

What is civil society:

Civil society exists to improve the well-being of individuals and communities. *The key to civil society is that it is voluntary, self-generating, and self-organizing. It operates without coercion.*

The concept of civil society includes a wide range of cultural, civic, religious, and charitable organizations. Civil society is at the center of whether people can build, as FREOPP President Akash Chougule describes, a life worth living—one that includes family, community, purpose, and a fair shot at upward mobility, one infused with dignity and meaning.

Public Trust

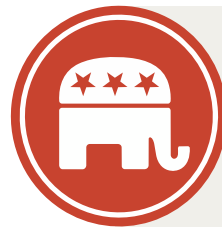
As social trust declines, so does private willingness to donate to charity.

Declining public trust undermines civil society by eroding social cohesion, diminishing civic participation, and hindering collective action. When trust is lost, people naturally retreat from an outward facing, more generous and self-sacrificing posture to one that is more insular and self-interested. As people turn inward, their group identity is strengthened, leading, in turn, to still greater polarization, and a further decline in trust of those outside the group.

Data points:



Only **53%** of Americans trust non-profits, NGOs, community orgs, and advocacy groups.



Republicans are more likely than Democrats (**75 to 63%**) to believe that people can be counted on to help those in need voluntarily.

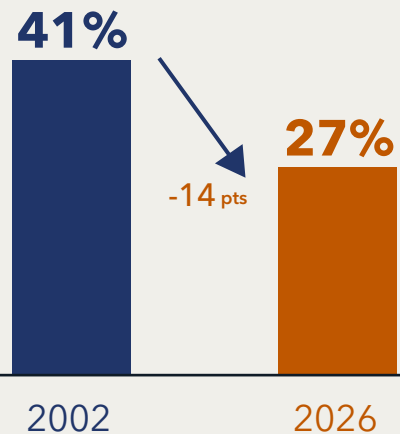


Only **34%** of Americans trust explicit philanthropies.



Democrats are much more likely (**57 to 7%**) to believe that a loss of trust in the government makes it more difficult to solve the country's problems.

Confidence in major U.S. institutions has declined 14 percentage points since 2002



Source: Gallup, Confidence in Institutions: Gallup Historical Trends.

Note: Average includes the church or organized religion, military, Supreme Court, banks, public schools, newspapers, Congress, organized labor, and big business.

What is causing it:



Loss of trust in institutions, due to increased lack of social civility



Harmful overregulation



Over-professionalization



Deep political polarization and partisanship rewards emotionally powerful narratives

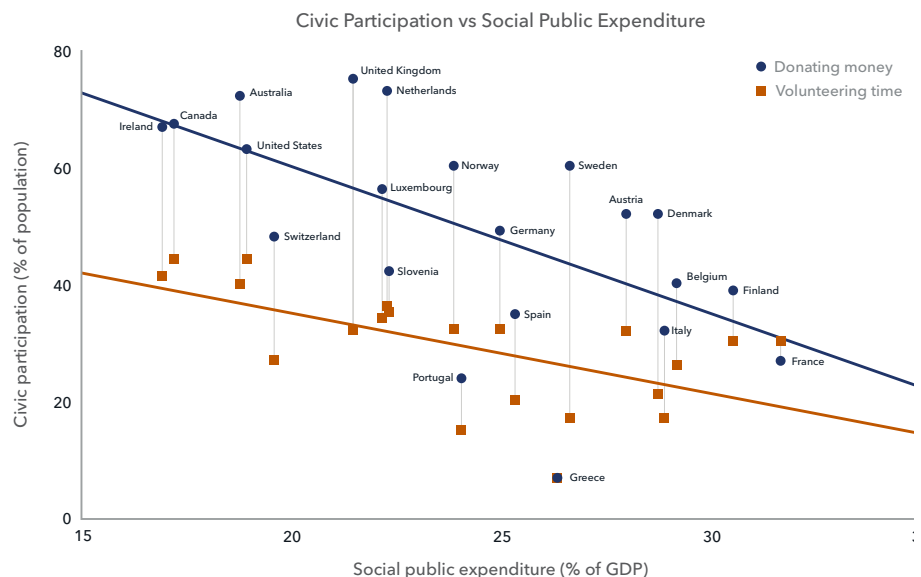
Crowd-out:

As government increases social welfare contributions, private charity suffers.

Studies have shown that when private charities receive government funds, there is a decrease in private donations, with the crowd-out ranging from as little as two cents to as much as 53 cents in lost contributions for every dollar of government funding received. People respond to need—or at least perceived need—meaning they are less likely to give if they believe the government has already intervened.

Higher public spending is associated with lower civic participation

Combined view of donating money and volunteering time against social public expenditure



Sources: Charities Aid Foundation, CAF World Giving Index 2015; OECD, Social Expenditure Database (SOCX), 2015.

Adapted from: Julia Brettmann, "Does Government Spending Crowd Out Voluntary Labor and Donations?" IZA World of Labor (2016).

Policymaker suggestions:

- A government-directed strategy to fix civil society would be both futile and undesirable. Government by definition stands outside of—and even in antithesis to—civil society. Instead, the government should focus on removing obstacles to civil society.
- The government should cease efforts to harass or intimidate civil society organizations.
- State and local governments should review regulations to see where they conflict with the activities of civil society organizations and activities.
- Both the federal and state tax codes should encourage charitable giving by maximizing the value of charitable deductions.
- Localities should address “civic deserts” by considering additional spaces for congregation, such as parks, community centers, public libraries, and performance spaces.
- Civil society organizations must model the behavior they wish to encourage. Anyone who values civil society should, in turn, practice civility.