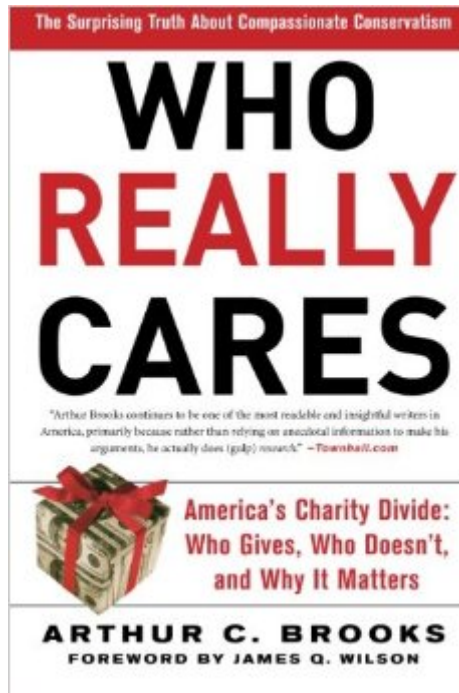


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Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism



Synopsis

We all know we should give to charity, but who really does? In his controversial study of America's giving habits, Arthur C. Brooks shatters stereotypes about charity in America—including the myth that the political Left is more compassionate than the Right. Brooks, a preeminent public policy expert, spent years researching giving trends in America, and even he was surprised by what he found. In *Who Really Cares*, he identifies the forces behind American charity: strong families, church attendance, earning one's own income (as opposed to receiving welfare), and the belief that individuals—not government—offer the best solution to social ills. But beyond just showing us who the givers and non-givers in America really are today, Brooks shows that giving is crucial to our economic prosperity, as well as to our happiness, health, and our ability to govern ourselves as a free people.

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Customer Reviews

The book uses data from many sources to prove that the one overwhelming predictor of generosity is religion. Political affiliation is almost irrelevant - the statistics for religious liberals and religious conservatives are identical. Religious people are statistically more likely to give than secularists (91% to 66%), and give more of their money (3.5 times more than secularists), are more likely to volunteer their time (67% to 44%), and volunteer more of their time (almost twice as much). The fact that the conservative population is more charitable than the liberal population is due to the fact that religious people tend to be politically conservative. Brooks defines religious people as those who attend a

place of worship at least once a week (roughly 30% of the population), and secularists as those who do not believe in a deity or attend a place of worship one time a year or less (20% of the population). That clearly leaves a large "middle class" where I suspect the statistics are hazy. Contrary to comments in a previous review (by Richard Benet), Brooks does address the issue of who the aid is given to. The statistics hold independent of the recipient of the donation or how the donation is solicited. Compared to secularists, religious people are more likely to donate to secular organizations or when the recipient is not local or is unknown. Religious people are more likely to make a donation when asked (by any organization, religious or not) than secularists. Brooks also addresses the issue (in an entire chapter) of comparing US generosity with the generosity of other countries. Foreign aid as a percentage of GDP by the US federal government may be smaller than some nations, but private donations more than make up for the difference.

I bought this book because I teach a course in which we read Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and I was looking for current information to supplement our discussion of Tocqueville. The book is on the whole a wonderful book but it has one flaw that leads me to give it 4, not 5, stars. The flaw is conveyed in the book's subtitle: "The Surprising Truth about Compassionate Conservatism." Now, as Brooks demonstrates, it is indeed the case that conservatives are more charitable and more likely to volunteer than liberals. Nonetheless, as Brooks also points out, this is the case because conservatives are more likely to be religious than liberals and the religious are more charitable and more likely to volunteer than the non-religious. By far the most important variable accounting for charity and voluntarism is religious participation, as Tocqueville asserted over a century and a half ago. It could be that Brooks (or his publisher) wants to obscure the relative importance of political ideology and religion in order to target an audience that will purchase the book, and one can hardly fault him for that. After all, his CSPAN discussion of the book was held at the Heritage Foundation. Still, as he states on pages 47 and 50, religious conservatives and religious liberals give to charity at the same rate--91%-- although religious conservatives give 10% more than religious liberals. Religious liberals are slightly more likely to volunteer, however, and although among all liberal and conservative households, liberal households earn 6% more than conservative households (p.22), I suspect very strongly that religious conservative households earn at least 10% more than religious liberal households.

Keep this quote from John Adams in mind as you read this book: "Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the

state of facts and evidence."The author is a professor at Syracuse. He was raised a liberal, was liberal most his life, but in grad school he studied public policy and then became an independent. The author did not conduct these surveys. He used data from reputable sources (government agencies, non-partisan research groups, etc.). Here are some key findings of his research: Nearly the same percentage of liberals and conservatives do volunteer work (1% difference), but conservatives donate much more time The same percentage of liberals and conservatives donate money, but conservatives donate 30% more and earn 6% less Conservatives give more money than liberals in every income class Poor people who don't accept welfare give much more than poor people who do accept welfare religious people give more than non-religious people religious people give more to secular causes than non-religious people The average family in San Francisco and South Dakota both give \$1300 away each year, even though families in San Francisco make 78% more! The percent of people that give to charity is higher among poor people who don't believe in income redistribution than rich people who favor income redistribution (welfare, closing the income gap, etc.) !!! [It is easy to want to give other people's money away and pat yourself on the back for advocating it, all the time calling people uncompassionate for not agreeing with you.

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