

# Social Norms in Major, Annual, and Legacy Gifts Fundraising

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How Examples Motivate  
Generosity





First: The answers to the test



# Major findings from use of social norms in charitable giving

Social norms of giving (vs. not giving) increase giving participation

Social norms work better when the examples are more “like me”

Social norms are more powerful in death-related contexts

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# Major findings from use of social norm **AMOUNTS** in charitable giving

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- Social norms of giving at a specific amount increase giving at that amount (but decrease giving at higher or lower amounts)
- The tradeoff is between participation rates and average gift size among donors
  - A lower amount norm will increase participation but decrease gift size
  - A higher amount norm will decrease participation but increase gift size





The  
size/participation  
tradeoff in legacy  
giving

- Legacy giving is highly skewed: The bulk of the money comes from relatively few but extreme gifts.
- Maximizing legacy giving participation is a different goal than maximizing legacy giving revenue. These strategies are different and can conflict.

# “Legitimizing Paltry Contributions” Can Work for Initial Current Gifts



- 
- LPC: Even a dollar will help!
  - This reduces gift size but increases gift participation.
  - It's not cost effective for this gift, but it might start a donor relationship that pays off over time.



# “Legitimizing Paltry Contributions” May Be Bad for Legacy Gifts



1. There's only one gift.
2. The money is driven by getting the large gift, not by getting a lots of gifts.

Interestingly, this approach has become popular, especially for UK charities.



# New experiment!

(Forthcoming 2025 academic journal article, 939 participants)

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Many people like to leave a gift in their will to support a cause that has been important in their lives.

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A gift in a will [**of 1%/2%/5%/10%/20% of your estate; whether it is 1% or 50% of your estate; of \$100/\$500; or “a very small gift in a will”**] can make a lasting difference for those in need.

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If you happened to sign a new will in the next six months, what is the likelihood that you might include a gift in your will to charity? [0 to 100]

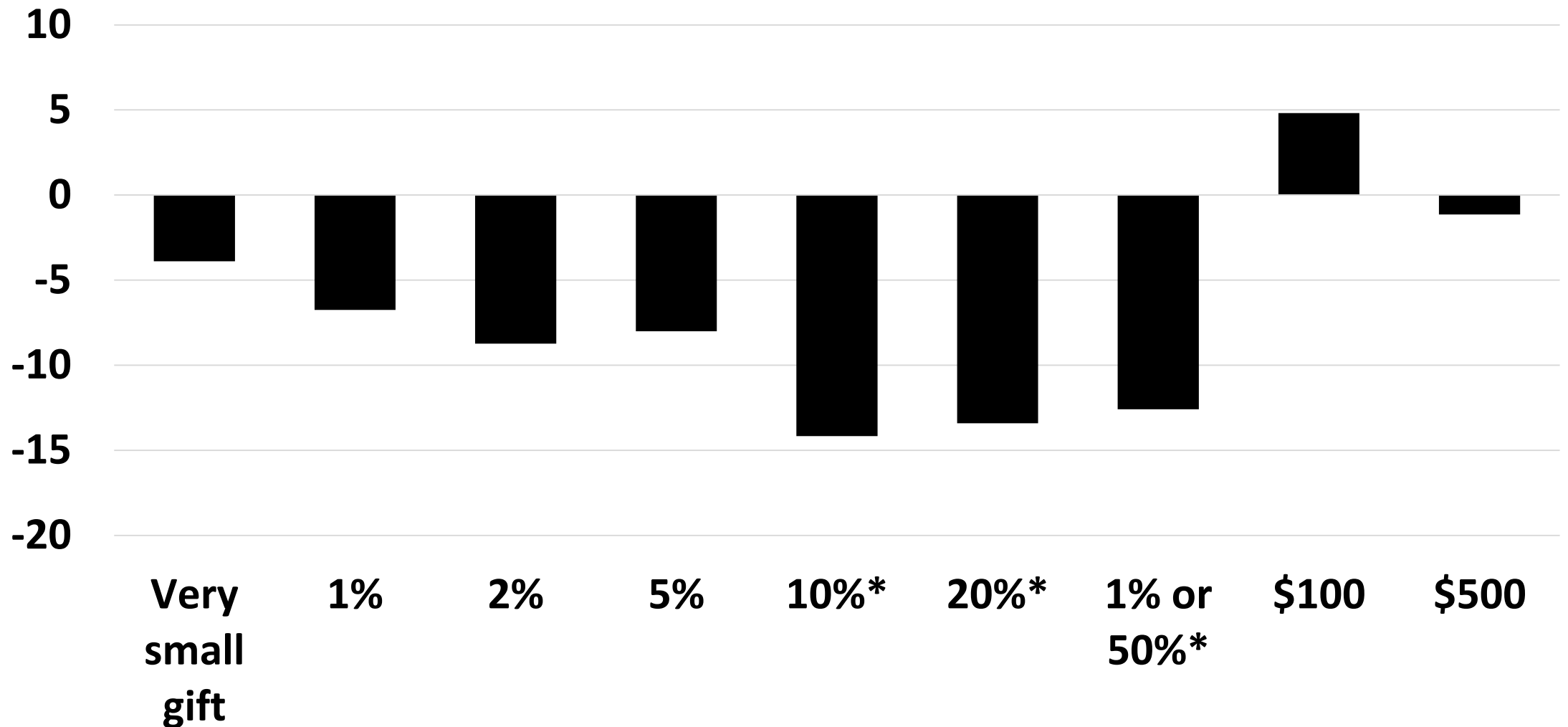
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If you happened to sign a new will in the next six months, and you did decide to include a gift in your will to charity, what percentage of your estate would you most likely leave to charity?

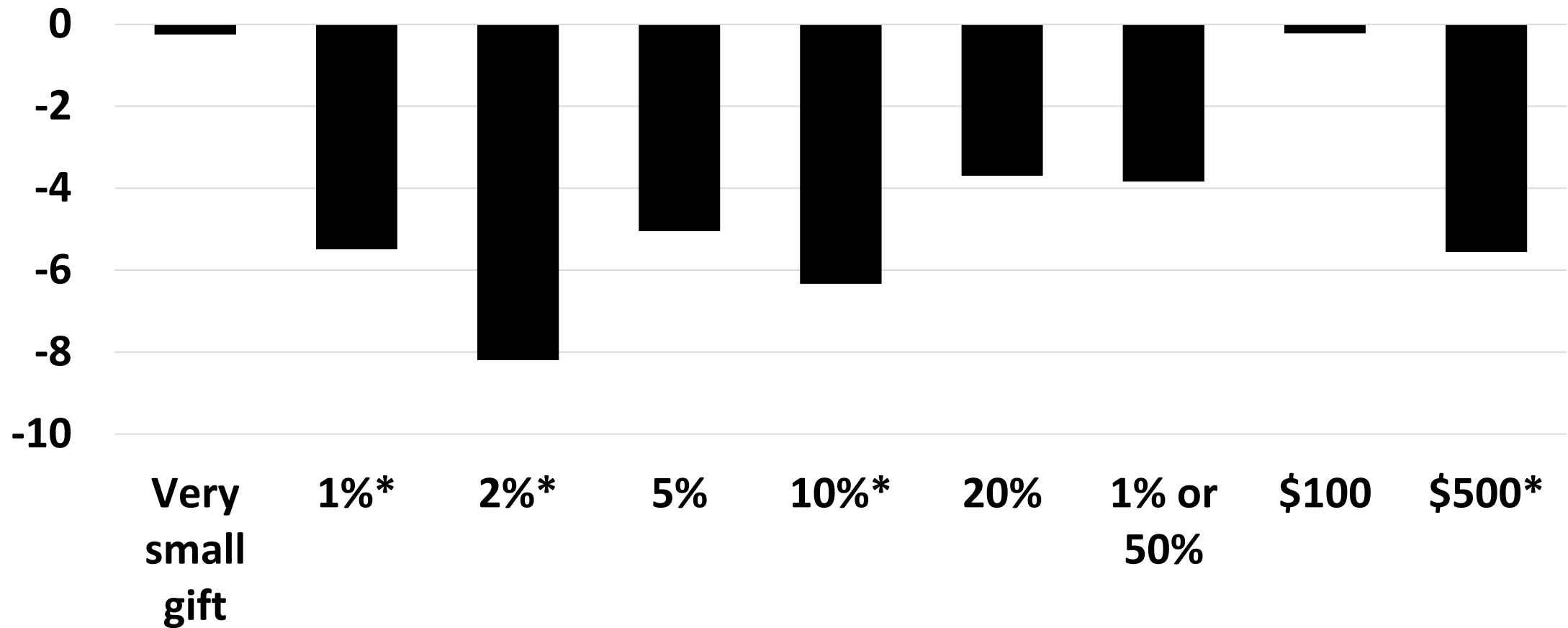


# Estimated percentage point impact of phrase variations on likelihood of leaving a gift

(OLS coefficients controlling for respondent demographics)



# Estimated percentage point impact of phrase variations on intended charitable share of the estate (OLS coefficients controlling for respondent demographics)



# A double negative for small percentage examples

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- Small percentage examples reduced the gift size BUT ALSO reduced gift likelihood
- Alternatives such as referencing small dollar amount examples (\$100 or \$500) or “a very small gift in a will” had no significant effect on the likelihood of making a gift. However, the negative effect on intended gift size was significant for the \$500 example.

	Gift likelihood	Intended gift share 10%+	Avg gift share of estate
No amount	48.6%	50.5%	14.3%
1% norm	43.4%	29.2%	10.3%
2% norm	41.3%	30.5%	8.1%
5% norm	41.3%	33.3%	10.0%
10% norm	37.9%	38.0%	10.3%
20% norm	37.1%	47.4%	11.6%
1% or 50%	37.5%	44.7%	11.7%
\$100 norm	55.1%	41.5%	16.4%
\$500 norm	50.5%	41.9%	10.6%
"A very small gift in a will" norm	46.1%	41.3%	14.3%

# Alternatives to the size/participation tradeoff

- The ask string: Presenting multiple norms
- Individualization: Norming a “stretch” gift – just above likely individual intentions
- Sequencing: The “hand raise” small gift that starts a relationship
- Individualization: Giving that accomplishes something specific







Your penalty  
for asking a  
professor to  
speak:

**The Theory  
Section!**

# Social Norms in Fundraising

People Like Me Make  
Gifts Things Like This!



# Theory, experiment, and practice

*Verba docent, exempla  
trahunt.*

“Words teach people,  
examples compel  
them.”

- Latin proverb



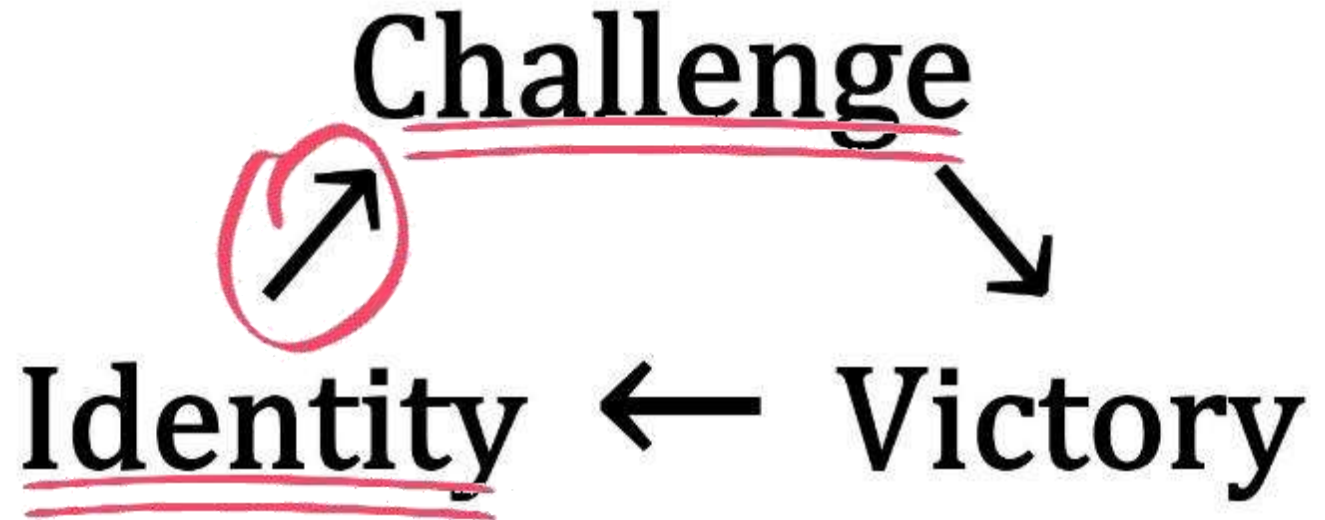
The effective ask includes three elements



Showing that  
“people like me  
make gifts like  
this,” links the  
challenge with  
the full cycle



Original identity →  
Challenge



“People like me make  
gifts like this”

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- The group is a key source of identity
- If others like me accept a challenge, it links my original identity to the challenge

Challenge → Victory



“People like me make  
gifts like this”

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- They must believe their gift will make a difference
- They must believe in the hope of victory
- Thus, it's easier for me to believe the same

Victory → Enhanced Identity



“People like me make gifts like this”

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- The group is a key source of identity
- The victory likely benefits
  - My group
  - My standing in the group

The effective challenge is part of the full story cycle



- The effective challenge is rooted in the donor's original identity and promises a victory that delivers an enhanced identity
- Showing that "people like me make gifts like this" helps make these links





Experimental  
results: Other  
people

Others' examples influence

- Giving
- Volunteering
- Helping others

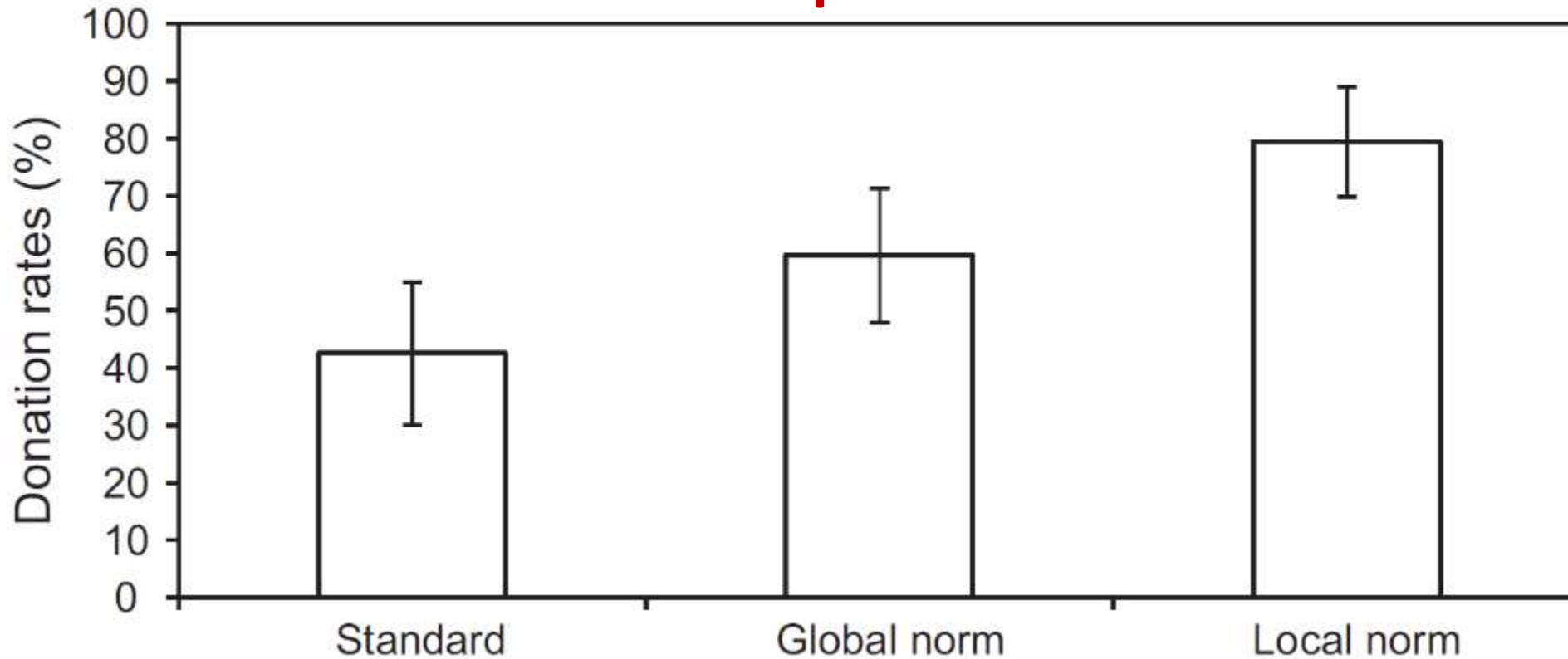
Cason, T. N., & Mui, V. L. (1998). Social influence in the sequential dictator game. *Journal of mathematical psychology*, 42(2-3), 248-265.; Frey, B. S., & Meier, S. (2004). Social comparisons and pro-social behavior: Testing "conditional cooperation" in a field experiment. *American Economic Review*, 94(5), 1717-1722; Chen, Y., Harper, F. M., Konstan, J., & Li, S. X. (2010). Social comparisons and contributions to online communities: A field experiment on movielens. *American Economic Review*, 100(4), 1358-98; Bryan, J. H., & Test, M. A. (1967). Models and helping: Naturalistic studies in aiding behavior. *Journal Of Personality and Social Psychology*, 6(4), 400-407.



## Experimental results: Public radio

- “We had another member; he [she] contributed \$240.”
- This was larger than the typical gift
  - When the “he” or “she” matched the caller’s gender, average gifts were a third larger than when it didn’t

# Social norms are more powerful when the examples are like me



Agerström, J., Carlsson, R., Nicklasson, L., & Guntell, L. (2016). Using descriptive social norms to increase charitable giving: The power of local norms. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 52, 147-153.

You can support [charity] by donating 20 Swedish crowns

...+ 73% of **University students in Sweden** who were asked for a contribution have donated 20 Swedish crowns to [charity]

...+ 73% of **Linnaeus University students** who were asked for a contribution have donated 20 Swedish crowns to [charity]



## Experiment at an Italian university

- “On average, Italians [Germans] donate €70 to support this project”
- When the example was Italian, donations were nearly 50% greater than when it was German



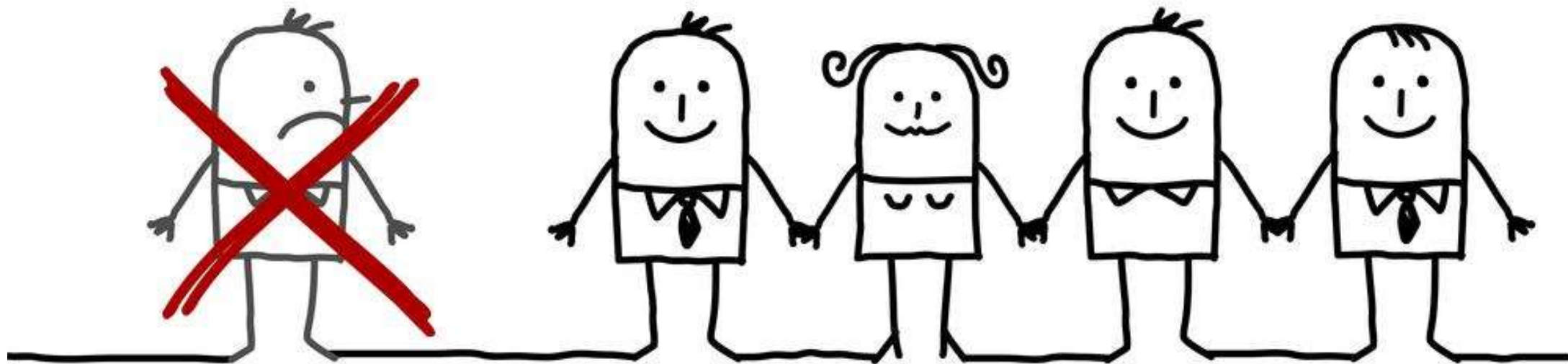
Hysenbelli, D., Rubaltelli, E., & Rumiati, R. (2013). Others' opinions count, but not all of them: anchoring to ingroup versus outgroup members' behavior in charitable giving. *Judgment & Decision Making*, 8(6), 678-690.





## The “Identity Congruency Effect”

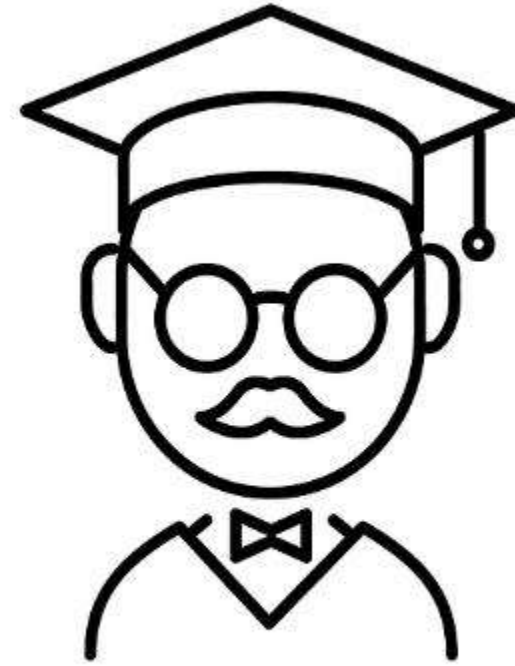
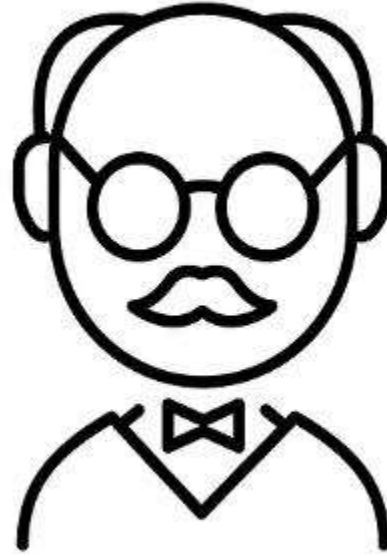
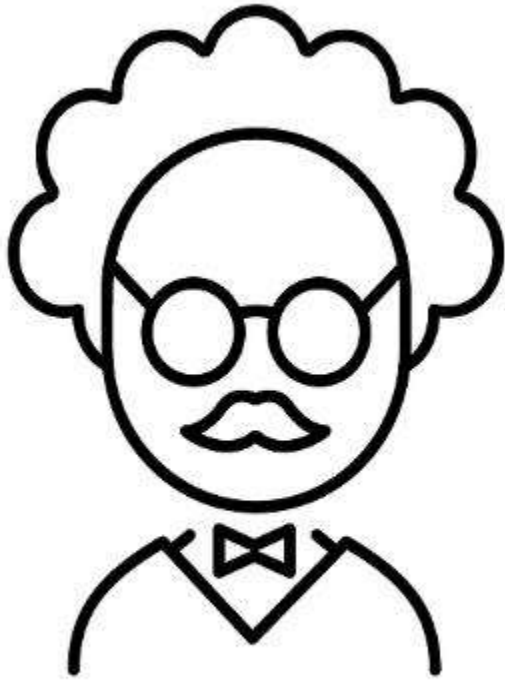
- This isn’t about age, or gender, or nationality; it’s about identity
- When people **LIKE ME** make gifts like this, the example is powerful



Drouvelis, M., & Marx, B. M. (2021). Dimensions of donation preferences: the structure of peer and income effects. *Experimental Economics*, 24(1), 274-302. p. 276.

Lab experiments:  
People like me

“Peer effects are positive, with subjects’ donations increasing in those of labmates and past subjects. However, subjects did not respond to ... gifts by an anonymous donor.”



Zhang, J., & Xie, H. (2019). Hierarchy leadership and social distance in charitable giving. *Southern Economic Journal*, 86(2), 433-458.

Experiments on  
professors:  
People like me

Professors' giving was influenced by another's initial donation amount only when the initial donor was revealed to be a member of their own department (peer) or their department chair (leader)



Meta-analysis: If people like me give, that's powerful

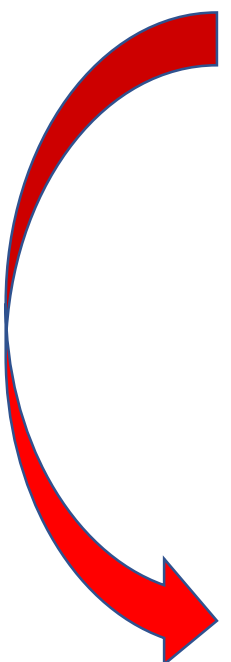
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“This systematic literature review (35 eligible studies) investigates how individuals' charitable giving is affected by the giving of others. It [proposes] a new mechanism of decision making in charitable giving through an important psychological construct: similarity.”



Tian, Y., & Konrath, S. (2021). The effects of similarity on charitable giving in donor–donor dyads: A systematic literature review. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 32, 316–339. p. 316.

# What “you” would do or what another has done?



You make a gift and receive a tax deduction and yearly income for life. Any unused gift amount will go to the charity at the end of your life.

Gift Annuity

Interested Now  
Definitely/somewhat/slightly

**All: 33.5%**  
**55+: 23.2%**

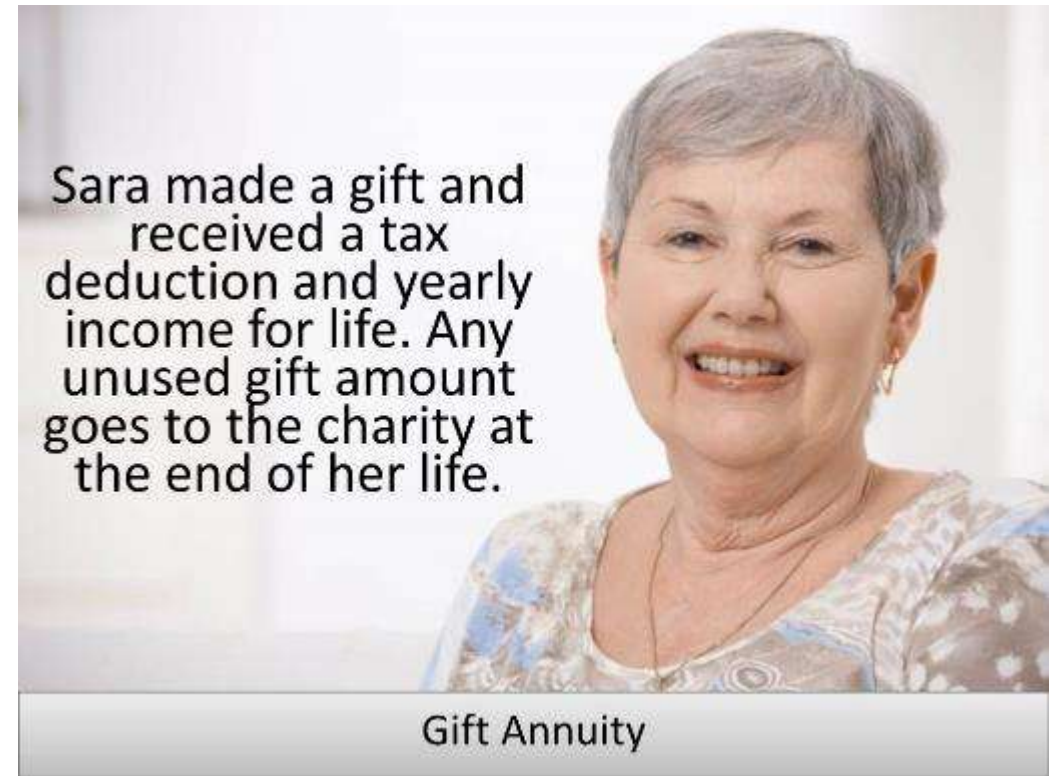
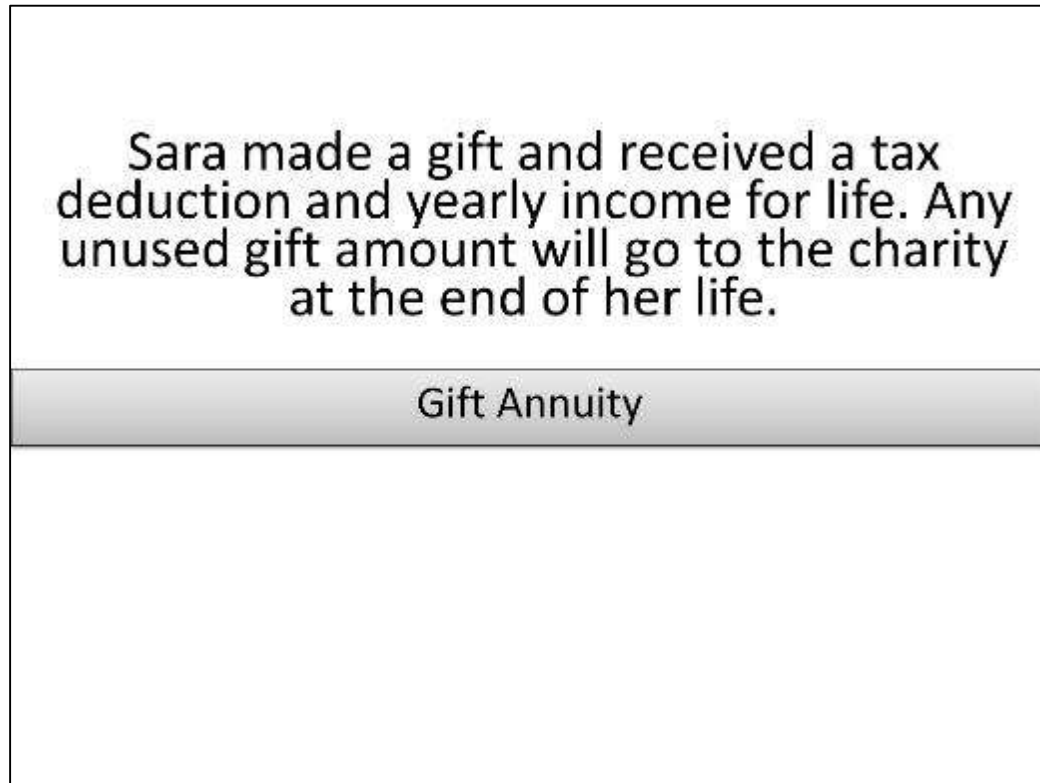
Sara made a gift and received a tax deduction and yearly income for life. Any unused gift amount will go to the charity at the end of her life.

Gift Annuity

**All: 38.6%**  
**55+: 38.6%**

Please rate your interest in pursuing the above described charitable giving arrangement

# Text only or text and donor picture?



Please rate your interest in pursuing the above described charitable giving arrangement: % Interested now (definitely/somewhat/slightly)

**No picture: 38.6%**

**Picture: 31.1%**



# Interested now (definitely/somewhat /slightly) by respondent age

Sara made a gift and received a tax deduction and yearly income for life. Any unused gift amount goes to the charity at the end of her life.



Gift Annuity

55+  
**24.4%**

35-54  
**38.4%**

U-35  
**44.5%**

Sara made a gift and received a tax deduction and yearly income for life. Any unused gift amount goes to the charity at the end of her life.



Gift Annuity

**22.0%**

**47.4%**

**32.6%**

Sara made a gift and received a tax deduction and yearly income for life. Any unused gift amount goes to the charity at the end of her life.



Gift Annuity

**41.1%**

**30.6%**

**30.2%**

James III, R. N. (2019). Using donor images in marketing complex charitable financial planning instruments: An experimental test with charitable gift annuities. *Journal of Personal Finance*, 18(1), 65-73.

Age mattered only  
when it changed the  
answer to this question:

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How much do you identify  
with Sara?

- ☐ She is not at all like me
- ☐ She is not really like me
- ☐ She is a little bit like me
- ☐ She is somewhat like me
- ☐ She is a lot like me







Experimental  
results: ... make  
gifts LIKE THIS

A social norm pulls giving towards either

1. Giving at the norm
2. Not giving at all



A social norm pulls towards giving at the norm or not at all

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Transparent donation box:

- With large bills generates fewer, but larger, gifts
- With coins generates more, but smaller, gifts

Martin, R., & Randal, J. (2008). How is donation behaviour affected by the donations of others? *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 67(1), 228-238.





## Giving at the norm or not at all

- Mentioning a large gift by another in an appeal letter raises average gift size
- But it lowers the likelihood of giving



A social norm pulls towards giving at the norm or not at all



In a UK study asking people to donate from a £10 payment, adding “Did you know that other participants gave £5 and they said that participants such as yourself should give £5?”

- Increased the share of people giving £5
- Increased the share who gave nothing
- Decreased the share of those giving amounts other than £5



# Research: Menus with large amounts

Experiment with 60,000 appeal letters. One used response card with the three most common gift amounts:

☐ \$10 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_

Another added higher amounts:

☐ \$10 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_

The second version raised twice as much money per letter. Another weird version worked just as well.

☐ \$10 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_

# Research: Menus with large amounts

Adding the larger option helps but increasing the smallest option is risky.

A study with 10,000 donors found, “in three independent comparisons, increasing the entire vector of suggested amounts by 20%–40% reduces the probability of giving by approximately 15%.”



Reiley, D., & Samek, A. (2019). Round giving: A field experiment on suggested donation amounts in public-television fundraising. *Economic Inquiry*, 57(2), 876-889.



## The ideal example is a stretch gift

- If the example is a little larger than the donor's last gift, it tends to increase the donation
- If smaller, it decreases the donation



Examples from major gifts:  
“People like me”

Josh Birkholz explains, “You need to be branded as the type of place that [other] ultra-high-net-worth donors give to. How do we do that? One of the key ways is to really go beyond just showing what your organization’s impact on the world is, but to actually demonstrate how specific donors have made a big impact on the world.”

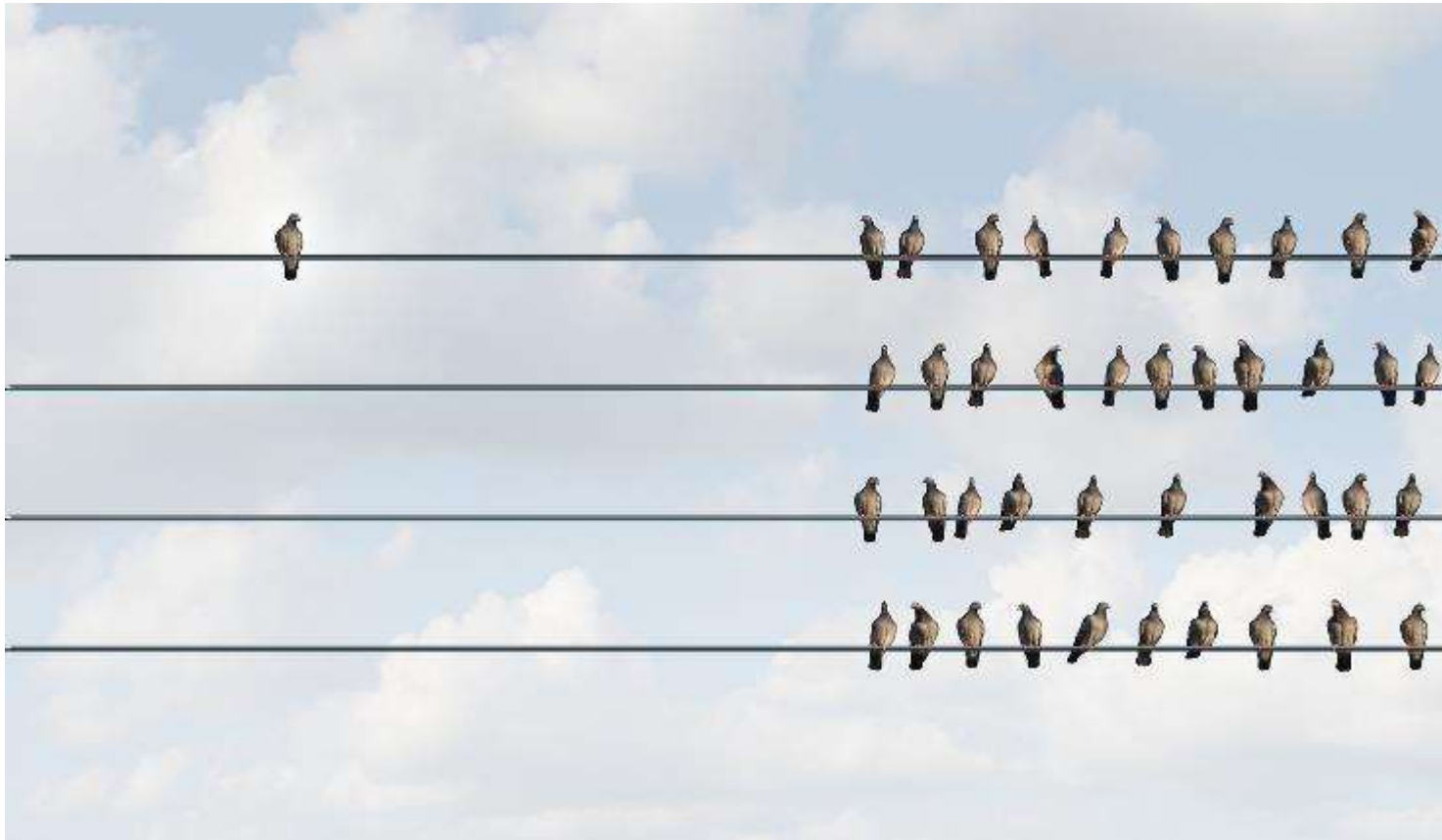


# Examples from major gifts: “People like me”

A study of ultra-high-net-worth donors found, “nearly 60% report collaborating with other funders”



# Examples from major gifts: “People like me”



In his interviews with mega gift donors, Jerald Panas shares, “People enjoy being part of ‘the club,’ being associated with prominent men and women who are giving to the same cause,” he says. And my interviewing bears this out. Very few donors enjoy the independent route...”

But what if you don't  
already have mega donors  
to use as examples?



Claire Gaudiani  
recommends using a  
historical example:

She begins with a phrase  
like, "You know, you  
remind me of ..."

The donor responds,  
"Who is that?"

Then, "Show how the  
vision of a major donor  
can transform an  
institution (Mary Garrett  
at Johns Hopkins) or an  
entire city (Ken Dayton in  
Minneapolis)"

“People like me make gifts like this”



It works in

- Lab experiments
- Field experiments
- Simple gifts
- Complex planned gifts
- Bequest gifts
- Small dollar gifts
- Major gifts



And most  
importantly, it  
works for people  
like you!





# Applications to legacy fundraising

People Like Me Make  
Gifts Things Like This!





Even more  
academic theory  
(about death)!

**Death is a problem.**



**Death is a problem.  
People use two solutions.**







Death is a problem.

People use two solutions.

1. Ignore the problem  
[*Avoidance*]



# Death is a problem.

## People use two solutions.

1. Ignore the problem  
[*Avoidance*]
2. Live on after death  
[*Symbolic immortality*]

In the tangible world, the only thing that survives to remember us is our family, our community, our group, a.k.a., our in-group

Both economic and psychological approaches predict that mortality reminders can lead to



1. Avoidance  
(initial and  
induced)



2. Pursuit of lasting social  
impact (“symbolic  
immortality”)



**Death reminders increase support for one's surviving community ("in-group")**



# Social approval by the community becomes more important in spending



In consumer purchase decisions, “when mortality is salient, people are more willing to act in concert with the opinions of others”

(Maheswaran and Agrawal, 2004, p. 214).

Mortality salience increased the desire for luxury products – Lexus car, Jaguar car, Rolex watch, famously expensive sweets – but not for products without such features – economy car, potato chips, or non-luxury brands (Heine, Harihara, & Niiya, 2002; Mandel & Heine, 1999; van Bommel, O'Dwyer, Zuidgeest, & Poletiek, 2015).

Mortality salience combined with reminders of pro-environmental social norms increased the desire for an environmentally-friendly vehicle, Toyota Prius, and an environmentally-friendly reusable cup while decreasing the desire for a less environmentally-friendly vehicle, Ford Expedition, and a less environmentally-friendly disposable cup (Fritzsche, Jonas, Kayser, & Koranyi, 2010).

# Death reminders increase attraction to positive remembrance

- Desire for fame (Greenberg, Kosloff, Solomon, et al., 2010)
- Interest in naming a star after one's self (ibid)
- Perception of one's past significance (Landau, Greenberg, & Sullivan, 2009)
- Likelihood of describing positive improvements when writing an autobiographical essay (Landau, Greenberg, Sullivan, et al, 2009)
- Perceived accuracy of a positive personality profile of one's self (Dechesne, Pyszczynski, Janssen, et al., 2003)



# A social norm default benefits from both reactions



1. Avoidance



2. Pursuit of lasting social impact ("symbolic immortality")

What is the most  
common response  
to an organ  
donation request?

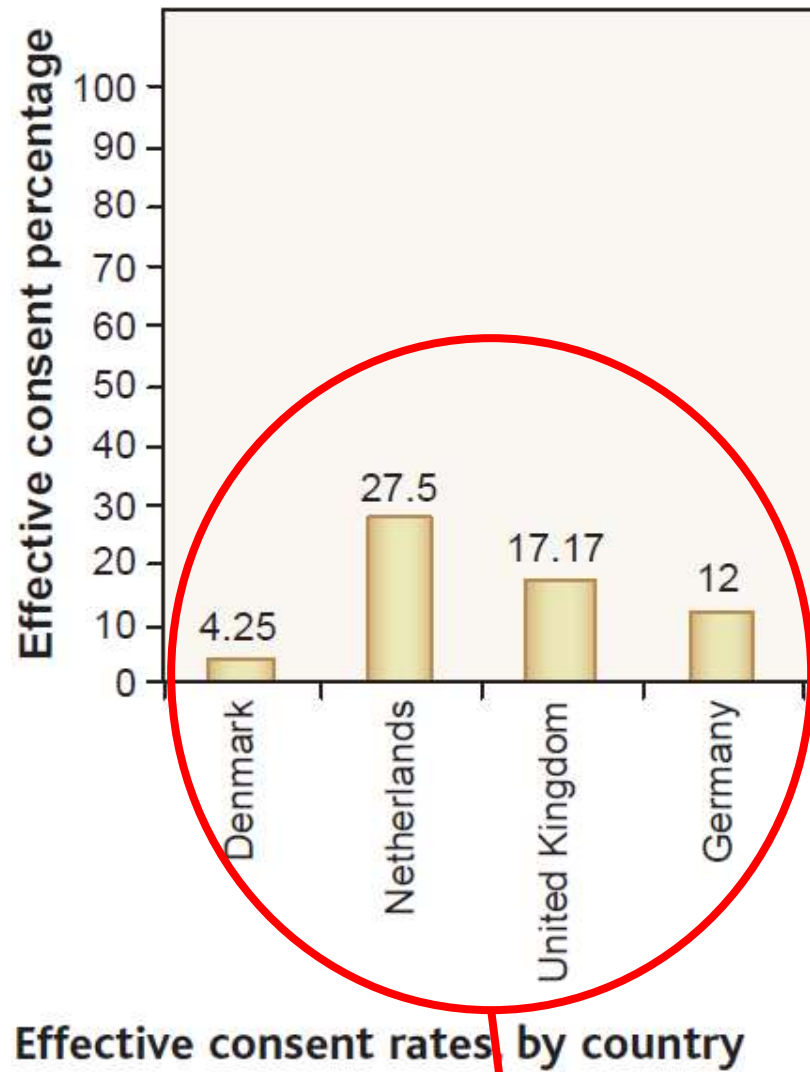
YES

NO

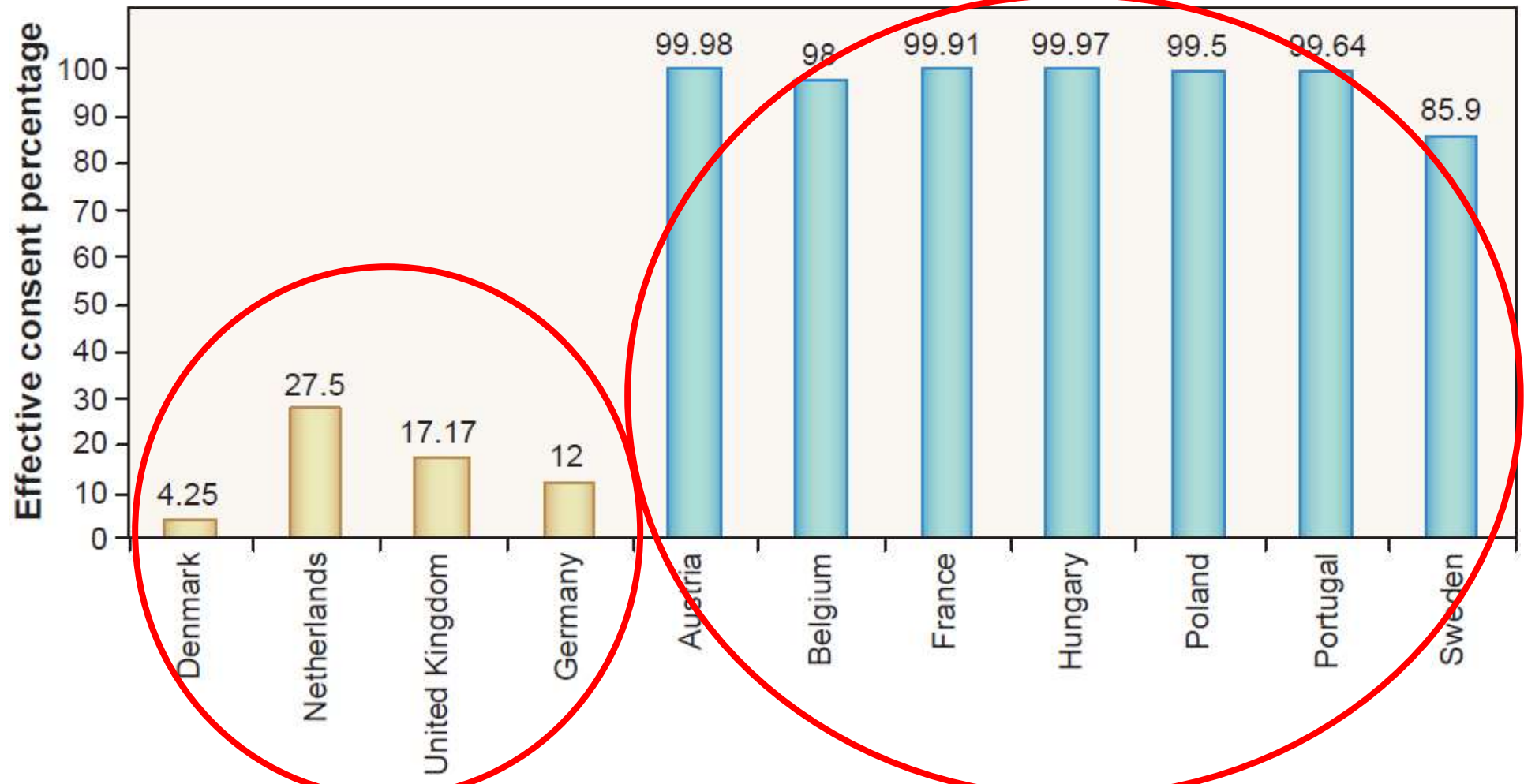
I don't want to  
think about it







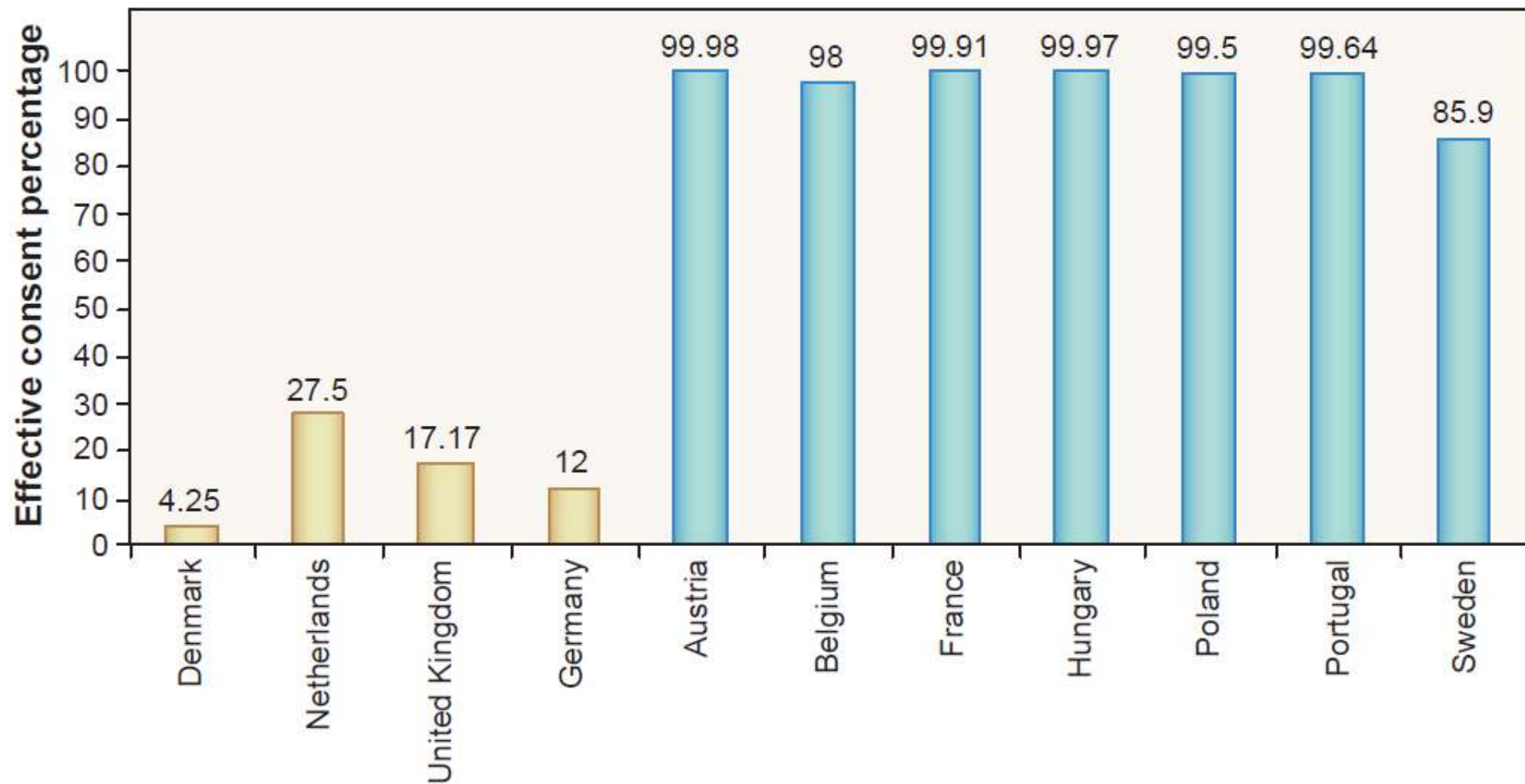
**No, people  
don't want to  
donate organs**



Effective consent rates by country.

**No, people  
don't want to  
donate organs**

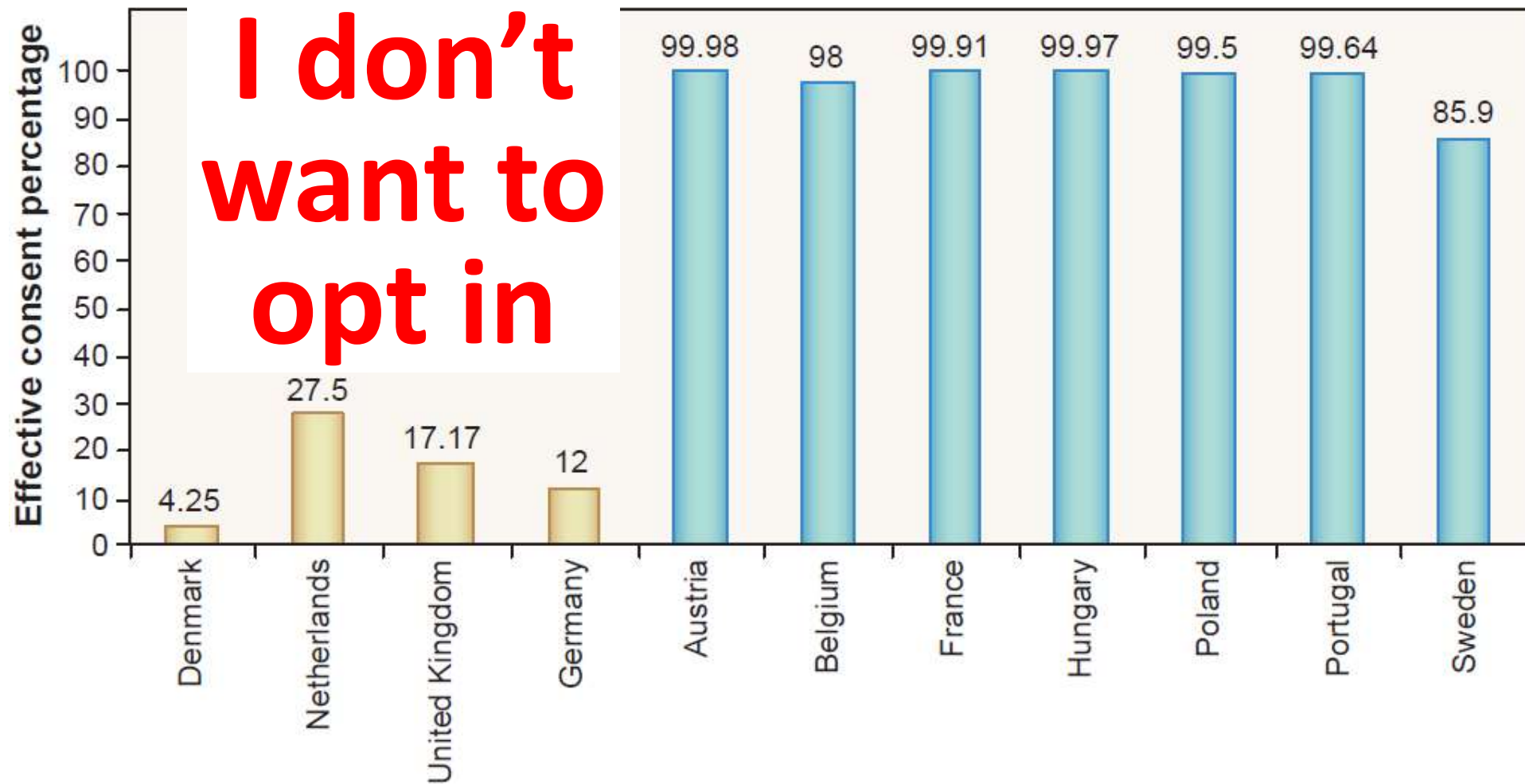
**Yes, people do  
want to donate  
organs**



Effective consent rates, by country.

“Opt-in”  
systems in Gold

“Opt-out”  
systems in Blue

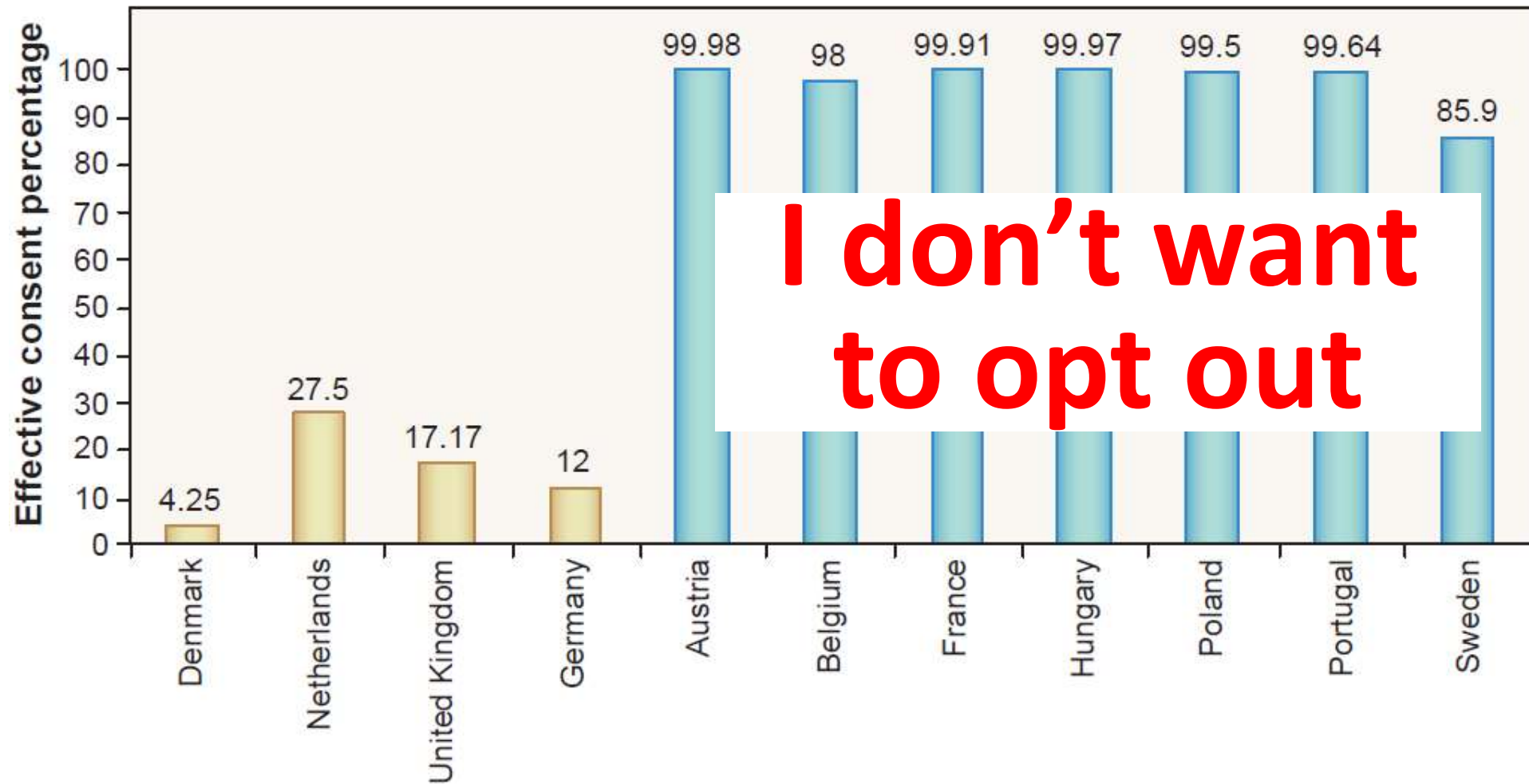


Effective consent rates, by country.

“Opt-in”  
systems in Gold

“Opt-out”  
systems in Blue

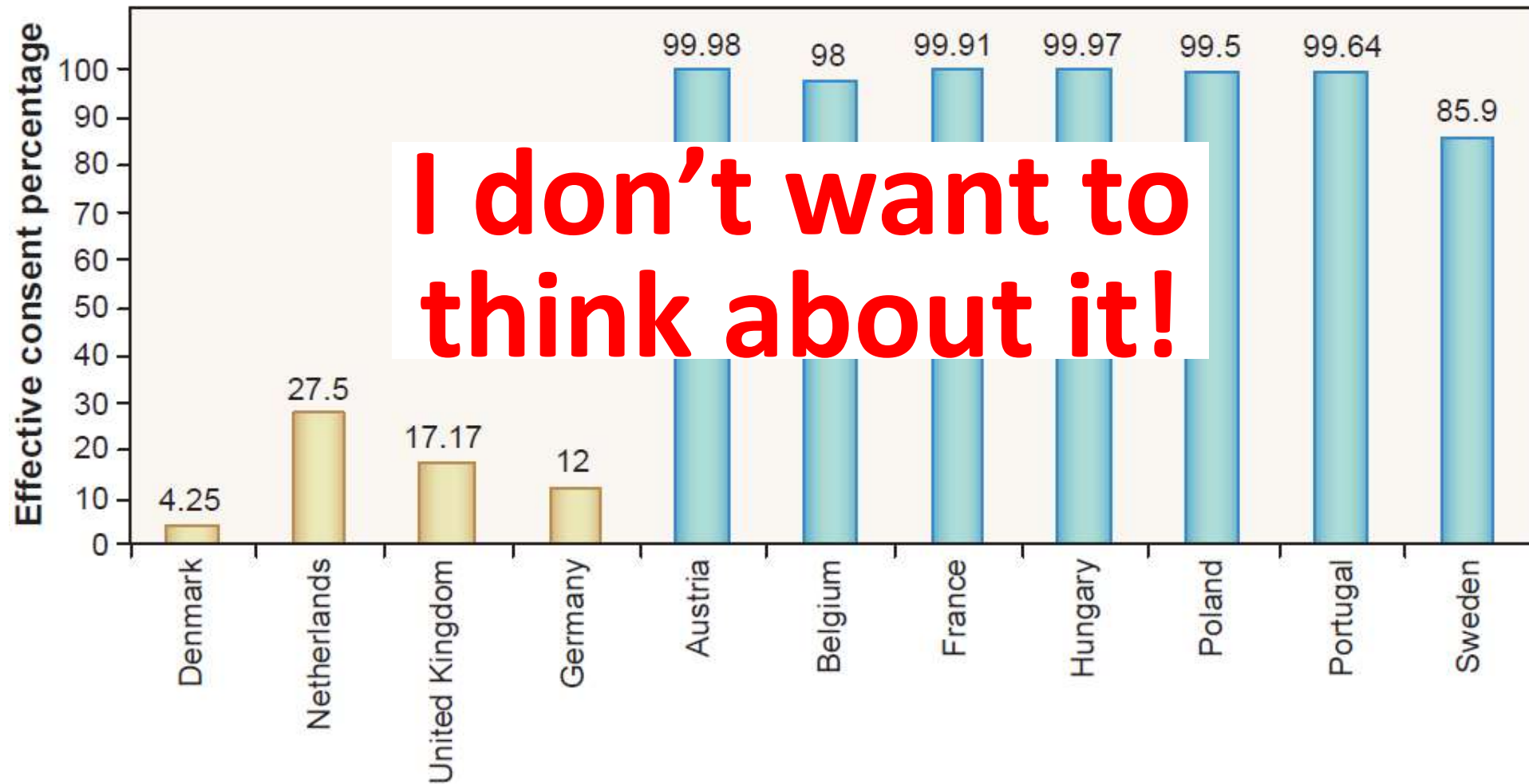




Effective consent rates, by country.

“Opt-in”  
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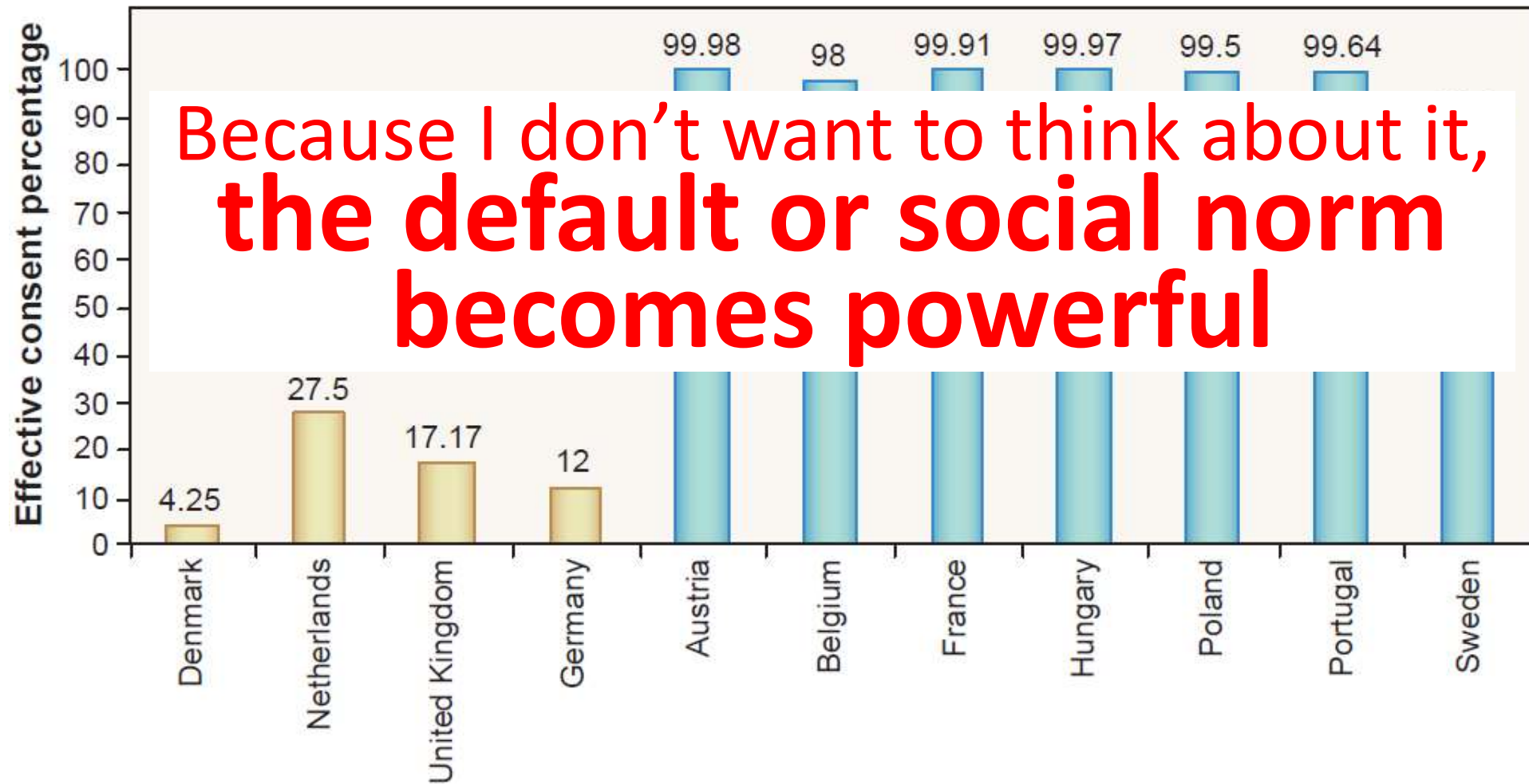
“Opt-out”  
systems in Blue



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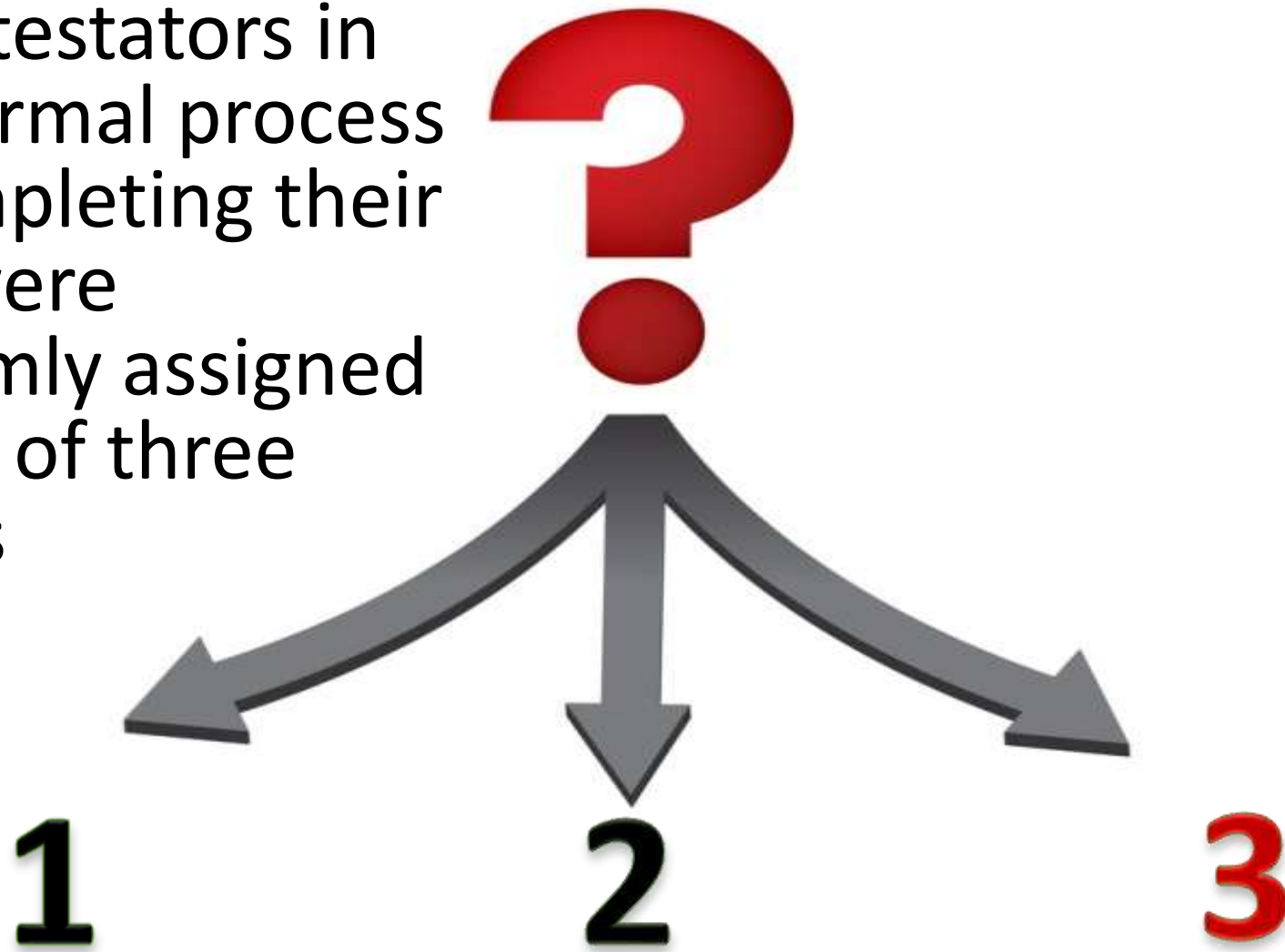
**Strategies: Present a social norm default**

**“Many of our customers like to...”**





3,000 testators in the normal process of completing their wills were randomly assigned to one of three groups

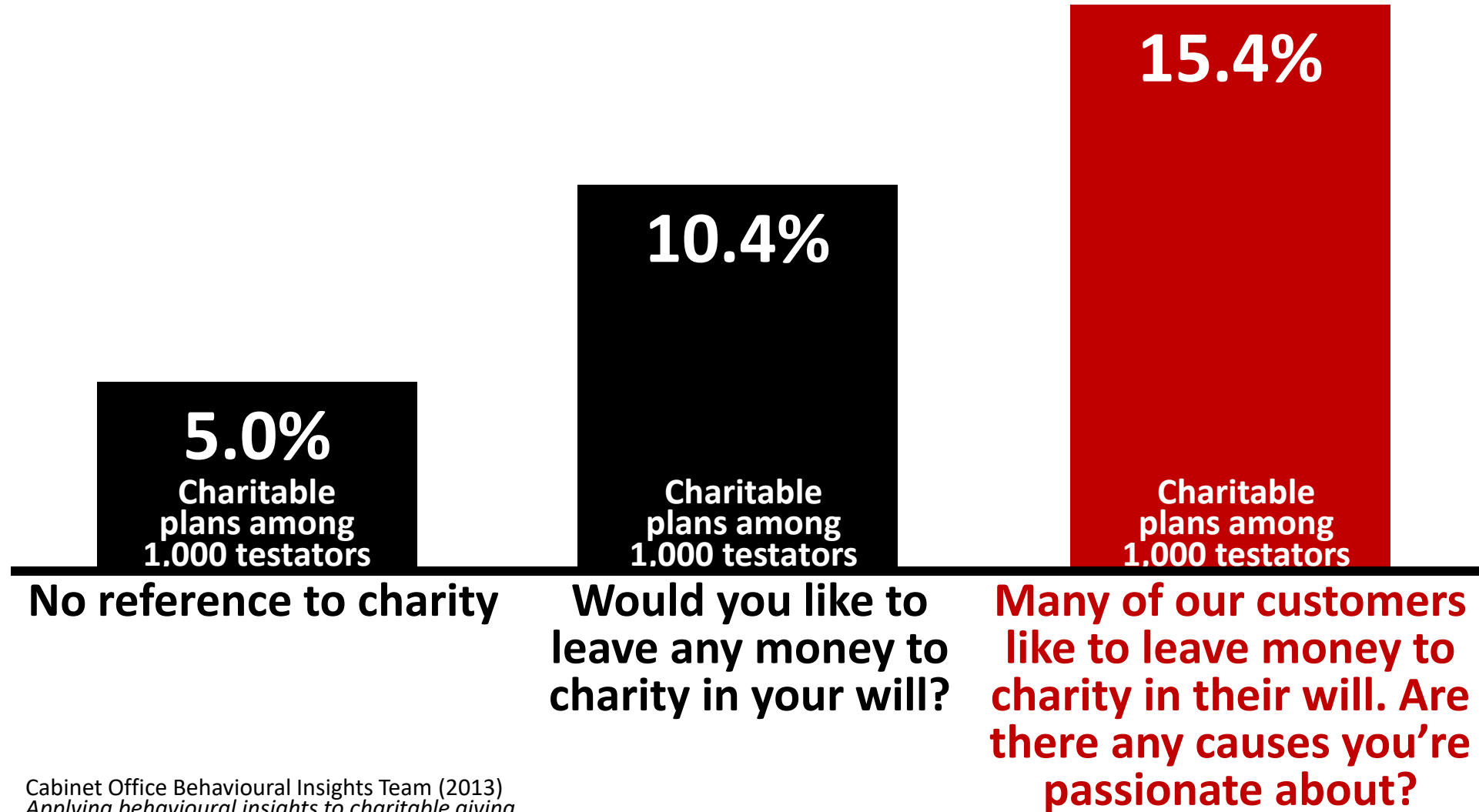


**No reference to charity**

**Would you like to leave any money to charity in your will?**

**Many of our customers like to leave money to charity in their will. Are there any causes you're passionate about?**

# Charitable bequests are influenced by a simple social example



# The social norm increased charitable bequest intentions

2014 Survey, 2,369 Respondents, Groups D/E/LateG+H

**Interested  
Now**

**Will Never  
Be  
Interested**

**31%**

Many people like to leave a gift to charity in their will. Are there any causes you would support in this way?

**9%**

**23%**

Make a gift to charity in my will

**12%**

**12%**

Make a **bequest** gift to charity

**14%**

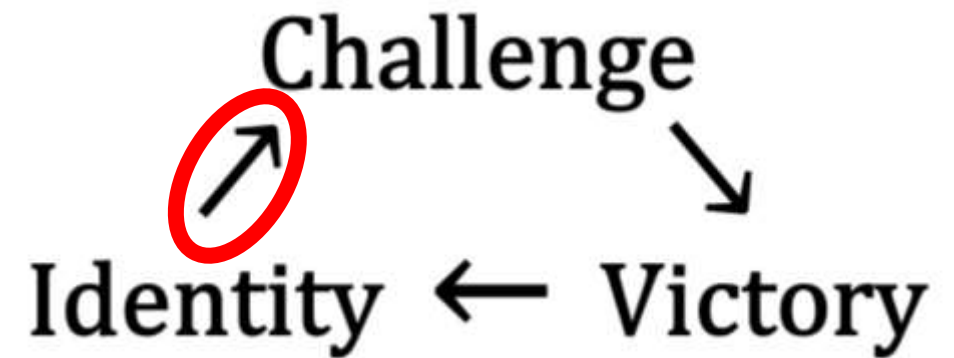
# Identity preface research: Your life story

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“Many people like to leave a gift to charity in their will.”

worked better as,

“Many people like to leave a gift to charity in their will because they care about causes that are important in their lives.”





# Medical end-of-life planning



In Hussein, R. & James, R. N., III. (2021). Encouraging living will completion using social norms and family benefit. Financial Services Review. 29(2), 85-99, The most effective phrasing addition to motivate completing an advance healthcare directive (living will) was

**“Many people like to have a living will because it can relieve family members of difficult decisions”**



The  
size/participation  
tradeoff in legacy  
giving

- Legacy giving is highly skewed: The bulk of the money comes from relatively few but extreme gifts.
- Maximizing legacy giving participation is a different goal than maximizing legacy giving revenue. These strategies are different and can conflict.

Results from  
U.S. statistics

The wealthy act  
differently

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It's about the wealthy

The gross estate category of more than \$50 million was first reported separately for returns filed in 2013.

In every year from 2013–2017, charitable decedents from this category, about 186 decedents annually, gave the majority of all charitable dollars reported on estate tax returns.





It's ALWAYS BEEN about the  
wealthy

For combined estate tax returns from 1916–1921, the share of total charitable giving coming from net estates of \$8 million or more (and the total number of all such estates) was 30.3% (and 35 estates). In 1922 it was 55.5% (from 16 estates).

# Wealthy people give to different places

As estate and gift sizes grow, charitable bequest dollars shift first from religious organizations to other public charities such as education/health organizations. (Religious giving propensity increases, but the gifts stay small.)

As wealth and gift sizes increase further, public charities gradually lose their bequest gifts to private foundations.





## Wealthy people are more generous with bequests

Among tax returns filed in 2013–2017, those with gross estates of \$50 million or more left the following gross estate shares to charity, 19%, 18%, 22%, 16%, and 19%, respectively.

For those with gross estates of \$20 to \$50 million, the charitable share was 8%, 10%, 10%, 10%, and 9%, in these years respectively.

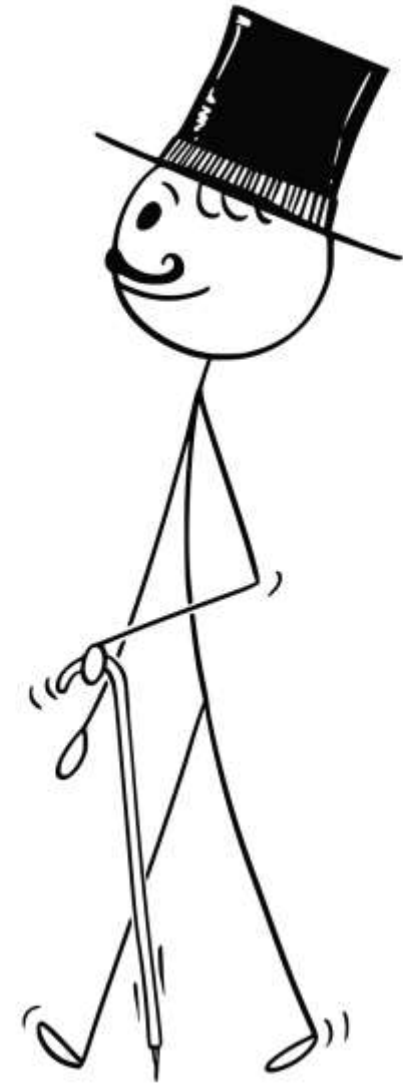
For those of \$10 million to \$20 million it was 7%, 8%, 7%, 6%, and 7%, respectively.

For those of \$5 million to \$10 million it was 5%, 5%, 5%, 4%, and 5%, respectively. And for those under \$5 million it was 2%, 3%, 2%, 3%, and 3%, respectively.

# Wealthy people are more generous with bequests

**1977 (observing 10.5% of U.S. decedents)**

<b>Gross estate</b>	<b>Share of estates to charity</b>	<b>Decedents making any gift</b>
\$60K to <\$100K	1.4%	8.5%
\$100K to <\$200K	1.8%	10.3%
\$200K to <\$300K	2.5%	14.1%
\$300K to <\$500K	2.9%	18.1%
\$500K to <\$1MM	3.8%	23.2%
\$1MM to <\$5MM	7.1%	34.1%
\$5MM to <\$10MM	10.7%	51.6%
\$10MM+	48.0%	76.0%





Wealthy people are more generous with bequest giving than current giving

Decedents in 2007 with estates under \$2 million, \$2 million to \$5 million, \$5 million to \$10 million, \$10 million to \$50 million, \$50 million to \$100 million, and more than \$100 million, produced estate gifts averaging 3.5 times, 20 times, 25 times, 28 times, 50 times, and 103 times, respectively, their average annual giving in the last five years prior to death.



Results from  
U.S. statistics

The outliers drive  
the dollars

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Welcome to the  
weird world of  
“Extremistan”

- There are no normal distributions here
- Only the outliers matter
- Typical bequest donors are financially irrelevant



# Lumpiness of transfers

In 1980 and 1981, the 5 largest donors accounted for 1% of national charitable bequests. In 1982, they accounted for 26.5%. (*Spoiler alert: J. Paul Getty died in 1982*)



Typical bequest donors are irrelevant



Among charitable decedents, the typical behavior is to leave less than 10% of the estate to charity.

Over 60% of charitable estate tax returns reported these typical donations for decedents dying in 2001 when the exemption amount was only \$675,000.

However, these typical charitable decedents were also financially irrelevant, transferring only 3.8% of total charitable bequest dollars.



# Typical bequest donors are irrelevant



Among both 2001 and 2014 decedents filing tax returns, those who left at least 90% of their wealth to charity gave more than 55% of total charitable bequest dollars, even though they constituted only about 10% of all donors

# Typical bequest donors are irrelevant

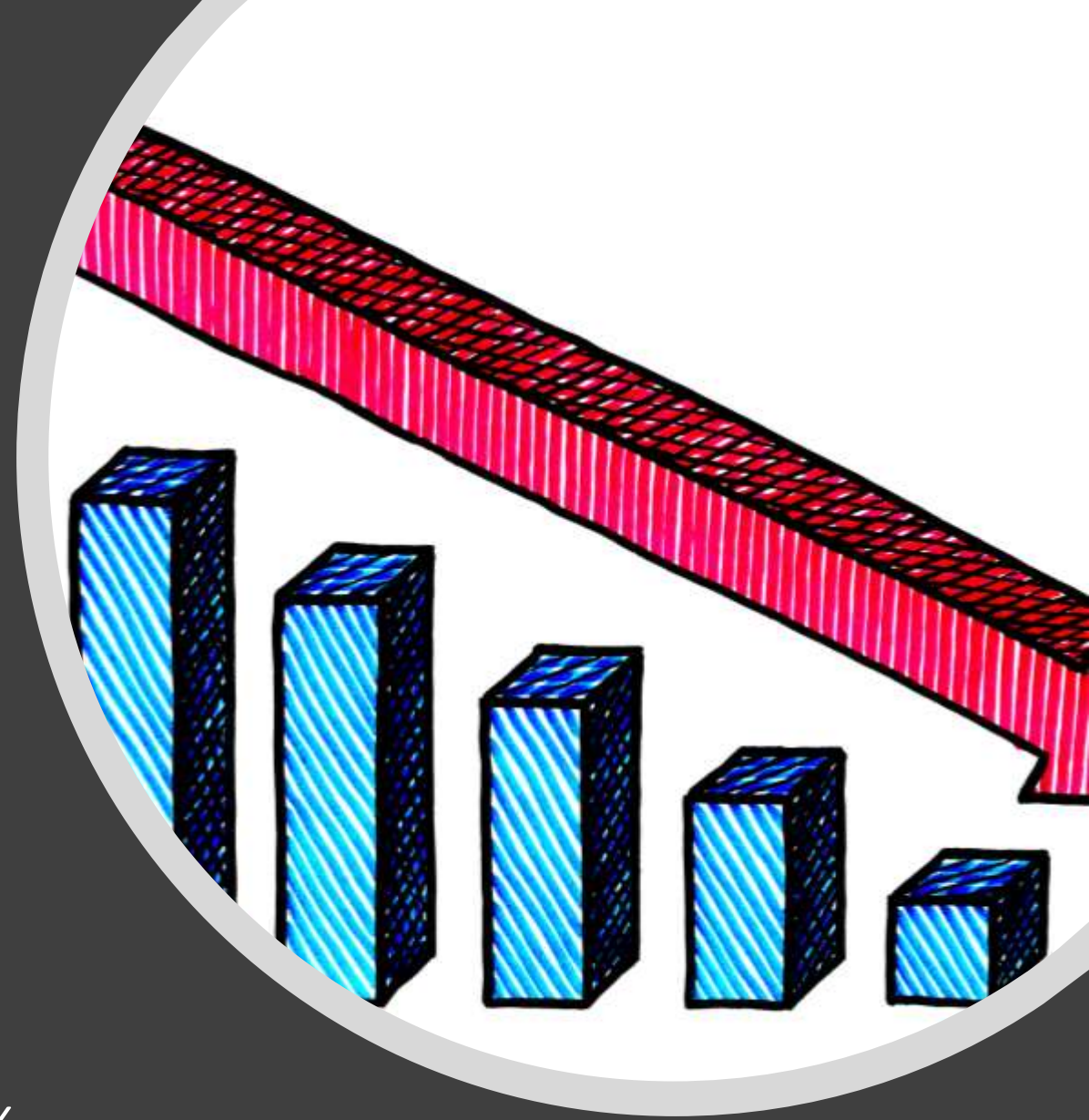


In 2003 estate tax returns (\$1MM estate tax exemption), the typical charitable decedent, representing about half of charitable estate tax returns, transferred less than \$100,000 to charity.

These typical charitable decedents were financially irrelevant, transferring only 1.1% of total charitable bequest dollars.

# Typical behavior is becoming even less important

- A smaller share of decedents are transferring a similar overall share of total wealth to charity
- From 1982 to 2014 decedents with wealth over \$10 million (in 2014 inflation-adjusted dollars) had a small, non-significant annual increase in the share of wealth being left to charity, but a significant decrease in the propensity to include any charitable gift
- The propensity to leave any charitable bequest from these wealthy estates dropped from 41.9% and 44.8% in 1982 and 1983, respectively to 32.6% and 32.7% in 2012 and 2013, respectively



Results from  
U.S. statistics

The money come  
from the oldest old

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It's about the old

Decedents age 75 or older transferred 83% of charitable estate dollars with decedents under age 65 contributing only about 4%

# It's INCREASINGLY about the old

Older decedents are constituting an increasingly large share of all charitable bequest donors.

Among returns filed in 1963, 1970, 1973, 1977, 1983, 1987, 1990, and for 2003 decedents, those aged 75 and older made up 65%, 70%, 72%, 71%, 77%, 81%, 83%, and 83% of all charitable bequest donors, respectively,

Those under 65 constituted 13%, 9%, 8%, 10%, 7%, 5%, and 6% of all donors, respectively.



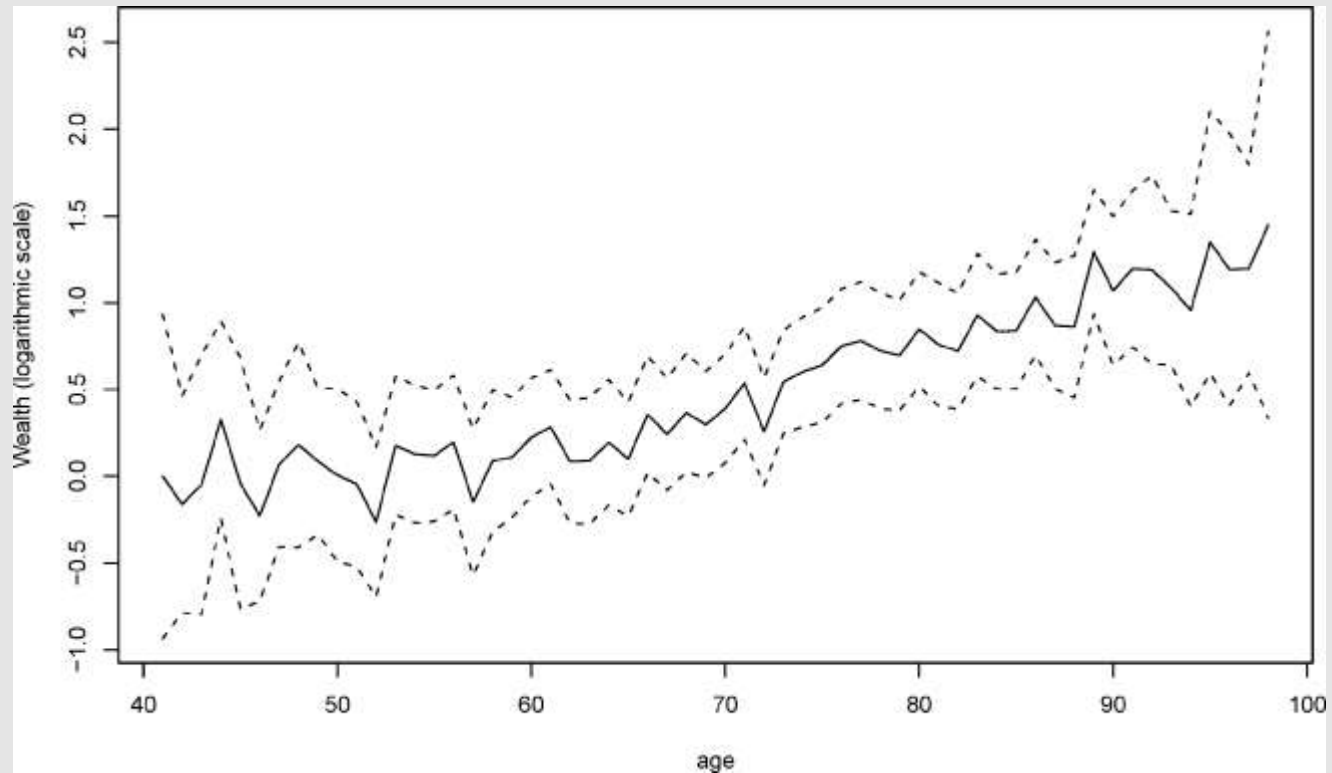
# It's about the old

Decedents aged 80 and older contributed 68%, 70%, and 77% of all charitable dollars among decedents in 1986, 1992, and 1995, respectively. Decedents under age 50 contributed only 0.9% and 0.4% of all charitable dollars in 1992 in 1995, respectively.

For returns filed in 2003, most charitable dollars (55%) came from decedents over age 85, while those under 65 contributed only 4.3%.



# It's about the old



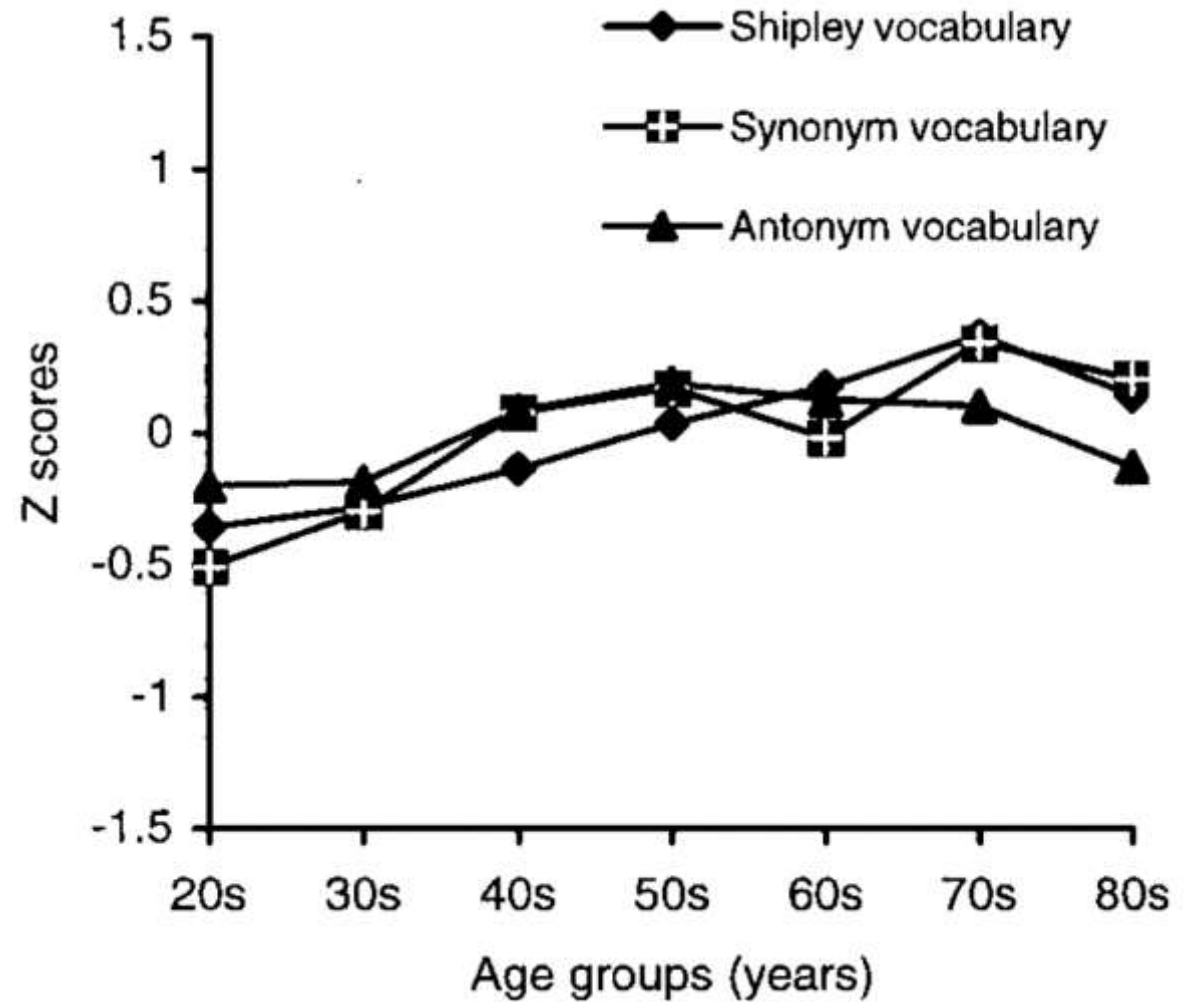
Wojciech Kopczuk, *Bequest and Tax Planning: Evidence from Estate Tax Returns*, 122 THE Q.J. ECON. 1801 (2007)

Wealth among those filing estate tax returns increases with every year of age, even up to age 98



Keep it simple.  
Keep it story.

Although  
numerical ability  
declines strongly  
with age, verbal  
knowledge is  
retained more  
strongly



Results from  
U.S. statistics

Decisions change  
near the end of life

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# Charitable plans change with age

For the age categories under 21, 21 to 35, 35 to 45, 45 to 55, 55 to 65, 65 to 75, 75 to 85, and over 85, the share of decedents leaving any gifts to charity (among estate tax returns filed in 2003) was 0%, 3.7%, 5.0%, 6.2%, 8.3%, 11.4%, 15.5%, and 29.7%, respectively





## Charitable plans change with age

Similarly, among 1995 decedents in their 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90+, the share leaving any gift to charity was 6%, 8%, 12%, 21%, and 38%, respectively



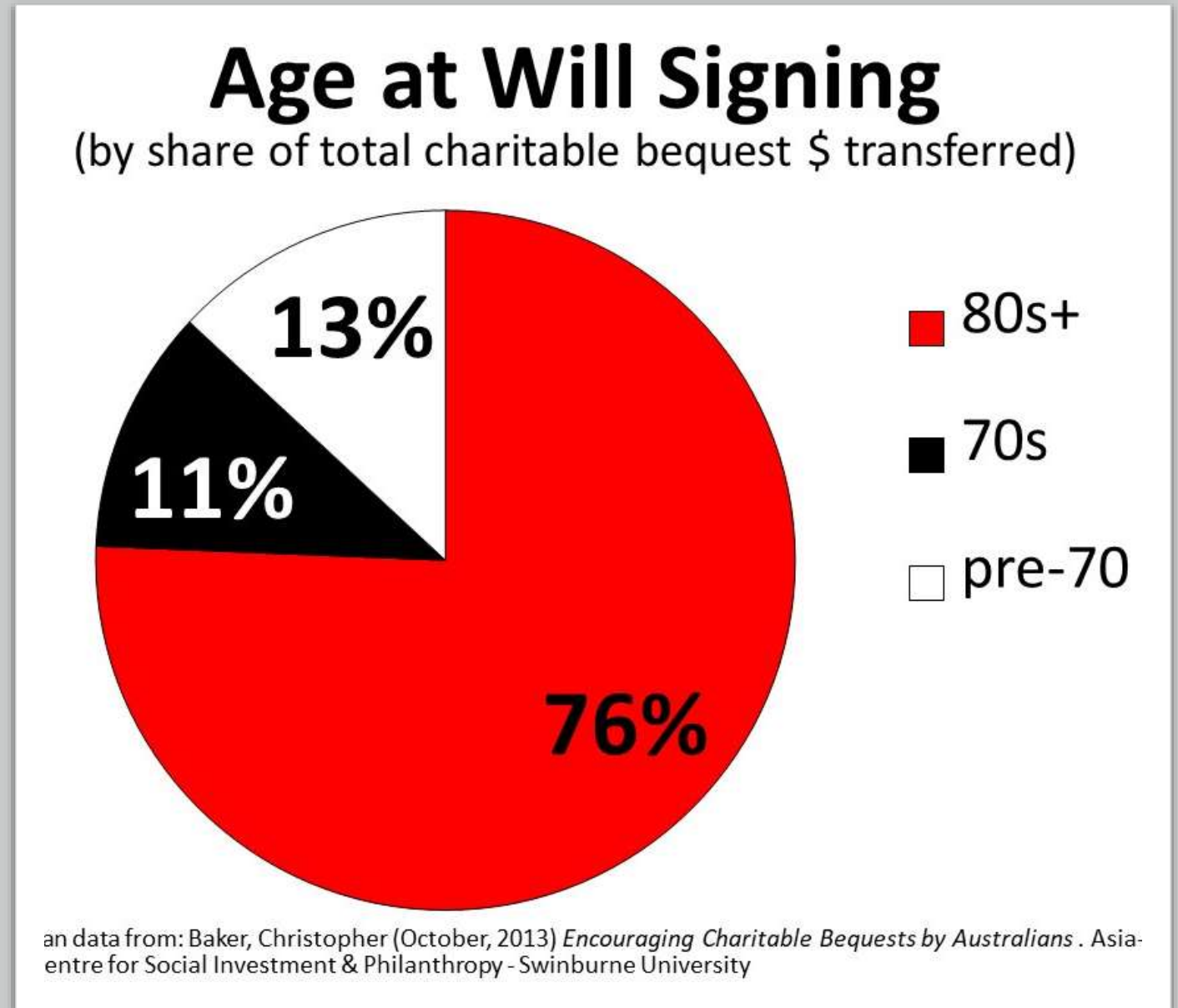
# Charitable plans have always changed with age

For tax returns filed from 1916–1945, in the age categories under 60, 60s, 70s, and 80 and above, the share of decedents leaving gifts to charity was 9.8%, 15.0%, 19.8%, and 24.2%, respectively



It's about decisions made near the end of life

A national sample of Australian wills found that 76% of charitable bequest dollars were controlled by will documents signed at age 80 or older.





It's about decisions made  
near the end of life

In the U.S., 61% of  
charitable  
decedents  
indicated having no  
charitable estate  
component at  
some point within  
the last five years  
of their lives.



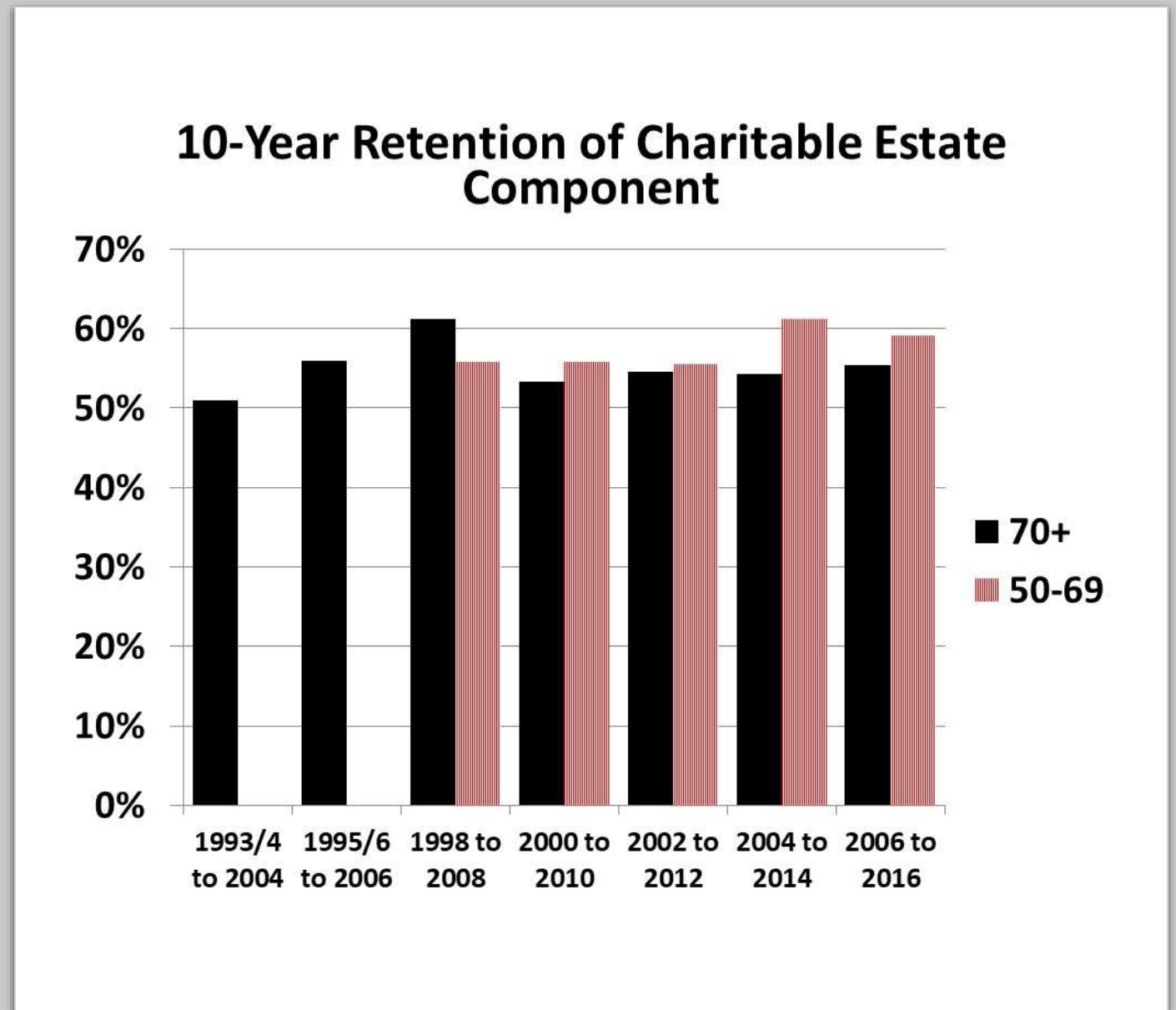


It's about decisions made  
near the end of life

Similarly, in 2012, data from 12,238 decedents in the U.S. Health and Retirement study, 40% of decedents whose estates transferred gifts to charity indicated within 2 years of death that they, at that time, had no charitable component in their estate plan.

It's about  
decisions made  
near the end of  
life

Among older living  
adults, only about  
55% of charitable  
estate components  
remain in the estate  
plan for at least ten  
years





# It's about decisions made near the end of life



- Additionally, in a national sample of probate records in Australia from 2012, the average time between will execution and death was 10 years for non-charitable wills and 5.6 years for charitable wills.
- In this national sample, over a quarter of charitable wills were signed within 1 year of death, and most were signed within four years of death.

	Years prior to death								
	0-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	17-18
<u>Charitable Bequest Decedents</u>									
Donate \$1,000+/Year	39.3%	39.7%	43.6%	49.1%	52.7%	53.4%	53.3%	53.9%	56.9%
Volunteer 2+ Hours/Week	10.6%	15.4%	16.1%	21.0%	26.4%	26.1%	26.4%	31.7%	37.0%
20-Word Recall Score	7.26	7.98	8.52	8.85	9.05	9.71	10.17	10.61	10.49
<u>Non-Charitable Bequest Decedents</u>									
Donate \$1,000+/Year	16.5%	19.1%	20.5%	22.5%	23.4%	24.8%	25.2%	27.0%	27.8%
Volunteer 2+ Hours/Week	5.0%	7.0%	9.3%	10.5%	12.7%	13.4%	14.3%	15.5%	15.9%
20-Word Recall Score	7.13	7.38	7.84	8.25	8.71	9.02	9.40	9.68	10.04

Results from  
U.S. statistics

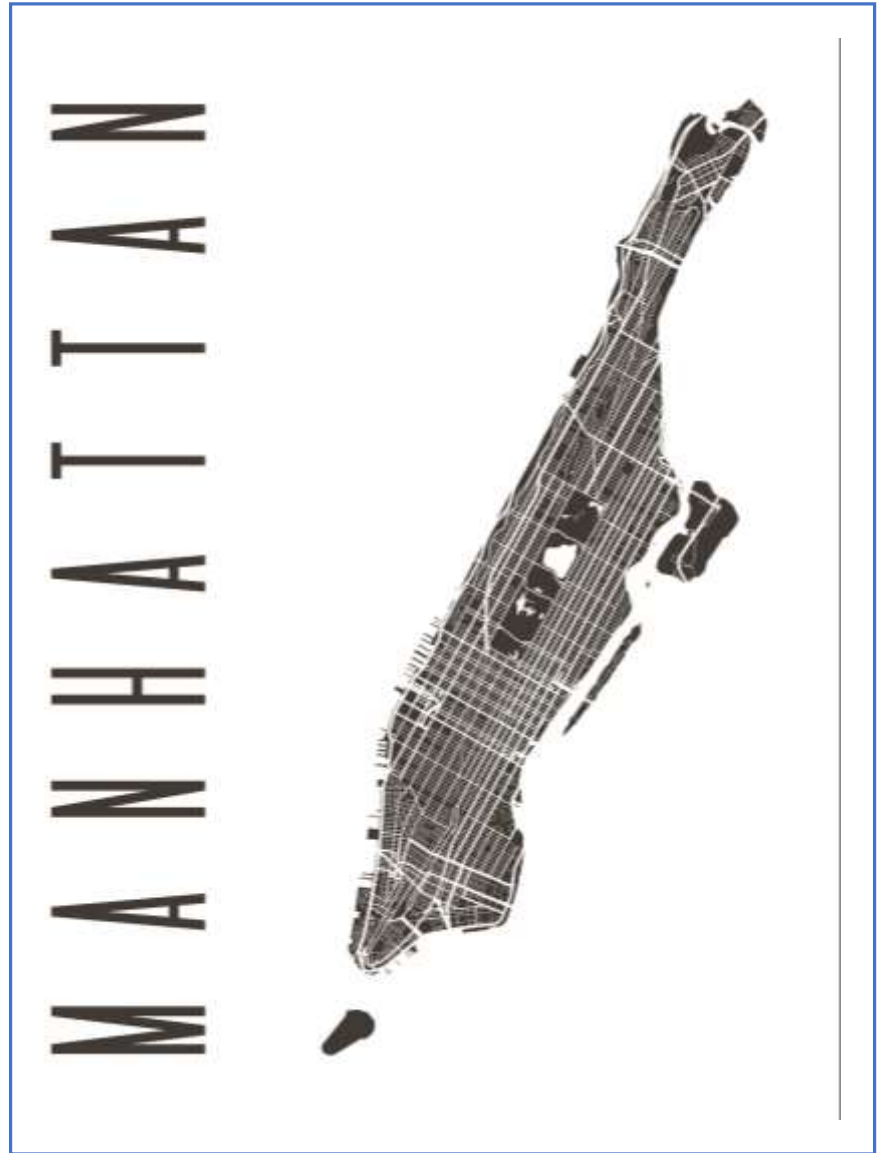
It's about the  
childless

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# It's about the childless

Among all 1,656 wills filed in Manhattan from 1638 to 1755 (with the first recorded under Dutch rule in the New Amsterdam court registers from 1638–1664), 5.7% left charitable bequests.

**About two-thirds of these donors were childless.**





# It's about the childless

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A study of wills from Bucks County, PA from the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s found childless decedents constituted 58% of a charitable donors (but less than a quarter of decedents)





# It's about the childless

A study of wills from  
Washtenaw County,  
Michigan in 1963,  
found among those  
leave 10%+ of estate  
to charity 70% were  
from unmarried  
childless decedents







It's about the childless (HRS)

In 2016, among living adults age 55+ childless individuals represented 8.8% of testate individuals and 25.7% of charitable testate individuals.

In decedents from the 1995-2006 HRS, only 9.75% (581 of 5,957) were childless, but these childless decedents accounted for 51.86% of all charitable dollars transferred (\$26,057,269 of \$50,244,418).

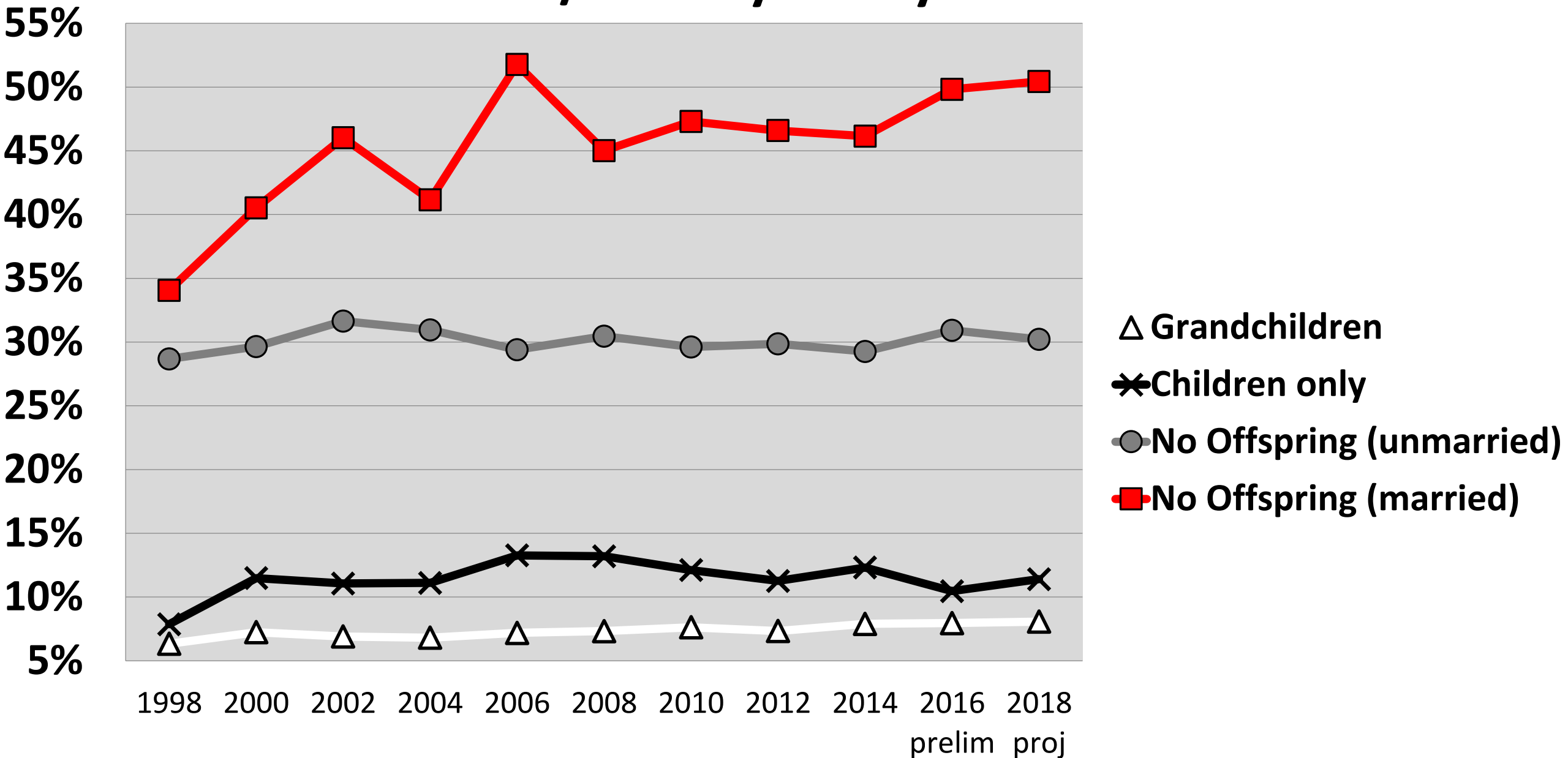
# Childless older adults give more during life and much more at death

Table 3  
Estate Giving for Deceased Panel Members in 1995–2006  
Health and Retirement Study by Offspring

Offspring	Last Annual Volunteer Hours	Annual Giving	Estate Gift	Estate Gift Multiple
No children	32.6 (6.6)	\$3,576 (2,073)	\$44,849 (24,128)	12.54
Children only	25.4 (7.1)	\$1,316 (229)	\$6,147 (2,177)	4.67
Grandchildren	23.2 (2.1)	\$1,497 (199)	\$4,320 (783)	2.89
Total	24.3 (1.8)	\$1,691 (269)	\$8,582 (2,609)	5.07

Note:  $N = 5,957$ . Table reports weighted means with complex sampling adjusted standard errors in parentheses.

# Age 55+ charitable recipient among those with will/trust by family status

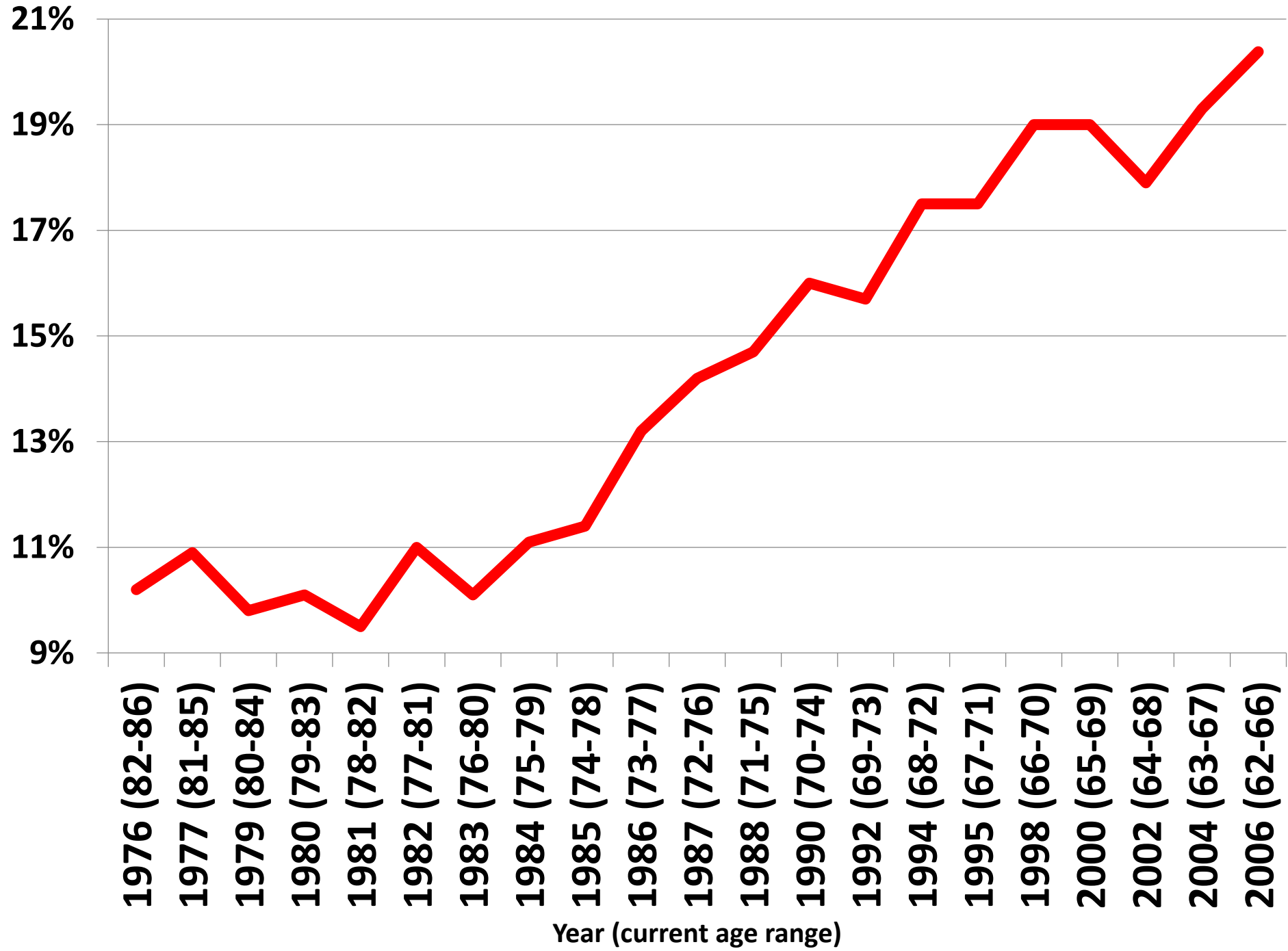




# Percentage of U.S. women who were childless

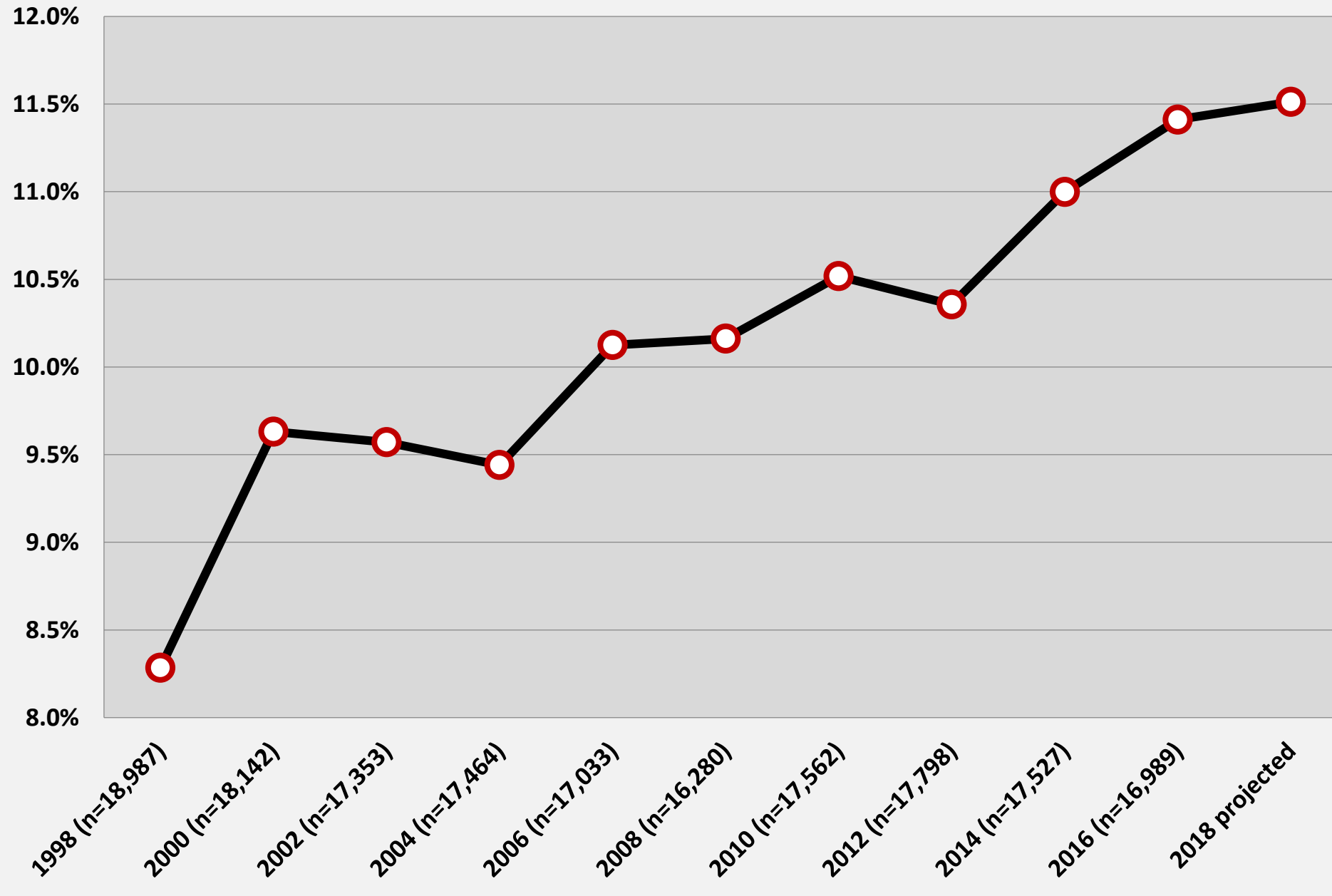
(measured at age 40-44 showing year of measurement and current age range)

**We can predict future trends**



# Charitable beneficiary reported among those aged 55+ with a will or trust document

We can see trends before they impacts post-mortem transfers



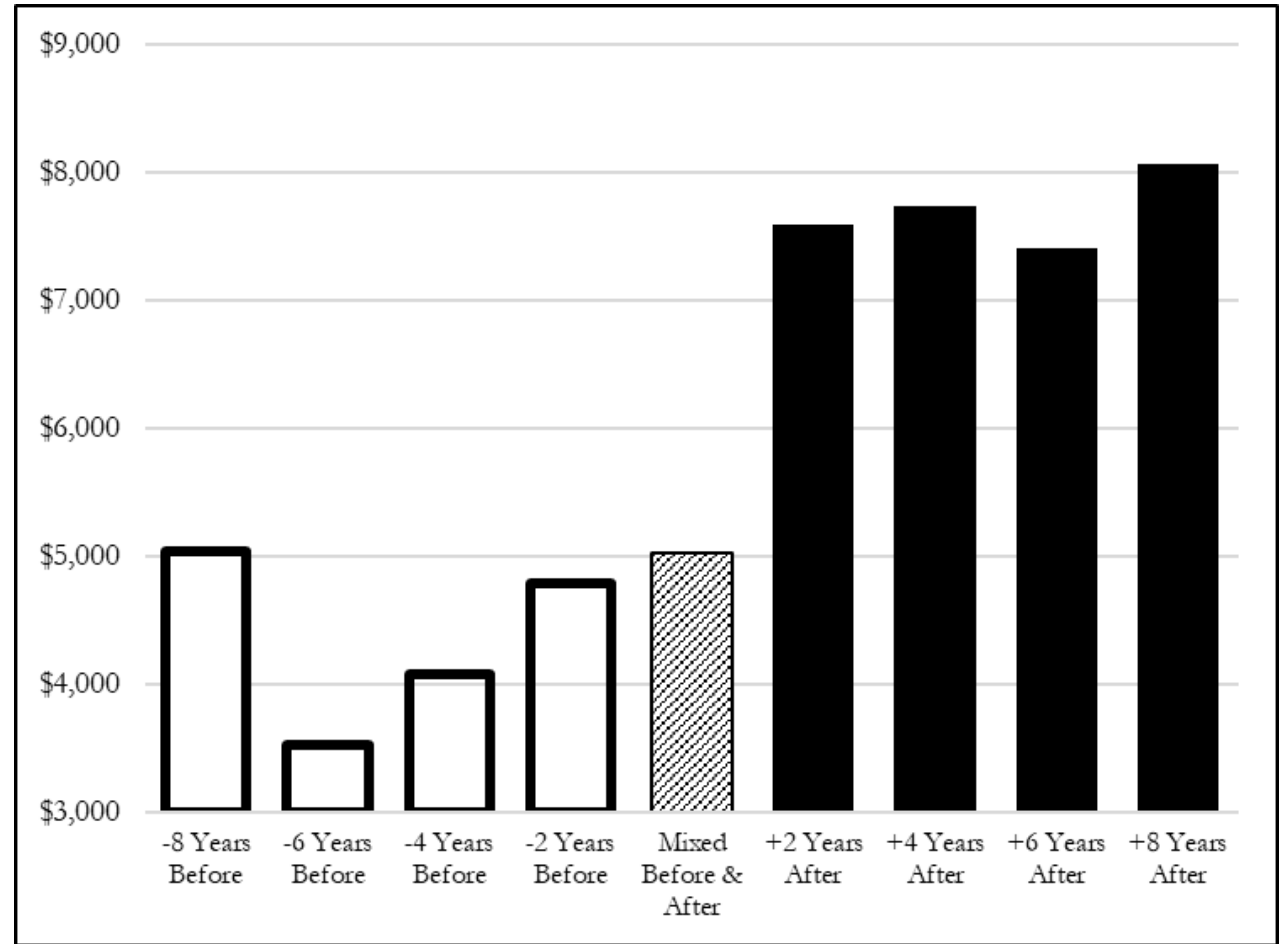
Results from  
U.S. statistics

Current giving  
increases after  
planning

# Current giving increases after planning

Among those age 55+ who added charity to their estate plan, their annual charitable giving (in inflation-adjusted dollars)

Thus, in these 8,891 “before and after” observations from 1993-2016, inflation-adjusted giving was, on average, about 77% greater after the charitable estate planning component was added than it was before (\$7,699 vs. \$4,355).





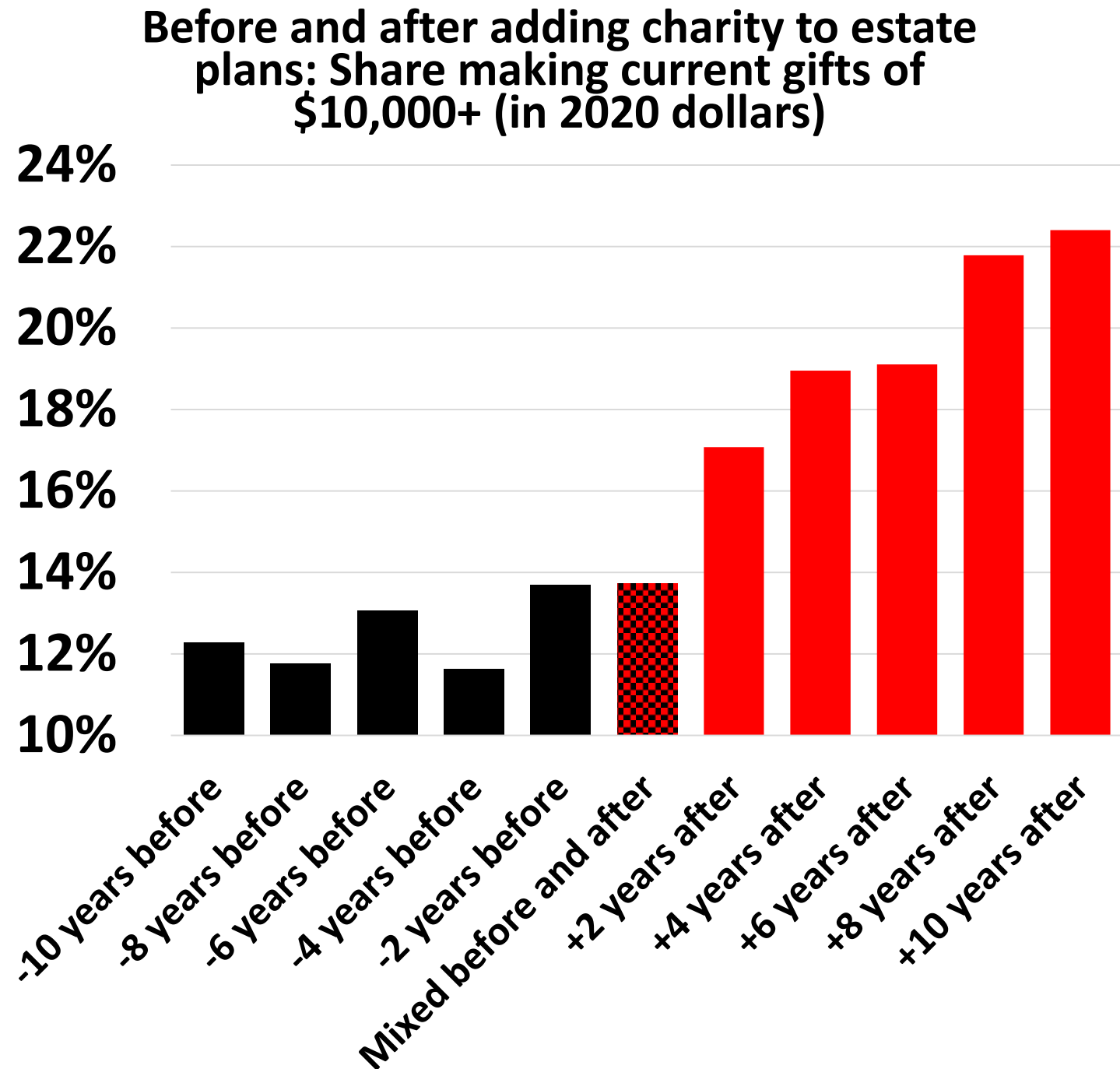


Current giving increases  
after planning

The propensity to make inflation-adjusted gifts of \$1,000 or more rose from 51.5% in the years before the charitable component was added to the estate plan to 61.8% in the years after the charitable component was added to the estate plan.

Normally the propensity to donate begins to decline at around age 65 to 75, but the median age for those measured here was about age 75.

Major giving  
propensity  
increases  
after  
including  
charity in  
the estate  
plan





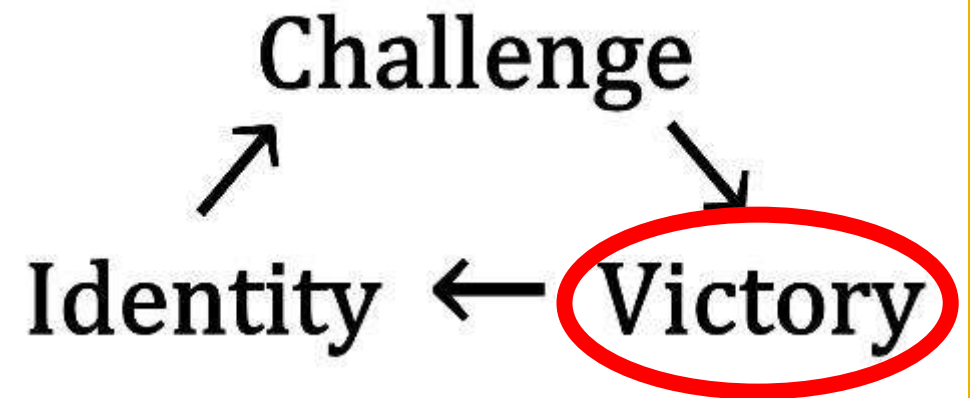
Beyond participation rate  
vs. amount: The two-stage  
approach

The initial gift simply begins a  
process.

- We must continue that  
relationship or risk losing the  
gift anyway
- We can increase the size and  
certainty of the gift when it  
accomplishes something  
specific

# Victory preface examples: Define a victory

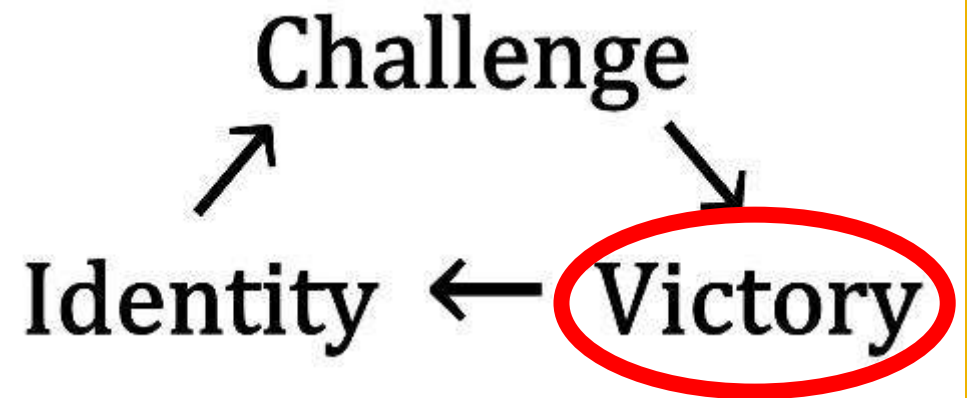
- “Tell me, ‘What you would like to accomplish with your gift?’”
- “Have you ever thought about how you would like your gift to be used?”





# Define a victory by sharing a story

- “The reason I ask is this. I was working with another donor; you remind me of him. You both have a real heart for this cause.” *[Identity]*
- “He decided to create a permanent endowment for a scholarship / lectureship / professorship / our \_\_\_ operations. It will ... [describe the impact].” *[Victory]*
- “This will come from a \$\_\_\_ gift in his will. Would that type of gift appeal to you?” *[Challenge]*



# Large gifts HAVE ALWAYS come with lots of instructions

In two studies of wills from the 1800s, charitable bequests were restricted in

- 14% of small cash gifts
- 58% of real estate or large cash gifts
- 70% of gifts of a share of the entire estate

James III, R. N. (2020). American Charitable Bequest Transfers across the Centuries: Empirical Findings and Implications for Policy and Practice. *Estate Planning & Community Property Law Journal*, 12, 235-285.

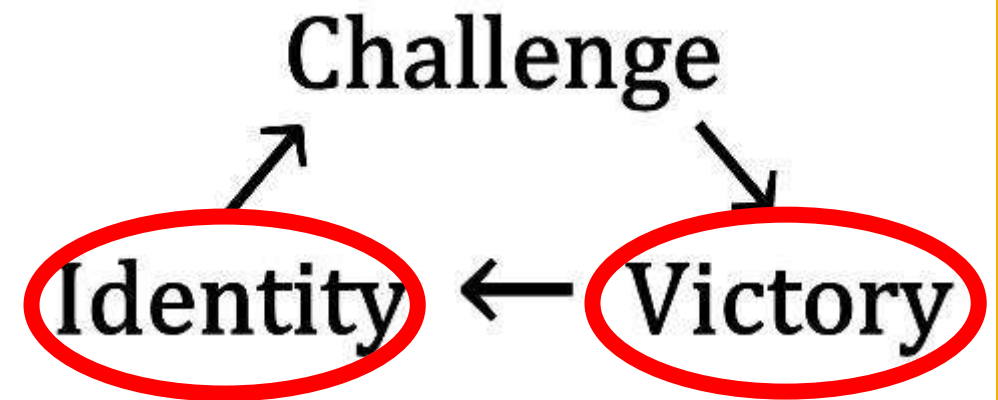


# Identity vs. Victory:

## Define a victory

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- The identity preface works to get a bequest gift
- The donor includes the charity because of the donor's people, values, and history
- But it doesn't give a reason for making a gift of a specific SIZE



# Victory: External competition in the U.S.

The most powerful permanent expression of identity is the private family foundation

- Lives forever
- Follows the donor's values and rules forever
- Named for the donor or donor's family

For estates over \$5 million, 78% of charitable bequest dollars go to private family foundations





# Social Norms in Major, Annual, and Legacy Gifts Fundraising

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How Examples Motivate  
Generosity

