



COLLECTIVE
INTELLIGENCE

Brunswick's Global State of Philanthropy Survey

[James Dray](#), [Kaylan Normandeau](#), [Jack Luttmann](#), Stephanie Benedict, Maddie Craddock, Sophia Paris and Laura Akroyd
November 28, 2023

Brunswick's inaugural global survey of public attitudes toward philanthropy uncovers widespread global support for philanthropy, key criticisms and opportunities to better engage the public on the role and impact of giving.

Philanthropy is at a crossroads. While philanthropy has always had its critics, a tidal wave of scrutiny has emerged from the media, regulators and politicians, grantees and citizens. Rising wealth inequality, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated both the need for financial contributions and innovative solutions that philanthropy can provide, while also leading to criticism of whether it was doing enough. New philanthropists from the Global South are providing new sources of funding, approaches and perspectives.

At the same time, a number of commentators have criticized the influence that "big philanthropy" has over governments and public policy. Accelerated by the reckoning over racial justice in the US in 2020, philanthropy has also grappled with questions around equity and power dynamics which often intersect with conversations about decolonizing global health and development. The rise of a few prominent examples of so-called "trust-based philanthropy" – which primarily refers to unrestricted grantmaking over longer time horizons – has thrust the sector into debates over different approaches to giving, and to what extent philanthropists should be evaluating their gifts at all.

What these tensions reveal is a potential trust deficit between philanthropy and the people it is trying to serve. Philanthropy is not always seen to be living up to its ambitions to play a positive role in society. The cumulative effect of these criticisms and shifting stakeholder expectations can lead to a sense of paralysis among donors – a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" inertia that can result in less giving and less risk-taking at a time when the world has a greater need than ever for more philanthropic capital to address major challenges including climate change, pandemics, education and inequality.

To that end, Brunswick surveyed a cross-section of the public in eight representative countries – four in the Global North (high-income countries, or HIC), and four in the Global South (lower- and middle-income countries, or LMIC) – to gauge perceptions of philanthropy among the people whom donors are aiming to serve with their giving. The survey sought to explore differences in attitudes between different geographies, political affiliations and age groups to help fill an important gap in existing data.

Brunswick's research uncovered widespread global support for philanthropy across geographies and demographics, indicating that Western media criticism is not necessarily reflective of the views of the public. Overall, people in lower- and middle-income countries feel more positive about philanthropy than their counterparts in higher-income, Western countries. While people in the United States feel the least positive about philanthropy relative to the other 7 countries, overall support for philanthropy in the US still



rates as 62% positive and 25% neutral – a much higher approval rating than many types of institutions in the US today. The same patterns hold for people in France and the United Kingdom.

The most significant concern about philanthropy is donors’ lack of understanding of the local context and culture. This is a much more salient concern than some of the criticisms around tax or influence that are most often amplified by Western media. At the same time, more than 1 in 5 people do not yet have a view on the effectiveness of philanthropy – indicating an important opportunity to engage.

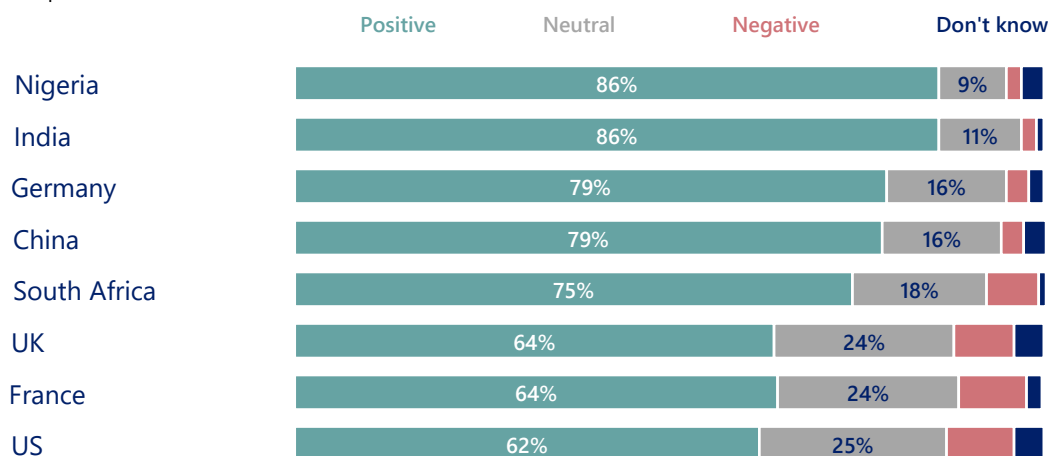
The key takeaway for philanthropists is that there is space to communicate philanthropic activities. They can and should proactively communicate about their giving – their motivations, activities and impact on people’s lives. Considerations for communications include the need to provide clarity on intentions as well as actions when it comes to addressing pressing problems; work with and incorporate the perspectives of local partners to understand and reflect the views of those you seek to work with; and be mindful of geographic differences when messaging about giving, as some markets and demographics have a clearer understanding of philanthropy than others.

Below are our key findings. You can view the entire research report [here](#).

There is widespread global support for philanthropy among the public

Attitudes Toward Philanthropy Are Positive Across the Globe, with the Most Positive Perceptions in LMIC Countries

Q: Do you have a positive or negative view of the world’s wealthiest individuals giving away money to various charitable or philanthropic causes?*



*"Positive" reflects "very positive" and "somewhat positive"; "negative" reflects "very negative" and "somewhat negative."

Source: Brunswick Global State of Philanthropy Survey, Oct 25 - Nov 1, 2023, General Public (n-size of 1,024 in China, 1,019 in France, 1,020 in Germany, 1,012 in India, 1,010 in Nigeria, 1,018 in GB, 1,006 in US, 537 in South Africa).

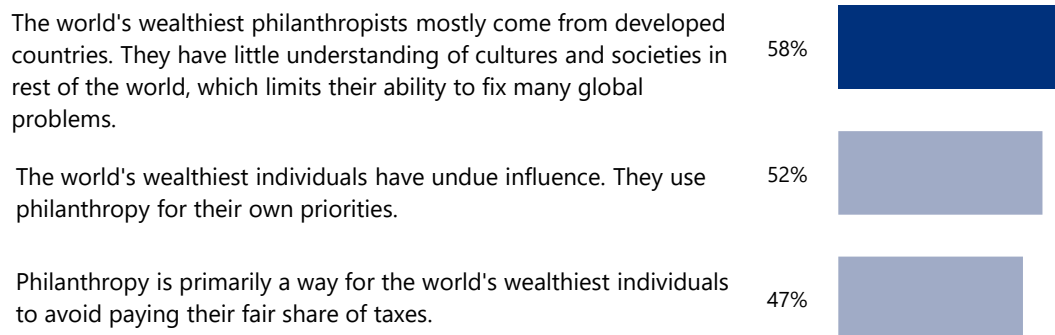


Working in partnership with local organizations and leaders is key

The most salient criticism of philanthropy centers on donors' lack of understanding of local cultures and contexts. This was the most resonant criticism in 5 out of 8 markets. Of note, this concern significantly outweighs criticisms most often amplified in Western media around accountability for philanthropists. Philanthropists should customize their approach and message to align with the cultural norms of the specific region they're in.

The Most Common Criticism Is Donors' Lack of Understanding of Local Cultures

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree [not shown] with each of the following statements about philanthropy?*(% Agree**)



*Of 3 criticisms and 3 appraisals presented as question options, only the criticisms are shown here.

**"Agree" reflects "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree"

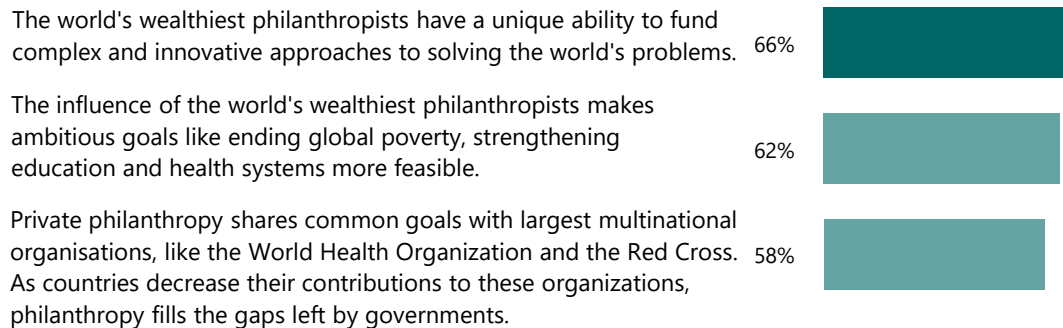
Source: Brunswick Global State of Philanthropy Survey, Oct 25 - Nov 1, 2023.

Aligning with the areas of greatest need can help

Messaging around philanthropy should concentrate on its ability to fund complex and innovative approaches to solving the world's most pressing issues - 6 out of 8 markets see this as its biggest benefit. Focusing on universal priorities such as health and education may help convey the benefits of giving.

Survey Respondents View Philanthropy's Ability To Fund Complex and Innovative Approaches As Biggest Benefit

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree [not shown] with each of the following statements about philanthropy?*(% Agree**)



*Of 3 criticisms and 3 appraisals presented as answer choices, only the appraisals are shown here.

**"Agree" reflects "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree"

Source: Brunswick Global State of Philanthropy Survey, Oct 25 - Nov 1, 2023.

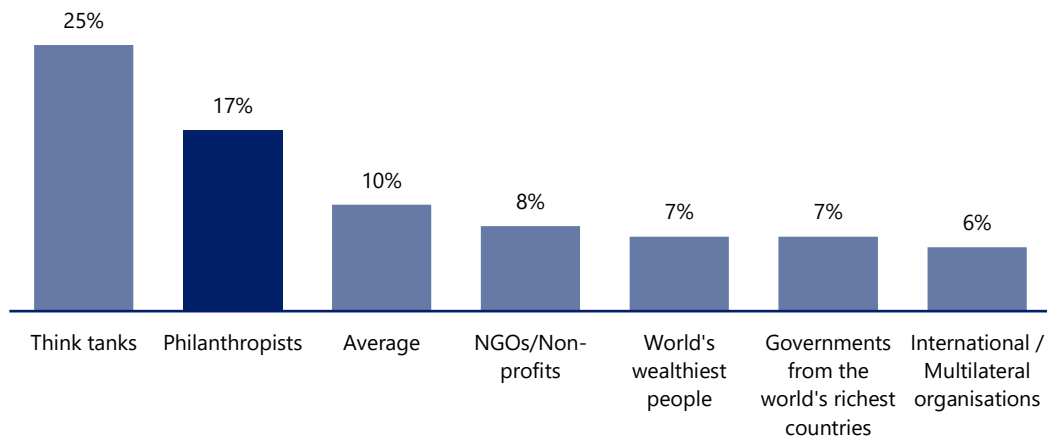


Donors have an opportunity to proactively engage the public on the role of philanthropy and the impact of giving

While the majority of the general public globally has an opinion on the world's wealthiest giving away their money, 17% do not yet have a view on the effectiveness of philanthropy. This suggests a mixed understanding about philanthropists and an opportunity to clarify motivations and impact.

Philanthropy Ranks Second Highest Amongst Survey Respondents Who Don't Have a View on Philanthropy's Effectiveness

Q: In your view, how effective do you believe each of the following to be in solving the most pressing issues facing society globally?* (% Don't Know)



*Of "total effective" and "don't know" presented as answer choices.
Source: Brunswick State of Philanthropy Survey, Oct 25 - Nov 1, 2023.



To continue the conversation



James Dray

Partner and Foundations, Education & Global Health Co-Lead, London
jdray@brunswickgroup.com

James helps lead Brunswick's work with global foundations and philanthropists. He has worked extensively on issues related to pandemics, multilateral fundraising and development.



Kaylan Normandeau

Director, New York
knormandeau@brunswickgroup.com

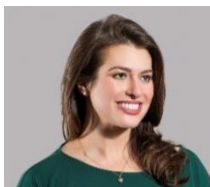
Kaylan is part of Brunswick's Insight team where she uses opinion research and media analytics to inform communications strategies and test campaigns for foundations, non-profits and corporations.



Jack Luttmann

Director, London
jluttmann@brunswickgroup.com

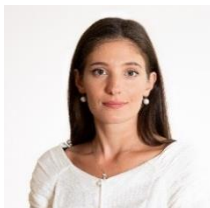
Jack provides communications advice to organizations facing critical issues, grounded in his expertise in opinion research. His work spans corporate reputation management, message and narrative development, stakeholder engagement and campaign development.



Stephanie Benedict

Associate and Foundations, Education & Global Health Co-Manager, Washington DC
sbenedict@brunswickgroup.com

Stephanie works with global foundations, philanthropists and NGOs on strategic communications and stakeholder engagement.



Sophia Paris

Associate and Foundations, Education & Global Health Co-Manager, London
sparis@brunswickgroup.com

Sophia works with not-for-profit and development clients on global health and climate communications and advocacy campaigns.