

It's Not All in The Ask

Effects and Effectiveness of Recruitment Strategies Used by Nonprofits in The Netherlands

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Abstract

Two thirds of all volunteers have been recruited by someone else. Ninety five percent of all donations are made in response to solicitations. Using data from the *Giving in the Netherlands Panel Survey*, this paper studies the effectiveness of the activities of nonprofits in recruiting new volunteers and soliciting donations. I find that nonprofits mainly target new donors and volunteers that are more easily accessible, but not necessarily those who are more willing or more able to contribute. For researchers, the findings imply that solicitation strategies used by nonprofits cannot explain why those who are more resourceful are more likely to give and volunteer. For nonprofits, the findings imply that current solicitation strategies are rather ineffective and can be improved considerably.

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There is social inequality in civic engagement in voluntary associations, like labor unions, political parties, religious organizations, environmental groups, human rights watch organizations, sports clubs, and hobby clubs in many nations across the world. Those who have more resources at their disposal are more likely to be engaged in some voluntary association (Kraaykamp, 1996; Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995; Wilson, 2000). Relevant resources for participation in voluntary associations are not only financial and human capital, but also social capital (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). A larger stock of these three types of resources increases membership in organizations, unpaid volunteer work, and charitable donations (Bekkers, 2004).

Usually, the role of resources is explained from the point of view of a rational individual deciding whether or not to become engaged in a voluntary association. It is easier to contribute for an individual who has a larger stock of financial, human and social capital at her disposal (Wilson, 2000). An alternative explanation of the role of resources starts not from the point of view of the individual, but from the point of view of the rational nonprofit organization seeking support for its mission (Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 1999). In a large majority of cases where individuals contribute some of their resources to nonprofits these contributions occur only after nonprofits have made an effort to solicit contributions. The 200 largest fundraising nonprofits in the Netherlands, who submit their annual reports to the Central Bureau Fundraising (CBF, which also issues accreditation seals based on these reports), spent some €135,6 million for fundraising in 2002 (CBF, 2003). The fundraising share among these organizations is 14.9% of total revenue (€912,9 million). However, little is known about how nonprofits spend their money on fundraising, and how effective the methods are which nonprofits use to solicit contributions. Even less is known about how voluntary associations attract volunteers, because there is no central database of costs for volunteer recruitment. We do know that a majority of current volunteers did not start volunteering on their own initiative, but became active after being asked (Bekkers, 2002). Rational nonprofit organizations in need of volunteers and donors will try to maximize the contributions of money and time they receive at the lowest costs possible. Therefore, nonprofit organizations will try to solicit contributions from those individuals who are most likely to support them. Freeman (1997) and Bryant et al. (2003) have argued that selective recruitment is one of the reasons why more resourceful individuals are more likely to contribute money and time to nonprofit organizations, but they did not test these arguments explicitly.

In this paper, I study whether nonprofit organizations themselves increase social inequality in contributions of money and time by soliciting contributions from more resourceful individuals. Rational nonprofits should direct their efforts solicit contributions to those who have more resources at their disposal, which enable them to give time or money. But to what extent do nonprofits actually do this? To answer this question, I first describe the strategies that nonprofit organizations in the Netherlands use to recruit new volunteers and to solicit monetary donations from the general public, how effective these efforts are, and how selective they are direct towards more resourceful individuals. Before I answer these empirical questions, I describe two theories that explain the role of resources for contributions of money and time to nonprofit organizations.

THEORY

Resource theory

Resource theory (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2000) explains why people with more resources are more likely to support nonprofit organizations. The central hypothesis in this explanation is that a greater stock of resources reduces the costs of a contribution, and therefore increases the likelihood that a contribution will be made. An additional assumption in resource theory is that financial, human, and social capital provide relevant resources for decisions to contribute time and money to nonprofit organizations. The availability of financial capital through higher wage income for example reduces the material costs of a monetary

donation. A donation of €25 to a charity is more costly for a median income household than for a household in the tenth decile of the income distribution. The same holds for volunteering. Everything else being equal, persons earning €100 per hour on the labor market are less likely to give their labor to a nonprofit organizations without remuneration than those who have no paid work (Lindeman, 1995; Freeman, 1997). In most cases, the material costs of volunteer work are higher than the material gains simply because there are no material gains, at least not in the short run. But not everything else is equal. Higher educated people are more often engaged as volunteers in nonprofit organizations despite the fact that their hourly wages are higher than those with lower levels of education (Freeman, 1997). Therefore, resource theory does not only consider financial and human capital as relevant resources, but also social and cultural capital (Wilson & Musick, 1997). The assumptions on social capital in resource theory build on old insights about norm conformity in social groups, laid down in Emile Durkheim's theory on social integration (Durkheim, 1897; Ultee, Arts & Flap, 2003; Van Tubergen, Te Grotenhuis & Ultee, 2005). Individuals in close communities are less likely to forego their social duties than individuals in less close communities. In the Netherlands, most citizens consider participation in voluntary associations as a social obligation (Dekker, 1999). The higher level of engagement of religious people in voluntary associations can be explained mainly by the higher level of social pressure to participate in religious networks (Bekkers, 2000; 2003; Dekker & De Hart, 2002). Integration theory does not only explain differences between religious groups at the meso-level, but can also be applied at the individual level. The stronger the relationship between the person asking for a contribution to a nonprofit organization and the person being asked to contribute, the higher the likelihood that a contribution will be made (Bekkers, 2004; Snow et al., 1980). Solicitations to contribute are more often successful when they are made by a person with a stronger relationship to the potential donor or volunteer because a refusal to contribute will endanger the relationship with the solicitor. We may expect that this pattern will hold even more strongly in communities where volunteering is strongly valued.

The role of 'cultural capital' in resource theory is problematic. Wilson & Musick (1997) define preferences for helping others as a form of 'cultural capital'. However, it is unclear how such preferences diminish the costs of participation. I would say individual preferences are exogenous factors that determine the subjective benefits of participation. Also the operationalisation of 'cultural capital' by Wilson & Musick (1997) in the form of religious involvement is problematic. Religion makes people volunteer not by shaping their attitudes about social duties, but by providing opportunities and exerting social pressure to transform these attitudes into action (Wuthnow, 1991; Jackson, Bachmeier, Wood & Craft, 1995; Bekkers, 2003).

Selective mobilisation theory

Another theory that explains why the availability of resources affects the level of engagement in voluntary associations takes the perspective of the nonprofit organization seeking support. The basic hypothesis of this explanation is: the larger the stock of resources of a citizen, the more attractive she is for a voluntary association, and the more this association will do to attract (and retain) support from this citizen. Nonprofit organizations will act rationally in mobilizing support: they will try to obtain as much support as possible at the lowest costs possible. This implies that voluntary associations will direct their mobilization attempts towards those who are more valuable for the organization, who are more likely to support the organization's mission, and who can be accessed by mobilization networks more easily. Effective mobilization requires identifying potential donors with all three characteristics. Potential donors and volunteers may be very valuable, but not accessible or interested in the organization's mission. In that case, they will not contribute. They may be accessible but not interested or resourceful; in that case, they will not contribute or only a little. Or they may be interested and accessible but not resourceful. In that case, they will contribute, but not much. Citizens with a larger stock of resources are more valuable as donors and volunteers for a nonprofit organization. Finding these resourceful citizens has its price. Rational nonprofits

should trade off these search costs against the benefits of finding more resourceful donors and volunteers.

Volunteer recruitment strategies in practice

For nonprofit organizations seeking volunteers, asking current volunteers to attract new volunteers is usually the cheapest method of mobilization: this method reduces costs for personnel recruitment, and a personal solicitation is more effective than an impersonal solicitation. The ‘current volunteers recruit new volunteers’-strategy also has important social side-effects that benefit the organization. New volunteers will usually have some social relationship with current volunteers, and current volunteers may direct their recruitment activities to people whom they expect to be concerned about the organization’s mission. These aspects of the ‘current volunteers recruit new volunteers’-strategy improve feelings of community and togetherness that tie new volunteers to the organization.

Like nonprofit organizations, individual volunteers also reduce their search costs: they will start looking for volunteers first in their own social network. As a result, people who have more volunteers in their social networks are more likely to be asked to become a volunteer (Bekkers, 2000). Therefore people with larger social networks run a higher risk of being asked to participate: they are more easy to find for mobilization networks (Klandermans, 1987). In addition we can assume that people who have a partner who volunteers or who have characteristics in common with existing volunteers run a higher risk of being asked to volunteer, because the principle of homophily often governs the formation of social networks: people like the company of others who are like themselves (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). The homophily principle also has drawbacks for nonprofit organizations. The scope of the networks of active volunteers constrains the range of potential new volunteers. When volunteers use their own networks to find new volunteers they may not find the optimal selection of potential new volunteers with a large stock of resources because they may select for other characteristics such as similarity in opinions, living in the same neighborhood and so on. Another potential problem of the ‘current volunteers recruit new volunteers’-strategy is that accessibility may become the key factor when the supply of new volunteers is low. Current volunteers may end their search when they have finally found a new volunteer after investing a lot of energy, although the new volunteer is neither particularly interested in the organization’s mission nor resourceful.

Fundraising solicitation in practice

Many fundraising nonprofits in the Netherlands have extensive networks of door-to-door solicitors throughout the whole country. Most of these solicitors are volunteers, who cover their own village or neighborhood. The availability of these volunteer solicitors minimize the costs that nonprofit organizations make for raising funds. However, they also limit the effectiveness of fundraising. Although door-to-door solicitors should be able to identify wealth and income of potential donors judging from the kind of houses in the neighborhood, it is not standard practice to do so. In fact, fundraising managers have little influence on how volunteer solicitors collect money. Volunteer solicitors greatly value their autonomy. They feel that the organization should be grateful for their efforts, and should not tell them how to collect money. Fundraising managers often do not even try to exert influence on how volunteer solicitors collect money because they are afraid to lose their volunteers. For direct mail fundraising campaigns the situation is different. These campaigns can be directed easily towards the wealthy simply by selecting addresses in zip code areas with higher incomes. However, it is unclear to what extent it is standard practice to do so.

The relationship between resource theory and selective mobilization theory

Selective mobilization theory and resource theory are not mutually exclusive alternative explanations for the role of resources. They can be true at the same time. According to selective mobilization theory, resources do not only reduce the costs of participation for an individual citizen, but also increases the likelihood that a nonprofit organization seeking support will

solicit contributions from this individual. Individuals who are more willing to contribute will therefore run a higher risk to be asked to contribute. The two theories identify resources as important in different stages of participation (see figure 1). Resource theory explains how people decide whether or not to contribute, and on how much. Selective mobilization theory focuses our attention on the role of resources even before people make decisions on participation.

Figure 1. Three stages of participation in voluntary associations

<i>Selective mobilization theory</i>	<i>Resource theory</i>	
1. Being asked	2. To contribute or not	3. Amount contributed
Yes ⇒	Yes ⇒	How much time or money
No	No ↓	
⇒ No contribution	⇒ No contribution	

Brady, Schlozman & Verba (1999) tested selective mobilization theory in a study of political participation in the USA and found strong support selective mobilization. The higher educated are not only more able and more prepared to be politically active, but are also more likely to be asked to participate. People with higher income are more likely to be asked for monetary contributions, and also give more. Thus, the mobilization strategies used by political organizations in the USA reinforce social inequality in political participation. Selective mobilization theory has not been tested on other types of voluntary associations. Freeman (1997) argues that the higher volunteering rate among the higher educated is due to the higher risk of being asked to volunteer, but did not have data to test this argument. Bryant, Slaughter, Kang & Tax (2003) analyze 1994 Independent Sector data, which offer the possibility to test selective mobilization theory. However, they conducted a different type of analysis showing that the factors which promote giving and volunteering among those who were not solicited are different from those which promote giving and volunteering among those who were solicited. Specifically, they find that human and social capital more strongly affect giving and volunteering among those who have been solicited. They argue that ‘most of the effects of social and human capital have already been accounted for in the equations determining who is solicited’. While this argument could have been tested easily with the Independent Sector data by looking at the effects of human and social capital on giving and volunteering taking solicitation into account, Bryant et al. do not conduct such a test. In the present paper, I conduct such a test using data from the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands a group of social psychologists studied recruitment strategies of specific types of political organizations and labor unions (Klandermans, 1987; Visser & Klandermans, 1993). This type of research is usually based on small scale surveys among members, sometimes adding a random sample of the population for comparison purposes. The results of these studies confirm earlier insights (Snow, Zurcher en Ekland-Olson, 1980) on the crucial role of social networks for recruitment new members and volunteers. However, it is unclear what the consequences of selective mobilisation are for social inequality in participation in voluntary associations. Do the lower educated participate less often in voluntary associations because they are asked less often? In addition, it is unclear to what extent mechanisms that are at work in political organizations are also operative in other types of nonprofit organizations. Very little is known about mobilization strategies used by nonprofit organizations in the Netherlands. In the present paper, I try to fill the gaps in the literature identified above.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

In this paper I analyze data from the ‘Giving in the Netherlands’-survey (GIN; Schuyt, 2003). This biennial survey is conducted since 1995 by the department of Philanthropy at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Here I use data gathered in May 2002 among 1,964 Dutch citizens, who were selected from a database of 72.000 persons aged 18 and over. The persons in this database regularly participate in poll surveys from TNS/NIPO. The polling institute uses quota sampling to keep the database representative for the Dutch population with regard to age, gender, level of education and region. The 1,964 respondents consist of a random sample of 1,707 individuals and an oversample of 257 Protestants. To correct for this over sample, I weighted the data to make statements on the Dutch population. The respondents completed the survey on their own personal computer at a web-address provided by the polling institute (CASI - Computer Assisted Self Interview). Because there was no interviewer present, the danger of socially desirable responding is limited.

Measuring contributions to nonprofit organizations

The GIN survey uses extensive Method – Area modules to measure contributions of time and money to nonprofit organizations. Method – Area modules increase the accuracy of reports in part by increasing the likelihood that small contributions (for instance in door-to-door collections) are reported (Rooney, Steinberg & Schervish, 2001). The method module contained cues on 24 different methods that people may use to donate money or time to nonprofit organizations. The area module mentioned 10 different areas in which nonprofit organizations are active (adapted from Giving USA) and named specific examples of nonprofit organizations for each area. The area module instructed the respondents to disregard contributions that may yield a personal profit (such as buying lottery tickets) and contributions that are payments for goods and services (such as school books, access to sports clubs). To improve the accuracy of reports on larger contributions, the survey was held in May, just after the regular citizen receives his tax forms. Respondents could complete the survey in multiple sessions, so that they could review bank transfers and ask other members of the households about their gifts. In the introduction to the questions on volunteering, volunteer work was defined as ‘unpaid work you do on behalf of an organization or group. With unpaid work we mean work for which you do not receive wages, although you may receive a small compensation (e.g., for travel costs).

In our analyses I distinguish between donors and non-donors. Donors are people who report donations to nonprofit organizations in at least one area, and who also reported a positive amount contributed. Using this definition, 82.1% of the households gave money to nonprofit organizations. The amount donated is the sum of contributions to organizations in all areas. The mean amount donated in 2001 is €215, excluding non-donors this amount is €265. Contributions are strongly skewed: the median contribution among all households is only €50 (but €75 when non-donors are excluded). To obtain a normally distributed variable I applied a natural log transformation. I also distinguish between small donors and large donors. Small donors are households with annual contributions below the median among donors. Large donors are households donating more than €75 per year.

Solicitation attempts for monetary contributions were measured with a list of 13 methods that are commonly used to solicit contributions. The survey asked whether the respondents had been asked for a contribution to a nonprofit organization in this way in the two weeks prior to the survey, and if so, whether the respondent had made a contribution in response to the request.

As ‘volunteers’ I considered those respondents who said they did unpaid work for nonprofit organizations in at least one area in the past 12 months. The volunteer group also includes episodic volunteers (those who report volunteer work less than once a month). As a result, the proportion of volunteers is relatively high (55%). An additional 15% of the current non-volunteers said they had been engaged in volunteering in the past. The remaining 30%

reported never having served as a volunteer in their lives. When asked ‘Have you ever been asked to do volunteer work?’ 41.1% said ‘yes’. Those who said they had been asked were asked about the person who made the request (partner, family member, friend, colleague, someone else, do not remember). The survey asked whether the respondents as well as the person who asked to become a volunteer were members of the organization.

Independent variables

I study the relationship of human, financial, and social capital with the number of solicitations for contributions to nonprofit organizations and the amount of money and time contributed. To measure human capital the survey asked about the level of education completed (range: 1 – lower education – to 7 – university degree). To measure financial capital the survey asked about the gross household income (originally measured in 29 categories; I assigned the class mean for each category, truncated incomes above €300,000, and log-transformed the income variable). In addition, the survey has data on whether the respondents own their residence. Home ownership indicates financial stability. Home ownership may also be considered as an indicator of community involvement. Home owners are more likely to invest in social contacts with neighbors to safeguard their property. As indicators of social capital I use size of community, church attendance and religious affiliation. Unfortunately, the GIN-survey 2002 does not contain direct measures of social capital in the form of questions on social networks. Instead, I assume that residents of smaller communities, frequent church attendees and religious persons have more social capital. Urban dwellers have less dense networks with a lower level of social pressure to conform to norms than rural dwellers (Flap, 1999). Frequent church attendees are also assumed to have more dense networks. Previous research (Bekkers, 2000, 2003) shows that the relationship of church attendance with volunteering and monetary donations to voluntary associations are mostly due to network mechanisms such as being asked and social pressure from others. Church attendance was measured in five categories (never, once or twice a year, once a month, once a week, more often than once a week). Social pressure to contribute to voluntary associations was measured with the question ‘In my social environment it is obvious to volunteer’ (range: 1 - ‘disagree completely’ to 5 - ‘agree completely’). Religious affiliation was measured with two questions. First, the survey asked whether people were involved in a religious community, and if so, the survey asked which one. Eighteen different religious groups were mentioned, which I grouped together in four: Catholic, Reformed Protestant (‘Hervormd’), Rereformed Protestant (‘Gereformeerd’) and other religion. The ‘other religion’ category consists mainly of members of small groups of Protestant denominations (Evangelicals, Lutherans, Jehova’s Witnesses), but also includes some Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims. Non-religious persons formed the reference category. I controlled our multivariate analyses for gender (female =1) and age. All variables measured on an ordinal or linear scale were z-transformed in order to be able their impact across different regression models.

Regression models

In the analysis of amounts donated, I use a Heckman Two Stage regression specification (Smith, Kehoe & Cremer, 1995) because there is a considerable number of non-donors (17.9%) and because I expect differences in the size of effects of independent variables on whether or not a household contributes and if so how much. Because females are more often at home when door-to-door solicitations are made, they will report a higher incidence of giving, but there is no reason to suspect they give more than males once they have opened the door. Another example is income. According to resource theory income should have a stronger effect on the amount donated than on whether or not a donation is made (Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 1999). Een final example is being asked to contribute. It seems obvious that people who are asked more often contribute more often, but it is unclear whether being asked also increases the amount donated.

RESULTS

A description of mobilization strategies used by nonprofits in the Netherlands

Volunteer recruitment

In the GIN-survey 41.1% reports a recollection of having been asked to become a volunteer at least once in their life time. As expected, there is a strong relationship between having been asked to volunteer and volunteering. Among those who have never done any volunteer work in their life, 90% has never been asked. Among volunteers and former volunteers, only 46% reports never having been asked. There was no difference between current volunteers and former volunteers. The likelihood of having been asked was more than five times higher among current or former volunteers than among those who have never volunteered. There may be a selective recollection-effect here – volunteers will remember more accurately that they have been asked – but it seems unlikely that the difference can be attributed solely to selective recollection. I will return to this issue in the discussion. Lesson number one for nonprofit organizations is: if you don't ask, you won't attract new volunteers.

Table 1. Relations with recruiters among those who experienced a recruitment attempt (source: Giving in the Netherlands Panel Survey, unweighted sample, n=704)

	Request denied	Discontinued volunteering	Still volunteering
Partner	1.9	2.9	3.7
Family member	3.7	4.3	8.2
Friend or acquaintance	24.1	36.4	33.9
Colleague	9.3	5.0	6.9
Somebody else	46.3	47.9	44.9
Does not remember	14.8	3.6	2.4
N	54	140	510

Table 1 shows that the relationship between the recruiter and a potential new volunteer is crucial. Requests to become a volunteer through a strong tie are more effective. Requests by recruiters who asked a colleague were more often denied immediately, and were less likely to lead to volunteering activity. Requests by friends or acquaintances in contrast are more likely to lead to some or even a prolonged period of volunteering. Those who discontinued their volunteering activities were less often asked by family members than those who are still active as volunteers. These results are in line with the hypothesis that requests for participation made through strong ties are more likely to be honoured. This hypothesis was also supported in a previous study of intentions to volunteer in hypothetical situations (Bekkers, 2004). Lesson number two for voluntary associations therefore is: let current volunteers recruit their friends and family.

Table 2 shows that it is also relevant how strong the recruiter is involved in the organization for which she is trying to attract new volunteers. Among those who have been asked to volunteer, a denial is more common when the recruiter or the potential volunteer was not a member of the organization in need of volunteers already. Requests for participation are most effective when the potential volunteer as well as the recruiter are involved with the organization. Lesson three for voluntary associations is: ask your current members to volunteer.

Table 2. *Involvement (in %) with the organisation of targets and recruiters among those who experienced a recruitment attempt (source: Giving in the Netherlands Panel Survey, unweighted sample, n=704)*

	Request denied	Discontinued volunteering	Still volunteering
Target was a member, recruiter was not	11.3	10.7	12.8
Target was not a member, recruiter was	34.0	46.4	41.3
Target and recruiter were both members	15.1	25.7	24.8
Target and recruiter were not members	39.6	17.1	21.2

Donor recruitment

How often are Dutch citizens solicited to contribute money to nonprofit organizations? In the two weeks preceding the GIN-survey, almost seven out of ten Dutch citizens were asked for a contribution. The most common method was the door-to-door collection (42.5%, see first column of table 3). Other common fundraising strategies were direct-mail (mentioned by a quarter of the respondents), collections in church (slightly less than one fifth), and offering lottery tickets benefiting some nonprofit organization (slightly more than one out of ten). Assuming that the weeks in May in which the GIN-survey was conducted are typical for other times of the year, and that the methods reported occurred only once, the average Dutch citizen receives 36 requests for contributions to nonprofit organizations, of which 9 through direct mail. This number is probably an underestimation because the assumption that May is typical for the rest of the year is rather conservative. Most direct mail solicitations take place in December. Even if the estimate is adjusted upward the number of solicitations in the Netherlands is rather low compared to the US. A report from 1995 mentions 14 billion direct mail fundraising letters per year (Press, 1995). This is 70 letters per year (assuming 194 million US citizens of 18 years and over; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

The second column of table 3 shows the success rate for different methods used to solicit charitable contributions (the proportion of households donating among in that way at least once divided by the proportion solicited at least once). Personal requests to contribute are much more often honored than requests that do not involve a personal, physical contact between a solicitor and a target. However, the pattern of results does not confirm the hypothesis that requests through strong ties are more likely to be honored. In door-to-door collections, the request for a contribution is usually made by a stranger, but was still successful in 94% of the cases, while direct mail solicitations, which are also made by strangers, were successful at least once in the past two weeks among only 28% of the households. A request by a co-member of a voluntary association, who can be assumed to be a familiar person, is less effective (70%) than the door-to-door-collection. It is also interesting to see that the offer to buy goods at the door is less successful than the ‘offer’ in a door-to-door collection to donate money without any counter service.

Table 3. Solicitation for monetary donations in past two weeks

	Solicitation	Donation
Personal solicitations		
Door to door collection	42.5	* 93.6
In church	18.1	* 96.8
Raffle tickets	12.0	* 69.6
Sponsoring	9.3	* 85.6
In town	6.8	* 65.8
Buy goods at the door	6.4	* 70.0
Fundraising in voluntary association	2.2	* 76.9
Fundraising at protest meeting	2.2	* 57.4
Fundraising at work	1.3	* 85.6
At least one personal solicitation	61.8	56.6
Number of personal solicitations	1.01	0.87
Impersonal solicitations		
Direct mail	25.4	* 28.4
Advertisement in newspaper	5.9	* 4.7
Television	2.3	* 2.9
Internet/e-mail	2.3	* 7.7
At least one impersonal solicitation	28.4	7.6
Number of impersonal solicitations	0.36	0.08
At least one solicitation	68.2	58.7
Total number of solicitations	1.37	0.94

All numbers except those marked with an * are based on all respondents (n=1,964).

* Among respondents who received this type of request

In table 4 I analyze the relationship between being asked to contribute and actual contributions. Among those who reported donations to nonprofit organizations in 2001, 55% also reported a solicitation for charitable contributions at least once in the two weeks preceding the survey. Among those who made small donations in 2001 (below €75) this proportion was 62%, and among large donors (above €75) 80% was asked for a contribution. Large donors were asked one and a half times more often than non-donors. Impersonal requests were reported twice as much by large donors (40%) than by non-donors and small donors (both 21%). The fact that there is no difference between non-donors and small donors suggests that impersonal solicitations are ineffective methods to obtain contributions from small donors. Personal requests are more effective among small donors than among non-donors (56% vs. 51%).

Table 4. Charitable solicitations and donations in 2001

	No gift	Small gift (below median)	Large gift (above median)
At least one request	55.1	61.9	80.2
Personal request	50.5	56.1	72.5
Impersonal request	21.0	20.5	39.7
N	305	704	698

The importance of being asked

In the preceding analyses I reported the prevalence and the effectiveness of mobilization strategies used by Dutch nonprofits. Now I will deal with the question to what extent selective mobilization takes place and to what extent it is a factor in the origin of social inequality in participation in voluntary associations. First I study which socio-demographic factors increase the likelihood to be asked to volunteer (model 1), whether these factors are the same as the factors that increase the likelihood to be currently active as a volunteer (model 2), and whether being asked explains why these factors are related to actual volunteering (model 3). Selective mobilization theory assumes that the availability of resources is not only related to actual volunteering, but also to the likelihood of being asked to become a volunteer. In addition, selective mobilization theory predicts that the greater likelihood of being asked is the reason why people with more resources are more active as volunteers. This implies that the relations of resources with actual volunteering should be weaker when I control for mobilization attempts (model 3). Below (table 6) I will conduct a similar analysis for charitable contributions of money.

Selective mobilization of volunteers

In line with selective mobilization theory, older persons, home owners, frequent church attendees, Protestants (but not Catholics), and people in a social environment in which volunteering is a more obvious thing to do run a higher risk to be asked to volunteer (see table 5). Social pressure to volunteer strongly increases the likelihood of being asked. Social pressure also reduces a participation of the relationship of age and church attendance with being asked: in a model without social pressure, age and church attendance had a stronger relationship with the likelihood of being asked (odds ratios of 1.14, $p < .008$; and 1.26, $p < .001$, respectively). In contrast to the prediction from selective mobilization theory, however, the risk of being asked to volunteer is not higher among the higher educated and among persons with a higher household income. Volunteers from these groups bring along more resources and should therefore be more attractive for nonprofit organizations. Still, they are asked just as often as lower educated and less earning persons. It is clear that voluntary associations can improve their mobilisation strategies by targeting these groups more strongly.

The hypothesis from selective mobilization theory that recruitment attempts are more often directed at those who are more likely to support voluntary associations finds some support in model 2. The results in this model show that the socio-demographic characteristics of volunteers are similar to the characteristics of those who are asked to become a volunteer. Older people, home owners, frequent church attendees, persons in a social environment in which volunteering is a more obvious thing to do and Protestants not only run a higher risk of being asked to become a volunteer, but are also more likely to be engaged in actual volunteering. However, there are also a number of exceptions. A higher level of education, a lower household income and being Catholic or having an 'other' religious preference is more common among volunteers despite the fact that these characteristics are not typical of those who have been asked to volunteer. The absence of relations with these characteristics in model 1 indicates that voluntary associations do not search for volunteers in these categories in an optimal way. It seems that solicitations to volunteer mainly depend on the level of social control and social expectations to conform to social duties. These factors increase the accessibility of potential volunteers and may also increase their concern for the missions of nonprofit organizations. However, they do not necessarily increase the stock of resources that potential volunteers bring along. Also in model 2 the relationship of age and church attendance is stronger when social pressure is left out of the analysis (odds ratios of 1.15, $p < .007$, and 1.46, $p < .000$, respectively). It seems that nonprofit organizations recruit volunteers who are accessible and more concerned about the organization's mission, but not more resourceful.

The prediction from selective mobilization theory that recruitment attempts explain the effects of resources on actual volunteering is tested in model 3. The results show that being asked is very important indeed. People who have ever been asked to volunteer are three times more likely to volunteer at present than those who have never been asked to volunteer.

However, the relationships of indicators of resources with volunteering hardly diminish when being asked is introduced in the regression analysis. The relations of church attendance and home ownership diminish a little, but remain significant and substantial. Only the differences between rural and urban dwellers and between Reformed protestants and the non-religious disappear when I control for the greater likelihood to be asked among rural dwellers and the Reformed in model 3. These results indicate that the greater likelihood to be asked is not the reason why Rereformed protestants, persons with another religious affiliation, and those who experience a stronger social pressure are more likely to be active as volunteers than the non-religious and those who live in social groups where volunteering is a less obvious thing to do. Note that Catholics, the higher educated, and the lower incomes did not report more solicitations to volunteer so that the higher volunteering rates among these groups could not be due solicitations in the first place. While the greater likelihood of being asked is one of the reasons why frequent church attendees and home owners are more often engaged as volunteers in voluntary associations, it is not a very important reason. Another surprising finding is that being asked is a less important factor promoting volunteering in social environments where volunteering is an obvious thing to do. I expected the reverse pattern. It could be that in such environments the supply of volunteers exceeds the demand (enough potential volunteers are available to compensate for denials) and/or because people anticipate requests (and start volunteering on their own initiative).

Table 5. Logistic regression-analyses of solicitations to volunteer (column 1) and actual volunteering in the past year (column 2 en 3) (source: GINPS01, n=1,954)

	Solicitation	Actual volunteering	
Female	0.95	1.11	1.12
Age	1.10 (*)	1.05	1.03
Level of education	1.05	1.25 ***	1.25 ***
Income	1.00	0.89 *	0.88 *
Home owner	1.38 ***	1.41 ***	1.31 *
Size of municipality	0.83 ***	0.87 **	0.90 (*)
Church attendance	1.21 **	1.35 ***	1.30 **
Catholic	1.06	1.44 *	1.43 *
Reformed Protestant	1.45 *	1.42 (*)	1.32
Rereformed Protestant	1.62 *	2.17 ***	1.96 ***
Other religion	0.88	3.63 ***	3.76 ***
Social pressure	1.29 ***	1.97 ***	2.15 ***
Being asked to volunteer			2.93 ***
Being asked * social pressure			0.77 *
Constant	0.60 ***	0.98	0.66 ***
Chi Square	144 ***	396 ***	507 ***
R Square	.095	.247	.308

Coefficients are odds ratio's for z-standardised independent variables

Reference category: non-religious

*** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; (*) p<.10.

Solicitations for charitable contributions

Table 6 shows that women, older people, home owners, rural dwellers, and those who are living in social environments in which volunteering is a more obvious thing to do are asked to contribute to nonprofit organizations more often. As in the previous analysis, I find that voluntary associations do not solicit contributions optimally. According to selective mobilization theory higher levels of education and income should increase the likelihood of being asked to contribute money, but this is not the case. In addition, I find that people who have been asked to volunteer run a higher risk of being asked for monetary contributions. This

finding confirms the hypothesis of Robert Putnam (2000, p. 121) that requests for contributions concentrate on a selective group of people: ‘Once on the list of usual suspects, I’m likely to stay there’. When I distinguish between personal and impersonal methods to solicit contributions, I find some differences. Older people, the higher educated, and Protestants are more often asked impersonally, but not through some personal contact. Personal requests are concentrated among women, home owners, rural dwellers, church attendees, Catholics, and people who experience more social pressure to volunteer, while these groups are not more likely to be asked for charitable contributions through impersonal methods. Personal solicitations for charitable contributions are directed towards the same social groups as solicitations to volunteer. This result suggests they are also a function of accessibility and concern for the organization’s mission, but not of resourcefulness.

Table 6. Logistic regression-analyses of solicitations for charitable contributions in the past two weeks (source: GINPS01, n=1954)

	At least one solicitation	At least one impersonal solicitation	At least one personal solicitation
Female	1.30 *	1.17	1.27 *
Age	1.19 **	1.38 ***	1.07
Level of education	1.06	1.29 ***	0.94
Income	1.06	1.09	1.04
Home owner	1.29 *	1.28 *	1.37 **
Size of municipality	0.81 ***	1.08	0.73 ***
Church attendance	1.54 ***	1.08	1.81 ***
Catholic	1.34	1.19	1.35 (*)
Reformed Protestant	1.41	2.04 **	1.26
Rereformed Protestant	1.90 (*)	1.93 *	1.75
Other religion	1.57	1.44	0.92
Social pressure	1.26 ***	1.16 *	1.20 ***
Being asked to volunteer	1.28 *	1.02	1.40 **
Constant	1.60 ***	0.27 ***	1.18
Chi Square	183 **	120 ***	240 ***
R Square	.143	.097	.179

Coefficients are odds ratio’s for z-standardised independent variables

Reference category: non-religious

*** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; (*) p<.10.

The two stage regressions of monetary contributions in table 7 first analyse the likelihood of being a donor (step 1). This likelihood is greater among home owners, rural dwellers, church attendees, Catholics, Reformed and Rereformed protestants, and those who are living in social environments in which volunteering is a more obvious thing to do. These relationships are in line with selective mobilization theory. A higher level of education and income do not promote the likelihood of having donated money. These results stand in contrast to selective mobilization theory. The results of the second step of the analysis show that the amount donated increases with age, education, income, home ownership, church attendance, social pressure, and that Reformed and Rereformed protestants give more than the non-religious, as well persons with an ‘other religion’. These results are in line with resource theory. Persons with more financial capital (higher income, own home), human capital (education) and social capital (a religious network) give more. The income elasticity of donations is .30: a 10% increase in income raises donations with 3%. This elasticity is much weaker than in the US, where the estimates vary between .40 to .80 (Clotfelter, 1997).

A comparison of table 6 with model 1 of table 7 shows that the char of those who give to nonprofit organizations (step 1) are also typical of those who receive personal solicitations for contributions (community size, church attendance, being Catholic, owning a home and social pressure), while characteristics of those who give higher amounts (step 2) are also typical of those who receive impersonal solicitations (age, education, home ownership, Reformed or Rereformed religious affiliation, and social pressure). This finding fits the pattern in table 4 that personal solicitations mainly produce small gifts, and impersonal solicitations produce larger gifts. Model 2 shows that neither the number of personal nor the number of impersonal solicitations is an important factor in the origin of relationships of human and social capital with donations. A higher number of impersonal requests increases the likelihood of being a donor, and also increases the amount donated, but does not explain why people with more resources donate more often and a higher amount.

Table 7. Heckman Two Step Regression-analysis of total amount donated in the past year (source: GINPS01, n=1954; 1618 positive observations)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Whether or not	Amount	Whether or not	Amount
Female	-.07 (.07)	-.02 (.06)	-.08 (.07)	-.03 (.06)
Age	-.04 (.04)	.42 (.03) ***	-.05 (.04)	.41 (.03) ***
Level of education	.06 (.04)	.26 (.03) ***	.05 (.04)	.24 (.03) ***
Income	.05 (.06)	.30 (.06) ***	.05 (.06)	.29 (.06) ***
Home owner	.30 (.07) ***	.18 (.07) **	.29 (.07) ***	.16 (.07) *
Size of municipality	-.09 (.03) **	-.01 (.03)	-.09 (.03) *	-.01 (.03)
Church attendance	.15 (.06) **	.39 (.04) ***	.13 (.06) *	.37 (.04) ***
Catholic	.36 (.12) **	.07 (.10)	.36 (.12) **	.06 (.10)
Reformed Protestant	.30 (.13) *	.85 (.11) ***	.28 (.14) *	.79 (.11) ***
Rereformed Protestant	.28 (.17) (*)	1.15 (.13) ***	.24 (.17)	1.11 (.13) ***
Other religion	.04 (.20)	1.41 (.16) ***	.03 (.20)	1.39 (.16) ***
Social pressure	.10 (.05) *	.14 (.04) ***	.09 (.05) (*)	.13 (.04) **
Being asked to volunteer	.11 (.07)	.00 (.06)	.10 (.07)	-.00 (.06)
Being asked * pressure	-.11 (.07)	-.03 (.06)	-.11 (.07)	-.04 (.06)
Personal solicitation			.05 (.04)	.06 (.03) (*)
Impersonal solicitation			.12 (.06) *	.20 (.05) ***
Constant	.57 (.18) ***	3.25 (.20) ***	.52 (.18) ***	3.18 (.20) ***
Chi Square	946 ***		964 ***	
Rho	.03		.00	

Coefficients are for z-standardised independent variables

Reference category: non-religious

*** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; (*) p<.10.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of our analyses suggest that selective mobilisation is not an important factor in the origin of social inequality in participation in voluntary associations in the Netherlands. Before I draw this conclusion, I will address three methodological problems: causal order, social desirability bias, and selective reporting. A first problem of causal order concerns the measurement of solicitations and donations. The measures of solicitations refer to events that took place at a point in time (May 2002) after the donations took place (the year 2001). Therefore, solicitations in May 2002 can partly be the result of donations in 2001. However, this problem does not occur for most forms of solicitations. For instance, it is improbable that those who gave more money via bank transfers in 2001 have attracted more door-to-door collections to their front porch in 2002 (and vice versa). Impersonal solicitations, however, may be the increased after large donations. Voluntary associations more often ask their regular

donors for an extra donation than their irregular donors. A second problem with the causal order concerns the measure of social pressure to volunteer. Agreement with the statement 'in my social environment it is obvious that one volunteers' is partly the result of being part of a social networks in which a larger number of people volunteer. And people who volunteer get to know more people who volunteer. With the data from the GIN-survey from 2002 it is impossible to tease out causes and consequences. However, in the mean time the majority of respondents that took part in the 2002 survey have completed a second wave of the GIN-survey (May 2004). These new data will enable a longitudinal analysis. Probably the effects of social pressure are overestimated in the present analyses.

A second methodological problem is that socially desirable responding may have increased the effect of being asked on actual giving and volunteering. It could be that people who have never done any volunteer work do not admit easily that they have been asked to become a volunteer, because this would imply that they have refused to volunteer. The same holds for solicitations to contribute money. People who refused to donate money may prefer to lie that they have not been asked instead of truthfully telling that they have been asked but that they have not donated. Such a pattern would increase the observed effect of solicitations. Although I cannot prove that socially desirable responding did not occur, it is less likely that it is a large problem because the present survey was conducted through the internet, without the presence of an interviewer. It seems more likely that people lie to an interviewer in a face-to-face situation or on the phone than to an anonymous webpage.

A third methodological problem is the potential selectivity in retrospective reports on solicitation attempts. This problem is most likely to occur in the measurement of mobilization attempts for volunteers. It seems likely that (former) volunteers remember more accurately that they have been asked to become a volunteer. Volunteer work has been a part of their lives (or it still is). Volunteers will talk more often with others about how they became active as a volunteer than non-volunteers will talk with others about how they did not become active as a volunteer. This increases the estimated effect of recruitment attempts on actual volunteering. The problem of selective reporting will be less severe for monetary contributions because the questions on solicitations for donations of money referred to a much shorter and more recent time period (past two weeks instead of 'ever').

If the problems with the causal order, social desirability and selective reporting have occurred, which seems improbable, then they will have increased the likelihood that hypotheses from selective mobilization theory are confirmed. The fact that the analyses provide little support for the role of selective mobilization in the origin of social inequality in participation in voluntary associations strengthens the belief that this role is not very important.

Thus, we may conclude that the availability of resources is more strongly related with actually doing volunteer work than with the likelihood of being asked to become a volunteer. If voluntary associations would direct their recruitment attempts for new volunteers and donors rationally, they would focus more strongly on persons with more resources than they do now. Dutch citizens with a higher level of education and income are not more often asked to become a volunteer or to donate money to nonprofit organizations, but – once they are asked – they give higher amounts. Although it is difficult to compare our results to those obtained by Bryant et al. (2003) and Brady, Schlozman & Verba (1999), it seems that the effect of selective mobilisation in the USA is much stronger than in the Netherlands. Dutch fundraising nonprofits direct their solicitations mainly towards those who are accessible and those who seem to be concerned about the organization's mission, but not towards those who are more resourceful. Taking advantage of the potential among those who are able to give and volunteer is one of the major challenges for the Dutch nonprofit sector in the future.

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