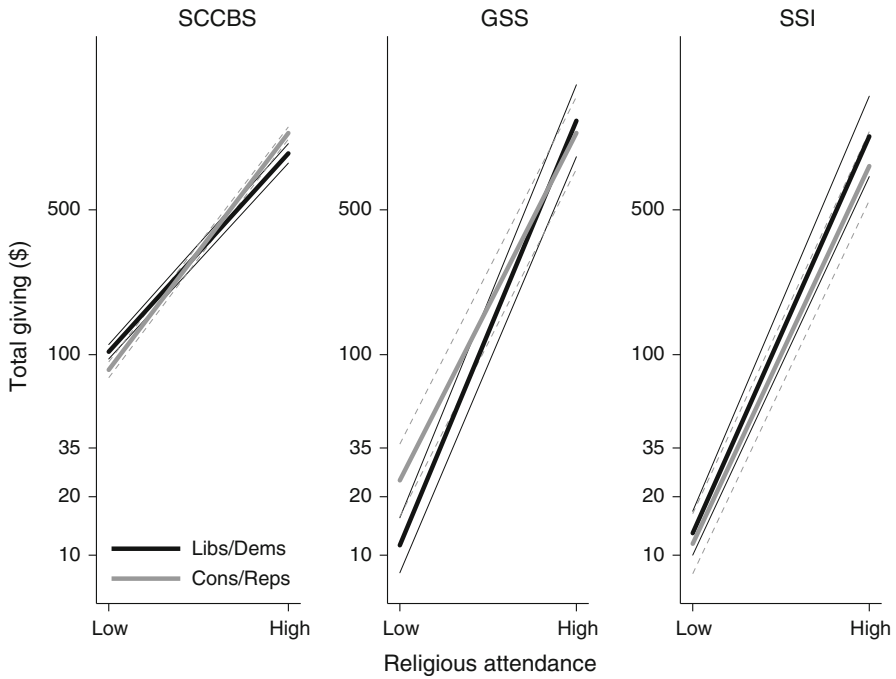


Fig. 1 Religious attendance explains partisan differences in giving for both Republicans and Democrats. *Thick lines* represent predicted values based on the estimates in Table 2, and *thin lines* span 95% confidence intervals

positive interaction between conservatism and attendance: the estimate is 0.43, with a standard error of 0.10.

We omit discussion of the remaining estimates and move now to considering substantive effects. As in the footer to Table 1, we convert the estimates from the interactive specifications to dollar amounts. To simplify the presentation, we plot these effects and their 95% confidence intervals in Fig. 1.²⁰

These plots confirm that religious attendance is a powerful predictor of giving. Depending on the sample, a comparison of the lowest and highest attenders shows a difference in total giving of between four and five hundred dollars. More importantly for explaining partisan giving gaps, however, these effects are essentially the same for liberals/Democrats and conservatives/Republicans. Indeed, for *any* level of religious attendance, it is difficult to discern any difference in giving between partisan subgroups. We can also see that the positive and significant interaction between conservatism and attendance in the SCCBS, reported in Table 2 column (2), has little substantive meaning. Viewed graphically in Fig. 1, we see that this positive interaction reflects the fact that conservative non-attenders give a little

²⁰ We generate the predicted values using the *margins* command in Stata 14. We then plot the predicted values on the log scale, but we exponentiate the vertical axis points and subtract one for clarity.

less than liberal non-attenders, and conservative high-attenders give a little more than liberal high-attenders.²¹

Table 3 presents the results of our second test of the religious identity mechanism, comparing giving to different types of organizations. In the SCCBS, there is a positive relationship between conservatism and giving to religious charities (estimate = 0.43, standard error = 0.04), but a negative relationship between conservatism and giving to secular charities (estimate = -0.33, standard error = 0.05). In dollar terms, shown in the footer to Table 3, conservatives give 37 dollars more to religious charities but 22 dollars less to secular charities. In the SSI sample (columns (6) and (7)), Republicans give just two dollars more to religious charities, though this effect is not significant (estimate = 0.12, standard error = 0.14) and six dollars less to secular charities (estimate = -0.42, standard error = 0.15).

Thus far, two results stand out in this section. First, church attendance is positively correlated with charitable giving for Democrats and Republicans alike. The partisan gaps in giving, therefore, emerge on account of Republicans attending religious services more frequently than Democrats, on average. Second, the overall partisan gap in charitable giving occurs, in large part, due to partisan differences in donating to individual houses of worship. Both sets of results indicate that religious involvement is an important driver of charitable giving, largely explaining why partisan differences in giving emerge.

The results for the GSS, which appear in columns (3) through (5) in Table 3, are of particular interest. Unlike the other two surveys, the GSS asks about giving to one's own congregation separately from giving to other religious charities. Recall that in Table 2, the only sample for which political identity was significant conditional on religious attendance was the GSS (Table 2, column (3)). Here we see that Republicans' higher total giving in the GSS is driven entirely by giving to one's own congregation: the estimate is 0.44, with a standard error of 0.14, and translates into about a 13 dollar difference. In contrast, there are no differences between partisans when we examine giving to other religious (estimate = 0.11, standard error = 0.17) or secular organizations (estimate = 0.06, standard error = 0.17).²²

²¹ One alternative explanation for this finding is that a person's religious tradition—for example, being an evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, or Catholic—may explain these differences, rather than religious attendance. Using Steensland et al.'s (2000) denominational coding scheme, we explore this possibility and present the results in the Online Appendix. While church attendance is positively associated with total levels of giving along with giving to religious causes, the relationship between church attendance and giving is essentially the same for members of different religious faiths. Additionally, we may be concerned about religious homogamy. Andreoni et al. (2003) note that men and women have different tastes when it comes to charitable giving, requiring married couples to compromise and bargain when making donation decisions that occur at the household level. Consequently, if Republicans and Democrats differ in their propensity to marry within their religious traditions, this could account for some of the partisan variation in donation decisions. However, we find no evidence that partisans differ in their rates of marrying within their religious faith.

²² We find substantively and statistically similar results when we replicate the findings excluding religious non-identifiers, who should be especially unlikely to donate to religious organizations and congregations. These results are available in the Online Appendix.

Table 3 Differences in giving to religious versus secular charities

	SCCBS		GSS			SSI	
	(1) Religious	(2) Secular	(3) Congregation	(4) Other Religious	(5) Secular	(6) Religious	(7) Secular
Conservative	0.43*** (0.04)	−0.33*** (0.05)					
Moderate	0.19*** (0.05)	−0.29*** (0.05)					
Republican			0.44** (0.14)	0.11 (0.17)	0.06 (0.17)	0.12 (0.14)	−0.42** (0.15)
Independent			−0.05 (0.21)	−0.14 (0.20)	−0.38 (0.23)	−0.08 (0.17)	−0.29 (0.19)
Income	0.29*** (0.01)	0.49*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)
Religious attendance	4.60*** (0.05)	0.55*** (0.05)	6.46*** (0.20)	1.92*** (0.23)	0.62** (0.24)	0.78*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)
Male	0.19*** (0.03)	−0.01 (0.04)	−0.35** (0.13)	−0.13 (0.14)	0.10 (0.15)	0.05 (0.12)	−0.21 (0.13)
Married	0.15*** (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.32* (0.16)	0.19 (0.18)	0.31 (0.20)	−0.01 (0.21)	−0.38 (0.24)
Family size	0.11*** (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.09 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)	−0.10 (0.05)	0.18 (0.16)	0.14 (0.17)
Age	0.02*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.02** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
High school	0.66*** (0.08)	0.92*** (0.08)	0.09 (0.15)	−0.13 (0.15)	−0.07 (0.18)	−0.22 (0.15)	−0.46** (0.16)
College	0.78*** (0.09)	1.65*** (0.09)	0.09 (0.19)	0.35 (0.25)	0.93*** (0.23)	0.18 (0.16)	0.47** (0.18)
Graduate	0.84*** (0.09)	1.93*** (0.09)	−0.05 (0.22)	0.50 (0.26)	1.02*** (0.25)	0.02 (0.19)	0.72*** (0.20)
White	0.10 (0.08)	0.47*** (0.08)	−0.05 (0.29)	0.03 (0.28)	0.31 (0.31)	−0.06 (0.20)	0.21 (0.22)
Black	0.40*** (0.09)	−0.14 (0.10)	0.44 (0.33)	−0.17 (0.32)	−0.14 (0.34)	0.82** (0.30)	0.37 (0.32)
Constant	−0.56*** (0.16)	0.06 (0.18)	−1.90*** (0.49)	−1.48** (0.45)	−1.54** (0.58)	−2.14*** (0.63)	0.18 (0.64)
Sample size	19,194	19,194	1014	1014	1014	1426	1426
R ²	0.48	0.23	0.62	0.17	0.27	0.57	0.20
Effect size (\$)	37	−22	13	1	1	2	−6

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Regressions also include indicators for geographic region (GSS) or state (SCCBS and SSI)

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Political Ideology

While we find strong support for the religious identity pathway, the estimates reported above do not rule out the possibility that political beliefs also drive partisan giving differences. In particular, it could be that those who attend church more also hold more conservative policy views. Thus the increased giving among this group may be driven by the desire to signal opposition to government service provision.

To conduct a more direct test of the ideology explanation, we employ Ellis and Stimson's (2012) distinction between symbolic and operational conservatives. As these authors explain, *symbolic* conservatives self-identify as conservative, while *operational* conservatives actually hold conservative views on the role of government. In Ellis and Stimson's analysis, only about half of symbolic conservatives are in fact operational conservatives. In other words, many are symbolically conservative but operationally liberal.

If conservative policy preferences explain baseline differences in giving between parties, it should be the case that operational conservatives give more, regardless of party. Similar to the estimates presented for religious identity, we test this implication by interacting partisanship with operational conservatism. We also estimate specifications with no interactions, but with operational conservatism by itself. We show the results in Table 4.

Columns (1) and (2) of Table 4 show the results in the GSS, while columns (3) and (4) show the results from the SSI sample.²³ Columns (1) and (3) show the baseline impact of operational conservatism. Interestingly, the estimate for operational conservatism is never statistically different from zero, and the estimate is actually negative in the GSS (estimate = -1.06 , standard error = 0.69 ; SSI estimate = 0.36 , standard error = 0.23). Turning to the interactions, they are also not significant, though they are positive in both the GSS (estimate = 1.65 , standard error = 1.44) and the SSI survey (estimate = 0.27 , standard error = 0.49).

We present the substantive impacts in Fig. 2, starting with the GSS in the left panel. This figure shows that operationally liberal Republicans and Democrats do not give any more or less than their operationally conservative co-partisans: while there are substantively large differences, the confidence intervals are wide and the differences between those with low versus high operational conservatism are never statistically different from zero.²⁴

In our SSI sample, shown in the right panel, we see positive slopes for both partisans. Though again the effect is slightly larger for Democrats, both effects are smaller in magnitude than in the GSS. While the direction of the relationship

²³ The sample size in the GSS drops considerably because not all respondents were asked about charitable giving and the items used to construct operational conservatism. Unfortunately, the SCCBS lacks questions we could use to construct a measure of operational conservatism.

²⁴ While the difference in giving between operationally liberal and operationally conservative Democrats borders on statistical significance, such a negative relationship actually contradicts the claim that policy conservatism and giving are positively linked. Additionally, there are very few operationally conservative Democrats. Below we report the results of a test that accounts for this lack of overlap.

Table 4 Differences in giving conditional on operational ideology

	GSS		SSI	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Operational conservatism	-1.06 (0.69)	-1.80 (1.08)	0.36 (0.23)	0.23 (0.33)
Republican	0.36 (0.25)	-0.30 (0.62)	-0.32 (0.17)	-0.46 (0.31)
Independent	-0.14 (0.36)	0.08 (0.94)	-0.35 (0.19)	-0.42 (0.36)
Rep X Operational		1.65 (1.44)		0.27 (0.49)
Ind X Operational		-0.46 (2.24)		0.20 (0.71)
Income	0.17*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)
Religious attendance	3.70*** (0.35)	3.72*** (0.35)	0.54*** (0.02)	0.54*** (0.02)
Male	0.09 (0.22)	0.08 (0.22)	-0.22 (0.13)	-0.23 (0.13)
Married	0.20 (0.30)	0.21 (0.30)	-0.30 (0.24)	-0.30 (0.24)
Family size	0.17* (0.08)	0.16* (0.08)	0.19 (0.17)	0.19 (0.17)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
High school	-0.40 (0.26)	-0.38 (0.26)	-0.39* (0.16)	-0.39* (0.17)
College	0.49 (0.33)	0.47 (0.34)	0.34 (0.18)	0.33 (0.18)
Graduate	0.26 (0.36)	0.21 (0.36)	0.64** (0.20)	0.63** (0.20)
White	0.61 (0.46)	0.61 (0.46)	0.21 (0.22)	0.20 (0.22)
Black	0.72 (0.53)	0.72 (0.53)	0.49 (0.32)	0.49 (0.32)
Constant	-1.17 (0.82)	-0.87 (0.86)	-1.17 (0.64)	-1.12 (0.65)
Sample size	372	372	1426	1426
R ²	0.49	0.49	0.42	0.42

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Regressions also include indicators for geographic region (GSS) or state (SSI)
 * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

changes, however, the substantive interpretation does not: as with the GSS, the estimates are very imprecise, and we can not reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between operational conservatism and giving. Overall, then, we find

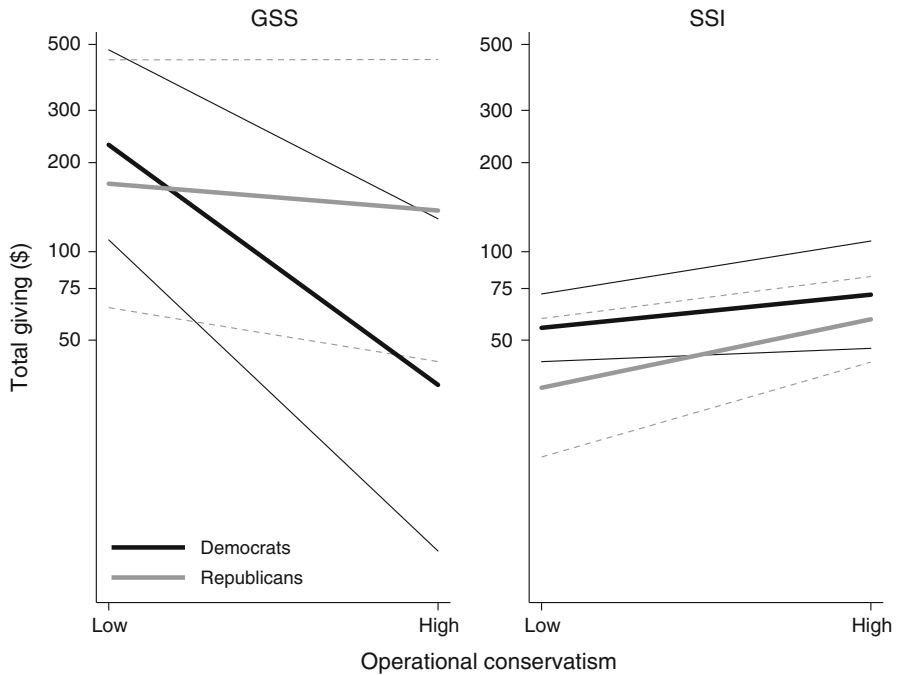


Fig. 2 Operational ideology does not explain partisan differences in giving. *Thick lines* represent predicted values based on the estimates in Table 4, and thin lines span 95% confidence intervals

little support for explanations involving differences in policy views between partisans.²⁵

Economic Status

Having found strong support for the religious identity explanation, and little support for the ideology explanation, we turn now to economic status. Perhaps donors use their philanthropy to signal their superior economic status, and Republicans are more interested in signaling economic status than Democrats.²⁶ If this explanation holds, it should be the case that changes in subjective economic perceptions among Republicans will influence donation behavior, as donors will now see themselves as possessing more economic capital to signal.

We use quasi-experimental variation in economic perceptions, induced by the 2012 election, to test this explanation, surveying our SSI respondents before and after the election outcome. Previous work demonstrates that election outcomes

²⁵ We present similar results using a more flexible model specification in the Online Appendix where we follow Ellis and Stimson in classifying respondents as “consistent conservatives”, “consistent liberals”, and “conflicted ideologues”. This alternative specification, which accounts for the fact that there are few operationally conservative Democrats, produces the same substantive results.

²⁶ Based on their analysis of baby names, Oliver et al. (2016) conclude Republicans are more motivated to signal economic as opposed to cultural capital.

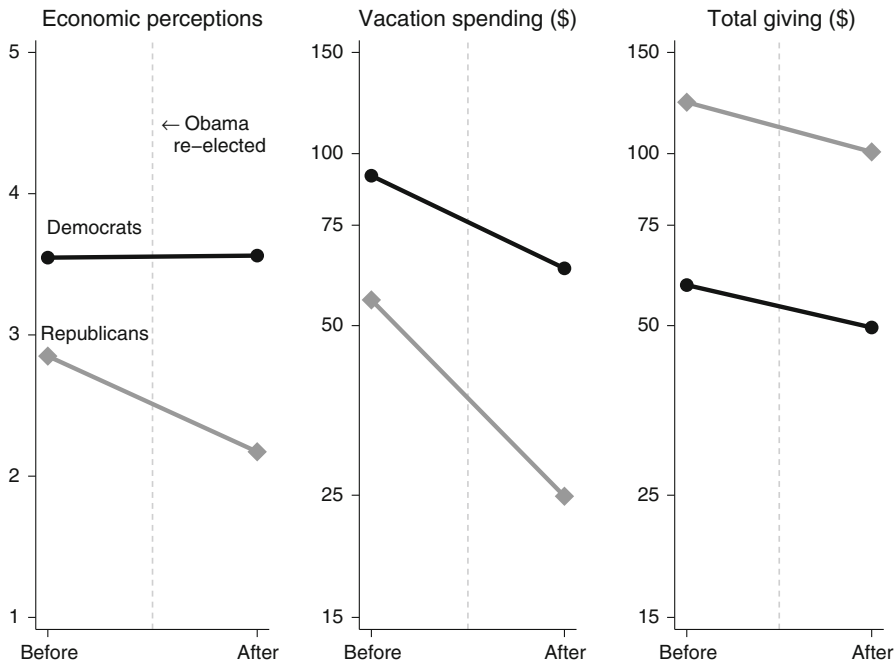


Fig. 3 The 2012 election changed partisan economic behavior, but did not affect partisan charitable behavior. Data are from the SSI panel survey

affect partisans’ economic perceptions: Republicans (Democrats) report more positive economic expectations when a Republican (Democrat) is in the White House, and more negative perceptions when a Democrat (Republican) is in the White House (Bartels 2002; Evans and Andersen 2006). These divergent attitudes have been shown to translate into real economic behaviors, with geographic areas supportive of the president collecting more sales tax receipts, and individual supporters of the party in power spending more on vacations (Gerber and Huber 2010, 2009).

Although the party of the president did not change in 2012, we leverage the fact that partisans had differing expectations about the outcome of the election. These expectations may have ranged from uncertainty, to an overconfident belief that their own candidate would win. In either case, the resolution of an uncertain or false belief about future control of the White House should induce partisans to update their economic perceptions—and if these perceptions matter for giving, then donation behaviors should change as well.

As a preliminary test of this explanation, we present raw averages for different outcomes, by party and by wave, in Fig. 3. The first two panels of Fig. 3 show we replicate past findings of an effect of election outcomes on economic perceptions (Gerber and Huber 2010). For Republicans, who viewed the economy more negatively in the weeks leading up to the election, perceptions of the economy dropped even further, by over half a point on the five-point scale, after President

Obama was re-elected between the two survey waves. What is more, the second panel shows these shifts in economic perceptions carry over into how much people plan to spend on vacations in the next year. The slight decrease found among Democrats is about half the size of the decline among Republicans. These results point to Republicans updating both their perceptions of the economy as well as their planned spending in response to President Obama's re-election.

The 2012 election was therefore an exogenous shock to partisans' relative economic perceptions, and thus ability to signal economic capital. If the desire to signal economic capital drives differences in giving, then we should also find post-election shifts in giving behavior. Yet we do not. In the third panel of Fig. 3, we change the outcome to charitable giving. Like vacation spending, there is a decline among both partisan subgroups. Unlike economic perceptions or planned vacation spending, Republicans' anticipated giving does not appear to decline more than Democrats'.

We corroborate these results using panel regressions with controls in Table 5. Our dependent variable in all specifications is the change in the outcome (economic perceptions, log vacation spending plus one, or log total giving plus one). For each dependent variable, we report results from regressions without and then with a lagged dependent variable to adjust for possible regression to the mean (Finkel 1995). These estimates confirm the graphical results shown above. First, there is a significant drop in both economic perceptions and vacation spending among Republicans relative to Democrats: the estimates are -0.66 and -0.95 for perceptions, with standard errors of 0.05 , and the estimates are -0.38 and -0.56 for vacation spending, with standard errors of 0.17 and 0.15 . Second, for charitable giving, there is no consistent relationship: the estimate is negative but imprecise when we do not include a lagged outcome (estimate = -0.12 , standard error = 0.11), but it is positive and insignificant when we do include lagged giving (estimate = 0.02 , standard error = 0.11). Thus although Republicans experienced a shock to their economic perceptions and thus ability to signal economic capital, their giving behavior did not change after the election.²⁷

While we prefer the SSI results given our understanding of why economic perceptions vary in this sample, we find similar results when we use the static measure of economic perceptions in the GSS. As we show in the Online Appendix, there is actually a negative, though statistically insignificant, relationship between viewing the economy favorably and charitable giving in models that do not include any interaction terms. Likewise, there is no substantive or statistically significant interaction between party and economic perceptions in this cross-sectional sample. Overall, then, we reject differences in the desire to signal economic status as an

²⁷ We likely find changes in economic perceptions among Republicans and not Democrats because Obama's re-election was expected among Democrats, but not Republicans. Because the lack of an effect on giving could be a result of a lack of statistical power, in the Online Appendix we test whether there is an interaction between "surprise"—the respondent's pre-election prediction of who would win—and party. Surprised respondents should theoretically exhibit larger changes in economic behavior (see Quek and Sances 2015). While we find substantively large interactions between Republican identity and predicted Obama vote share for economic perceptions and vacation spending, we find no evidence of an interaction for giving.

Table 5 Differences in economic perceptions, behavior, and giving before and after the 2012 election

	Perceptions		Vacation		Giving	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Republican	−0.66*** (0.05)	−0.95*** (0.05)	−0.38* (0.17)	−0.56*** (0.15)	−0.12 (0.11)	0.02 (0.11)
Independent	−0.17* (0.07)	−0.47*** (0.07)	0.19 (0.22)	−0.16 (0.20)	0.36* (0.15)	0.20 (0.14)
Male	−0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.04)	0.15 (0.15)	0.20 (0.14)	0.09 (0.10)	0.02 (0.10)
Married	0.03 (0.09)	−0.01 (0.08)	−0.22 (0.28)	−0.52* (0.25)	−0.39* (0.19)	−0.46* (0.18)
Family size	0.03 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.11 (0.19)	0.43* (0.17)	0.20 (0.13)	0.27* (0.12)
Age	−0.00* (0.00)	−0.00* (0.00)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Income	−0.02*** (0.01)	−0.02* (0.01)	−0.01 (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.04* (0.01)
High school	−0.04 (0.06)	−0.06 (0.05)	0.07 (0.19)	−0.11 (0.17)	0.24 (0.13)	0.07 (0.12)
College	−0.04 (0.07)	0.05 (0.06)	0.15 (0.21)	0.29 (0.19)	0.28 (0.14)	0.35** (0.13)
Graduate	0.13 (0.07)	0.13 (0.07)	0.36 (0.23)	0.35 (0.21)	0.23 (0.16)	0.41** (0.15)
White	−0.07 (0.08)	−0.10 (0.07)	0.02 (0.25)	−0.06 (0.23)	−0.12 (0.17)	−0.12 (0.16)
Black	−0.09 (0.12)	0.06 (0.11)	0.19 (0.36)	0.23 (0.33)	−0.34 (0.25)	−0.08 (0.24)
Lagged outcome		−0.45*** (0.02)		−0.37*** (0.02)		−0.22*** (0.02)
Constant	0.62** (0.24)	2.01*** (0.22)	−0.43 (0.72)	0.26 (0.66)	−0.34 (0.50)	−0.19 (0.47)
Sample size	1,426	1426	1426	1426	1426	1426
R ²	0.15	0.33	0.04	0.22	0.05	0.15

Data are from the SSI survey only. Regressions also include indicators for state. Robust standard errors in parentheses

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

explanation for the baseline difference in giving between Republicans and Democrats. Indeed it is somewhat surprising, given past results in the charitable giving literature, that we find no relationship between economic perceptions and giving.

Conclusion

Debates about increasing political polarization and partisan sorting (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008, 2005; Fiorina et al. 2008, 2005; Hetherington 2001; Levendusky 2009) have raised questions regarding just what divides Democrats and Republicans. We have explored whether partisans differ in the seemingly apolitical, but consequential, act of charitable giving, uncovering large differences in giving patterns. Yet we do not find that partisans differ in their charitable giving as a means of demonstrating their policy viewpoints or economic status. Instead, differences in charitable give appear to arise due to social differences, specifically differences in religious identities, between partisans.

Our results broaden our understanding of how and why politics may influence non-political decisions. While Oliver et al. (2016) do not find evidence for a religious explanation for ideological differences in behavior, we do. More specifically, they find that parents in liberal neighborhoods are equally likely to give their children biblical names as mothers in conservative neighborhoods. In contrast, we find that religious identity—measured by the frequency of religious attendance—explains partisan and ideological differences in charitable giving. Being involved in a religious community may result in direct pressure to support a church or other religious organization, and this same pressure may not exist when it comes to naming children. The former may be necessary for the continued existence of the organization or group, whereas baby names have limited impact on the broader religious community. Consequently, our research identifies an area in which religious differences among partisans produce differences in nonpartisan behaviors.

Our findings on religious identity also generally agree with and build on Brooks (2006). Similar to Brooks, we find that religious attendance is an important predictor of giving to both religious and secular causes. Our analyses go a step further, however, to demonstrate these differences are largely attributable to conservatives and Republicans donating more to their own houses of worship, but not to other religious or secular organizations. In short, giving to one's local, often close-knit, community explains differences in giving. This result suggests the importance of social networks in explaining partisan differences in consumption, as the types of groups which partisans engage, and the subsequent social pressures they may feel, may account for such differences in other contexts as well.

In contrast to Brooks (2006), however, we do not conclude that partisan differences in charitable giving are rooted in ideological disagreements. While Brooks (2006) argues that policy views on income redistribution and charitable giving go hand in hand, we find no evidence for a link between policy views and giving amounts. Our findings instead demonstrate that partisan differences in nonpartisan behavior—similar to differences in partisan behavior (Achen and Bartels 2016; Iyengar et al. 2012; Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Mason 2015)—are rooted in social differences between partisans, and not disagreements over public policy.

Additionally, we do not find evidence that individuals donate to charity as a way to signal their economic status. Changes in economic perceptions, measured either by partisans' self-reports of their financial situation or in response to an external

event, do not correspond with changing levels of charitable giving. While Republicans and conservatives, therefore, may choose to display their economic capital in other ways—including by giving children more traditional names (Oliver et al. 2016)—these displays of economic status do not explain partisan differences in charitable giving. These results also indicate that perceptions of the economy affect charitable giving decisions differently from other consumption activities, such as spending on vacations. These results highlight an avenue for future research exploring which economic behaviors may be influenced by partisan bias.

Finally, our results have practical implications for nonprofit organizations. Although previous research indicates that political conservatism and economic status are reliable proxies for identifying potential donors, our results suggest that organizations would be better off simply targeting those more prone to social pressure, regardless of their political beliefs.

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