

CHARITABLE GIVING  
AROUND THE 2016 ELECTION:  
*Does Gender Matter?*



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**IUPUI WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY INSTITUTE**  
LILLY FAMILY SCHOOL OF PHILANTHROPY

RESEARCH THAT GROWS WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY

## Researched and written by:

### Women's Philanthropy Institute

The Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) is part of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. WPI increases understanding of women's philanthropy through rigorous research and education, interpreting and sharing these insights broadly to improve philanthropy. Learn more at <https://philanthropy.iupui.edu/WPI>.

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## Highlights

The 2016 U.S. presidential election was contentious and polarizing. For the first time, a woman was the presidential candidate of a major political party. Nearly \$2.4 billion was raised for the two major party presidential campaigns.<sup>1</sup> Americans voted with their wallets by contributing to the campaigns, or to associated Super PACs and political parties – and then they voted by ballot on November 8, 2016.

As election results were tallied and announced, some nonprofit organizations and causes began to report substantial fundraising increases.<sup>2</sup> The popular media began to refer to “rage giving” – the concept of donors giving to charity in response to election results, often to causes that had been debated during the campaign such as minority rights, reproductive rights, and climate change.<sup>3</sup>

While this anecdotal increase in giving after the election appeared in media articles, little research exists to confirm this trend. This study aims to provide insights on donations during the unique time period around the 2016 U.S. presidential election, using gift data from an online donation platform. Did giving to charitable organizations increase after the election? What causes benefited from post-election philanthropy?

This study also seeks to understand whether there were gender differences in giving around the 2016 U.S. presidential election. More than a decade of research from the Women’s Philanthropy Institute has confirmed that women and men exhibit different patterns of giving and are motivated to give by different factors.<sup>4</sup> Given that gender played a key role in the election – having a female candidate from a major political party, as well as key women’s issues being raised as divisive political topics during the campaign – does gender also impact giving after the election?

## Key Findings

1. Charitable giving was lower than expected immediately following the 2016 election.
2. Lower charitable giving after the 2016 election was concentrated among men; women’s giving did not experience the same election effect.
3. Charitable giving after the 2016 election increased significantly for relevant progressive charities.
4. The increase in charitable giving to relevant progressive charities after the 2016 election was driven primarily by women donors.



## Background

### *Political and Charitable Giving*

There is a long history of giving time and resources to charity in the United States. In 2017, Americans gave more than \$410 billion to charity – and nearly 80 percent came from individuals.<sup>5</sup> Long-running studies show that a majority of American households give to charity – 56 percent in 2014, with the average donor household giving around \$2,500.<sup>6</sup>

Giving time and financial resources to political candidates – or to influence political outcomes – is done by a smaller proportion of Americans. But the segment of the population that gives politically is growing, doubling over the last 25 years, from 6 to 12 percent.<sup>7</sup> During the 2016 presidential election campaign, the two main candidates raised a combined \$2.4 billion.<sup>8</sup> And individual donors played a large part, contributing 71 percent of Hillary Clinton's and 40 percent of Donald Trump's fundraising totals.<sup>9</sup> While there are few studies that link charitable giving and political giving, one study indicates that 24 percent of high net worth households gave or planned to give to a political candidate or campaign during the 2016 election season.<sup>10</sup> Charitable and political giving differ in many ways – in particular, giving to charitable 501(c)(3) organizations is tax-deductible; giving to political candidates or campaigns is not.

There is little scholarly research that explicitly links charitable and political giving; the studies that do so primarily discuss motivations for giving to one or the other.<sup>11</sup> A large body of literature explains why people might give to charity. For example, they might give out of pure altruism, or out of more selfish motives such as prestige, social pressure, or simply because giving feels good.<sup>12</sup> The political science literature adds to these ideas to suggest why people give to political candidates or campaigns. First, they may give to politics as a way of participating in the political process.<sup>13</sup> Second, they may give in order to affect policy outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

One of the only reports to examine how charitable and political giving behaviors may be linked comes from the Blackbaud Institute and examines the organizations that political and non-political donors support.<sup>15</sup> The study found that in the year leading up to the 2012 general election, political donors increased giving to a number of subsectors but decreased giving to health-related causes. Non-political donors, on the other hand, increased their giving to public and society benefit and human services, decreasing their giving to several other types of causes. Another 2012 study from Giving USA analyzed the characteristics of households that give to charity, politics, or both; however, the report did not address the role of gender or the actual election cycle.<sup>16</sup>

## *The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election*

In terms of gender, men are generally more likely than women to donate to political candidates or campaigns.<sup>17</sup> However, given that 2016 was the first time a woman was a major party's presidential candidate, this may not apply during the most recent presidential election. 2016 exit polls showed that women voters supported Clinton over Trump by 54 percent to 42 percent, a 12-point margin.<sup>18</sup> Men voters had the same margin, favoring Trump over Clinton (53 percent to 41 percent). The 2016 gender gap in presidential voting was among the widest in exit polls in recent decades.

For a long time it was thought that there was no relationship between political and charitable giving. An emerging concept positions giving to charity as an extension of people's political voices; they want their voices to be heard around the elections, and so while it is not explicit political giving, some charitable giving may be politically motivated. This study is the first known research to explicitly examine the relationship between the political election cycle and charitable giving, and how gender factors into this relationship. Do women and men have different patterns of giving around the 2016 election?



## Data and Methods

This study uses daily transaction data from an online donation platform. Gift data were merged with organizational information on recipient nonprofits<sup>i</sup> as well as demographic information about donors, including gender. Using this data set, this study tests if charitable giving patterns changed in the week before and after the 2016 election. This study looks only at the period around the 2016 election, compared to similar periods in 2015 and 2017. Results are therefore only applicable for the 2016 election and may not indicate how giving changes around other election cycles. Because the data set is comprised of online donations, findings also may not be generalizable for all charitable giving.

While data presented in this report are from one week before and one week after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, a wider range of data was analyzed to ensure results are consistent. The data include information about both the organizations that receive donations (EIN, subsector, revenue, etc.) as well as donors (gender, income, location, etc.).

Trends and figures presented in this report are from data about gifts to only the top organizations, measured by either the number or the total dollar amount of donations received during the time period in question. Giving patterns to all organizations were examined to ensure results are consistent. Giving to these top organizations was also analyzed according to whether the organization is perceived as more progressive (or liberal) in nature.

The Methodology section at the end of the report provides more detailed information on the data and the methods used to analyze it.

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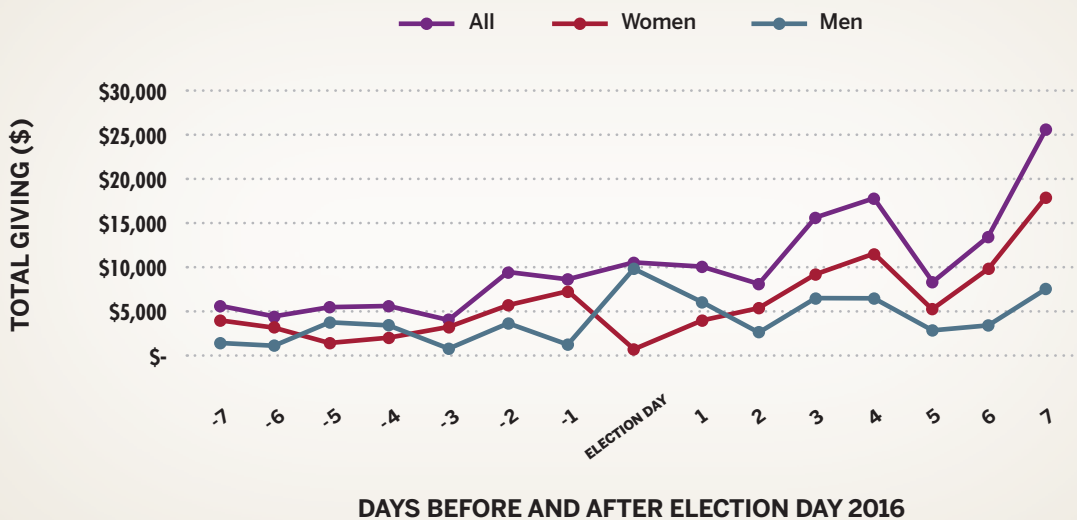
<sup>i</sup> Donors can only give to 501(c)(3) charitable organizations via this online donation platform. This report uses the terms “charity” and “nonprofit” (or “charitable organization” and “nonprofit organization”) interchangeably. There are various types of nonprofits with different limits on political speech and advocacy. In this report, “nonprofit” refers only to 501(c)(3) charitable organizations rather than the universe of nonprofits. See the Methodology section at the end of the report for more detail.

## Findings

### ***Finding 1: Charitable giving was lower than expected immediately following the 2016 election.***

This study first examines trends in overall charitable giving in the week before and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election. While total dollars given to charity increased immediately around Election Day 2016 (see Figure 1 below), this is not unusual and can be attributed to the regular rise in giving toward the end of the calendar year. There is no evidence that overall charitable giving increased *due to the 2016 election*.

Figure 1: Total giving 1 week before and after Election Day 2016 (all giving, and by donor gender)



According to Figure 1, giving to charity increased immediately around Election Day 2016 (November 8), rising sharply the day after the election and continuing to increase at least one week later. Gender differences are evident even in this first look at the data. While giving by men peaks on Election Day, it quickly drops close to pre-election levels and does not continue to rise. Women's giving appears to drive most of the rise in giving post-election, although on Election Day itself women's giving is lower than normal.

It is well known that charitable giving rises toward the end of the calendar year. Is the upward trend in giving shown in Figure 1 due to the 2016 election, or is it just typical end-of-year giving? Comparing 2015 and 2016 trends helps to answer this question. Figure 2 shows that 2016 giving post-Election Day is actually lower than expected based on 2015 trends.



Figure 2: Cumulative giving 1 week before and after Election Day 2016 and hypothetical Election Day 2015<sup>ii</sup>

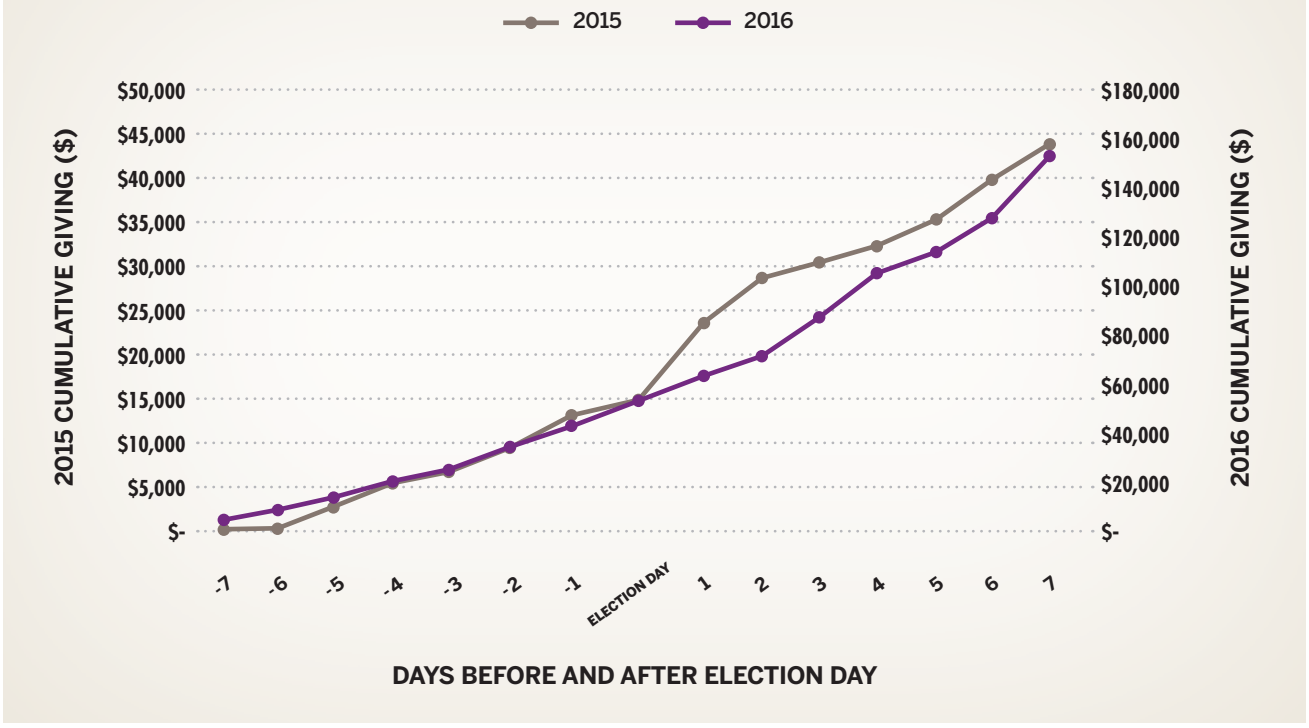


Figure 2 shows that “rage giving” – or giving above and beyond what would be expected in a non-election year – does not exist, at least for *overall* charitable giving. In fact, giving was even lower than expected immediately following the 2016 election.

After examining general trends around the election, this study turns to the impact of gender. Do men and women have different giving trends post-election? Does the lower-than-expected giving have a gender component?

<sup>ii</sup> Note on Figure 2: Between 2015 and 2016, the donation platform providing gift data for this study experienced significant growth in the amount of donations being processed via its website. Dual Y-axes are used to emphasize the difference in the cumulative giving trend between years, rather than the overall dollar amounts.



**Finding 2: Lower charitable giving after the 2016 election was concentrated among men; women's giving did not experience the same election effect.**

Finding 1 demonstrated that giving to charity slowed in the days following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, compared to the level that would normally be expected based on previous non-election years. Exploring giving by women and men reveals a clear gender difference: this lower giving level is concentrated among men. Women donors, in comparison, gave higher dollar amounts to charity in the week after the election.

Figure 3: Cumulative giving 1 week before and after Election Day 2016, by donor gender

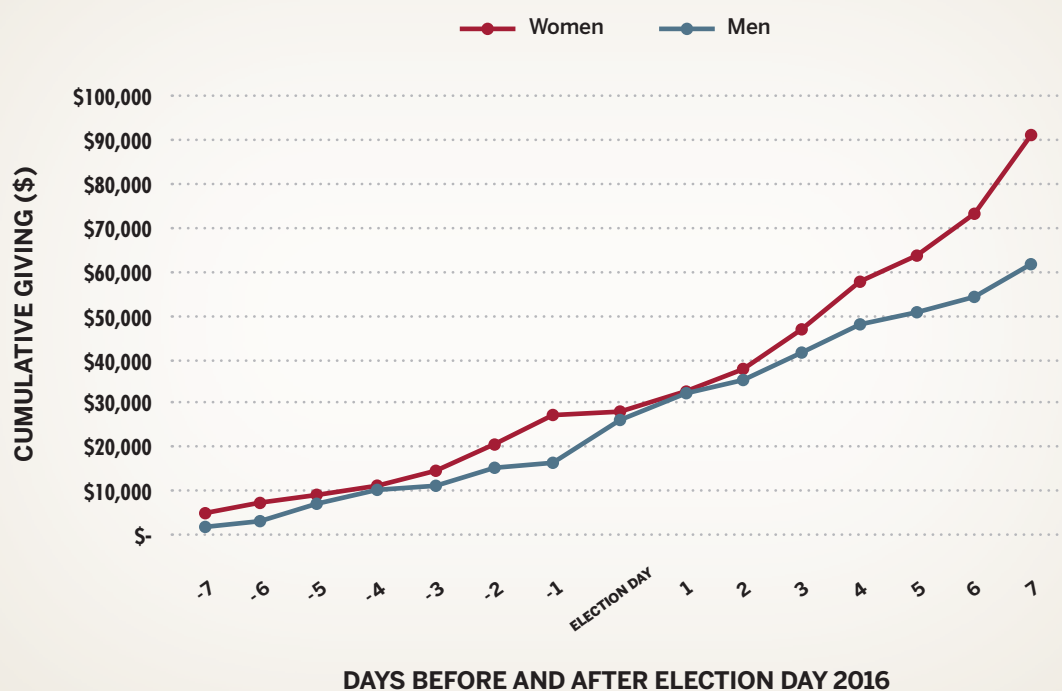


Figure 3 shows that while the trend in cumulative giving by men and women looks similar up to Election Day 2016, women's giving increases much more than men's giving post-election. To illustrate this gender difference, in the week before the election women gave an average of \$1,586 more than men to the top organizations in the data set. In the week after the election, this difference more than doubled to \$3,905.

After looking at big-picture gender differences in giving around the 2016 election, this study examines the recipient organizations of that giving. If giving overall is lower than expected post-election, what types of charities experienced a boost in giving?



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***Finding 3: Charitable giving after the 2016 election increased significantly for relevant progressive charities.***

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Findings 1 and 2 showed that while overall giving did not increase due to the 2016 election, women donors gave in greater amounts than men following the election. The study next turns to the nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations receiving funding around the 2016 U.S. presidential election. An initial analysis of key characteristics of these charities showed no significant effect on post-election donations. These nonprofit characteristics, such as the charitable subsector or cause they serve, or their size, did not impact whether a charity saw an increase in donations post-election.

However, when organizations were classified according to a perceived political leaning or particular relevance to the 2016 election cycle, significant differences did appear. Examples of such “relevant progressive” charities include Planned Parenthood and the National Immigration Law Center; for a more detailed description of this categorization, see the Methodology section at the end of the report. Organizations categorized as more progressive-leaning, and particularly relevant to the issues raised during the 2016 presidential election campaign, received higher amounts of charitable donations in the week following the election – from both men and women.

Figure 4: Cumulative giving 1 week before and after Election Day 2016, by relevant progressive nonprofits and all other nonprofits <sup>iii</sup>

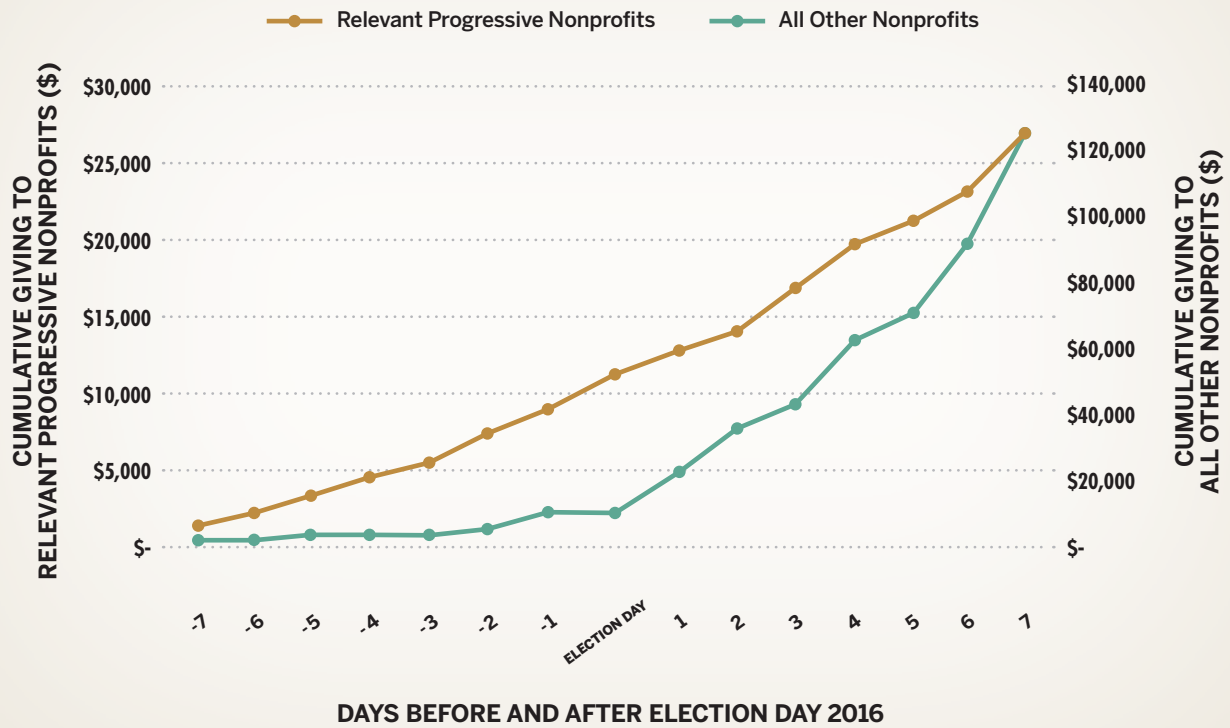


Figure 4 demonstrates the faster growth in giving after the 2016 election to relevant progressive charities. While the trend in cumulative giving to all other nonprofits (i.e., every top nonprofit *not* classified as relevant progressive) appears relatively stable throughout the time period before and after Election Day, cumulative giving to relevant progressive nonprofits experiences a significant shift upward during the week after Election Day.

<sup>iii</sup> Note on Figure 2: Dual Y-axes are used to emphasize the difference in the cumulative giving trend between relevant progressive organizations and all other organizations, rather than the overall dollar amounts. Because relevant progressive organizations are a relatively small share of all organizations, they receive lower total charitable donations.



**Finding 4: The increase in charitable giving to relevant progressive charities after the 2016 election was driven primarily by women donors.**

Finding 3 showed that more progressive organizations with particular relevance to the 2016 election cycle benefited from an increase in charitable giving in the week after the election. When examining giving to these nonprofits according to the gender of the donor, the increase in giving by women donors to these organizations is even more significant than from all donors (both men and women). While women gave in greater amounts than men *overall* following the election, they also targeted relevant progressive charities with that increased giving.

Figure 5: Cumulative giving to relevant progressive organizations 1 week before and after Election Day 2016, by donor gender

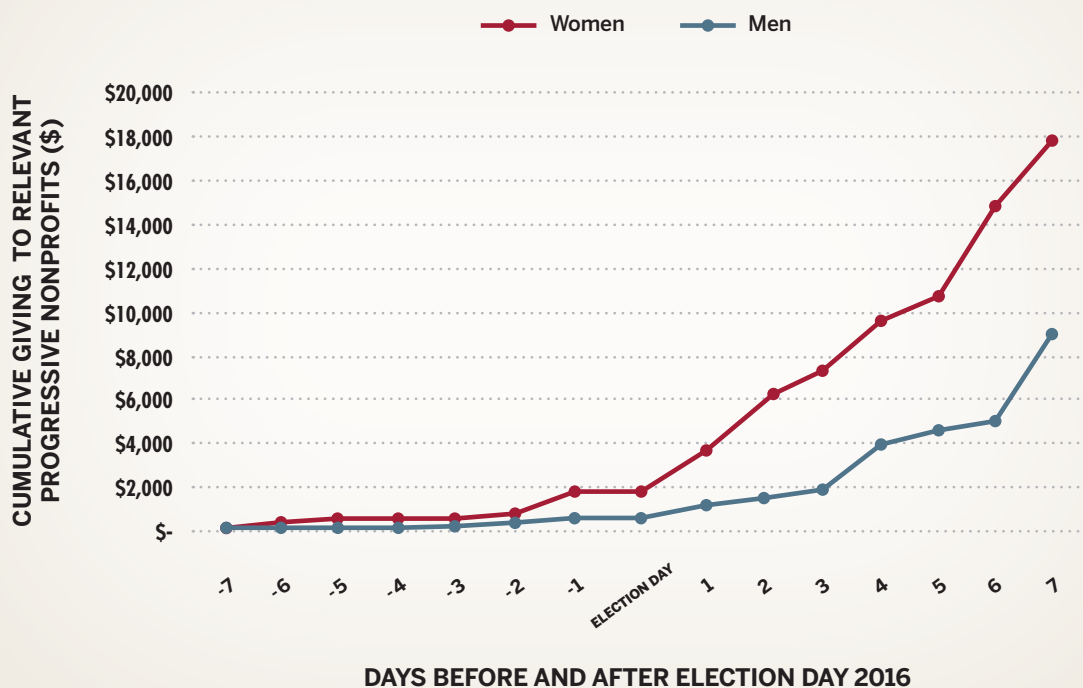


Figure 5 illustrates this gender difference that begins around Election Day 2016. In the week leading up to the election, cumulative giving by men and women to relevant progressive nonprofits appears fairly similar; in the week following the election, cumulative giving by women increases at a rate far surpassing that of men. In the week before the election, women gave an average of \$184 more than men to the top relevant progressive 501(c)(3) organizations in the data set. In the week after the election, this difference increased nearly six-fold to \$1,098.

## Discussion

This report aims to provide a greater understanding of how women and men respond to a political event – specifically, the 2016 election – through charitable giving. Overall, analyses show no evidence for an increase in charitable giving due to the election; if anything, the election may have depressed charitable giving. However, gender differences are evident. Women gave in greater amounts than men following Election Day, and they appeared to target relevant progressive charities with that increased giving.

Why did women's charitable giving rise after the 2016 election, compared to men's giving? While analysis for this report cannot determine the exact reason for this gender difference, previous research points to some possible explanations.

First, women and men tend to have different key motivations for giving to charity. Women are more likely to be motivated to give by empathy and altruism.<sup>19</sup> Women tend to give to help others, while men focus on the benefits they receive from giving.<sup>20</sup> Many of the relevant progressive nonprofits in the data set address issues that might be considered “other-centered,” such as human rights, minority rights, and immigration rights – which may explain their greater appeal to women. A 2016 report on high net worth philanthropy found related drivers and motivations for giving: women in the study were more likely than men to:

- Indicate their giving decisions are driven by issues;
- Believe that larger donations from the wealthiest Americans are more likely to change the world;
- Be confident in the ability of charitable organizations to solve societal or global problems; and
- Cite their political or philosophical beliefs as a motivation for their charitable giving.<sup>21</sup>

Second, one theory in the academic literature, known as the social identification theory of care, posits that people are motivated to give to those with whom they identify.<sup>22</sup> This idea was used to explain previous research by the Women's Philanthropy Institute which found women are more likely to give to causes serving women and girls.<sup>23</sup> Because a number of relevant progressive nonprofits in the data set advocate for or otherwise support women's reproductive rights, women may increase giving to these causes more than men because they identify more closely with those who benefit from services those nonprofits provide.



Philanthropy has colloquially been defined as giving the “3 Ts” – time, talent, and treasure. Now, this definition may include a fourth T: testimony. People are increasingly using their voices and platforms to advocate for causes they care about. By adding advocacy to their portfolios, people are extending their charitable activity into the political realm.

This study is limited in that it examines only the impact of one presidential election year, 2016. The 2016 election was unique in many ways. To have a better understanding of how elections more broadly impact charitable giving, further research should include data from a number of years, and include election cycles with a variety of outcomes. For example, it is uncertain if progressive nonprofits would see the same rise in giving, or if women donors would increase their giving to the same extent, if the outcome of the 2016 election had been different.

### *Implications*

This report highlights the changes that may occur in charitable giving around elections, which have implications for donors and fundraisers alike. Donors increasingly care about aligning their values wherever they spend or give money, from choosing to purchase sustainable products, to making impact investments, to giving to political candidates and campaigns they judge to be most in line with their values. Giving to charity is no different; donors want to understand how a nonprofit’s work aligns with the donor’s values. Do these nonprofits include an advocacy component? Is the organization aligning or collaborating with other groups or causes that appeal to the donor?

Charitable organizations in turn should be aware of the political leanings and other investments of their major donors. For example, if a top donor intends to make a major political donation during an election year, the nonprofit may be affected – in terms of the amount the donor reserves for their traditional charitable giving, or in terms of the topics or programs of interest to the donor. A major donor may not have the bandwidth to serve on a board or a committee for a nonprofit during an election year if they are highly involved in a political issue or campaign.

Nonprofits also need to be aware of the political cycle, whether or not they have any sort of political or ideological leaning. This report shows that the political cycle affects giving even if a nonprofit does not have any political leaning; in 2016, the average nonprofit experienced a lower level of donations than expected after the election. On the other hand, nonprofits most concerned about election outcomes may see a silver lining in the findings. Progressive organizations, especially those that address issues explicitly raised during the 2016 presidential campaign, received more funding in the wake of the election, perhaps by those concerned about how certain issues would be affected given the election results. In short, all nonprofits should be prepared for fluctuations in their gifts following an election.

Women are using their financial assets to make their voices heard around elections. Nonprofits as well as political campaigns and causes should understand that women are using all of their resources and outlets – including charitable giving – to express their values.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think women were more likely to give following the 2016 election?
- What role does philanthropy play in civic engagement?
- How can the nonprofit sector leverage political events including elections to engage more women with philanthropy?

### FOR DONORS:

- How did the 2016 election affect your charitable giving?
- As a donor, is it important to you that the organizations you support engage in political advocacy?

### FOR FUNDRAISERS AND NONPROFIT LEADERS:

- How did the 2016 election affect your organization's fundraising results?
- Is advocacy an important part of your organization's work? Should you consider getting more involved in political discussions?
- Do you know the political preferences of your major donors? How do you use this knowledge in your fundraising efforts?



## Methodology

This study uses data from Charity Navigator, a 501(c)(3) organization that evaluates nonprofit and charitable organizations in the U.S. Visitors to [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org) can find basic information on all U.S. nonprofits, and evaluations of over 9,000 charities. Visitors can also give to those charities via the “Giving Basket” donation feature on the website. Charity Navigator provided Giving Basket daily transaction data for donations made through its website, and merged this data with demographic information about donors, including gender, and organizational data on the non-profits. The data set contains information on the gifts themselves (e.g., amount, date, and time), the organizations receiving donations (e.g., EIN and subsector), and donors (such as gender, income, and location).

The data set is limited to donations given via Charity Navigator’s website; it is a small portion of all donations made and is not necessarily representative of all charitable donations in the U.S. Because the data set is comprised of online donations, findings may not be generalizable for all charitable giving.

The full data set spanned the time period from October 29, 2015 to January 1, 2018; regression analyses that underlie this report’s findings used the full data set. Robustness checks were conducted on several varied windows of time around Election Day, to ensure results are consistent. To focus on the impact of the 2016 general election, data reflected in figures come from November 1 to November 15, 2016 – one week before and after Election Day, November 8, 2016.

To test whether the election itself affected charitable giving, random-effect panel Ordinary Least Squares models were used, which controlled for date information. Via these same models, 2015 data were used to estimate what 2016 giving would look like if it were not an election year.



Analyses for this study used a subset of data from the top 131 charities, defined as any organization in the top 100 by either number or amount of donations. Robustness checks were also run with a larger set of charitable organizations, and results were similar. Charities in this subset of data were manually coded for political leaning. Note that all organizations in the data set are 501(c)(3) public charities and are therefore limited in any advocacy or overt political actions they can take; these categories are based on perceived political leaning only. These categories included:

- Control: no identifiable political leaning, e.g. Alzheimer's Association, Food for the Poor, American Red Cross
- Conservative: a perceived conservative political leaning, e.g. Wounded Warriors Project, Operation Homefront
- General progressive: a perceived liberal or progressive political leaning, e.g. the Greenpeace Fund, World Wildlife Fund
- Relevant progressive: a perceived liberal or progressive political leaning, that also has a direct connection to the 2016 election campaigns, e.g. Planned Parenthood Federation, American Civil Liberties Union, National Immigration Law Center, Southern Poverty Law Center

Data for the top 131 charitable organizations were collapsed in two different ways. First, all donations by organization by day were collapsed, so that each organization had one observation per day. The dependent variable used in analyses shown was the log of total donations received by each organization on that day. Second, all donations by gender by organization by day were collapsed. In other words, donations from men and women donors were collapsed separately, so that each organization had two observations per day. This allowed the closer analysis by gender.



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