

Chapter 2

Graphic “Acts of Solidarity in Mexico” (Analysis of the National Survey on Solidarity and Volunteer Action)

Gustavo Verduzco

Introduction

We usually think that most of our actions are governed by interests that bring us some kind of material benefit or by desires and intentions that are not economic but that are, however, selfish, where the final benefit is bestowed upon oneself or loved ones. It is true to a large degree that many human actions take place in this way. However, we rarely stop to think about the numerous actions we perform without any direct economic aim or without any self interest. These actions are carried out at times in different ways in diverse societies in accordance with the socioeconomic and cultural peculiarities of each place. In the western world, these kinds of activities commonly occur through nonprofit organizations, many of them religious, although the secularization of life has also allowed room for nonreligious organizations with humanitarian purposes. However, aside from what occurs based on secular organizations or within the institutional framework of churches, individual actions also take place that are not regulated by an organization or institution but rather are implemented by each individual to the benefit of others, in accordance with the volition of each person. These types of activities were known in earlier times as “charity”, performed to alleviate some problem or other need of another person. Today, the secular world calls them “actions of solidarity” performed for the benefit of others. These activities are carried out either individually or in relation to various institutions. They are spontaneous expressions of support that occur either sporadically or regularly, but that occur with greater intensity when some event of catastrophic proportions takes place, such as a natural disaster.

Throughout the history of Mexico, we have seen different types of arrangements that have something to do, in some measure, with these kinds of expressions of solidarity. I will first mention several types so as to emphasize those that, although they have overtones of solidarity, more properly belong to a form of social organization

G. Verduzco (✉)
El Colegio de México, México D.F., México
e-mail: gverduz@colmex.mx

that has generally persisted until our time with a certain sense of moral obligation arising from the socio-cultural framework to which some communities belong.

During the colonial era, the Crown imposed a type of social organization on the indigenous peoples that implied collective collaboration of the members of each village for common goals. This is why a system of posts and responsibilities generally referred to as the “stewardship system” (*sistema de cargos*) arose with the purpose of organizing different tasks that community members had to perform. This system was and continues to be a form of organization for dealing with common needs. The *tequio* (free community labor) and the *mano vuelta* (cooperative interchange of labor among community members) have been other forms of solidarity and collective organization among Mesoamerican indigenous peoples. These collective forms were a practical strategy for working together that made it possible to deal in a better way with conditions of a scarcity of goods in a world governed by colonial domination. For this reason, we should note that, in the strict sense of the term, these kinds of actions differ from others mentioned at the beginning insofar as these indigenous forms of organization, although expressing solidarity, had the aim of safeguarding their own conditions of social and economic reproduction as groups weakened by the actions of the colonial power imposed upon them. Some of these organizational forms have persisted up until the present, not only in indigenous communities, but also in *mestizo* (mixed race) communities in different regions of the country. Although these kinds of communal actions are still quite prevalent in the country, I want to make clear that they have not been the subject of our investigation, since they involve situations in which the actions occur under the pressure of a moral obligation arising from community life.

On the other hand, during the colonial era, there were also the so-called brotherhoods which, although wrapped in legal structures nominally corresponding to the Catholic Church, were organizations of laypeople, *criollos* (descendants of Spaniards), *mestizos*, and indigenous peoples with diverse religious, economic, and social background. Many of them were support institutions for the operation of schools, hospitals, and orphanages (Bechtloff 1996). They came to be what are now the foundations that also support these kinds of services. In the past as in the present, these kinds of organizations exist, because there are people who donate their time and money to these causes without any kind of personal profit or benefit involved. The support achieved through some brotherhoods for educational development and health care in the past had, in relative terms, greater importance than today, because modern public health and education institutions did not exist. This circumstance made the excellence of these support and solidarity institutions stand out even more.

In what is presented here, we will focus only on those actions that are carried out with certain regularity in favor of third parties without any payment whatsoever, both those in which an institution or group is involved and those carried out individually. We have not taken into consideration sporadic actions that are not done with certain regularity. It is important to note that, in the research on the subject, researchers often center solely on actions that people carry out for others within some institutional framework, leaving aside another set of actions that are carried

out by informal groups or individuals. This has been the case with studies like the one by Portocarrero for Peru (2004) and Layton for Mexico (2006).

Before beginning this investigation, we had the hypothesis, based on field work experiences, that we Mexicans undertake intense solidarity activity, which for the most part occurs through informal groups or in a totally individual manner, in addition to other activities carried out through more formal institutions. Similarly, we had the impression that acts of solidarity performed individually or through informal groups with little structure were much more common and frequent than those taking place through more formal, institutional groups.

For example, one frequently hears of a neighbor who visits and helps some sick or disabled neighbor, with certain regularity with the aim of helping them in regard to some of their limitations. This is an individual type of act of solidarity. On the other hand, in rural communities and especially in poor urban neighborhoods, voluntary labor is commonly organized among the pauperized inhabitants in order to facilitate introduction of basic urban services such as drinking water or drainage. It is true that in these cases, there is a personal or family benefit from the free labor, but this does not mean that there is not also a broader public benefit served by this free personal collaboration. On the other hand, and in a different context, we often observe people in churches (more women than men) who voluntarily do different tasks, from catechesis work to multiple activities such as organizing processions, drawings and raffles, varied courses, help for the sick, and many other things. Similarly, in another sphere, one frequently hears of women workers who regularly leave some of their children with a neighbor while they are at work. These practices are, without doubt, exercises of solidarity. In another sphere, there are, of course, actions that volunteers carry out through private assistance institutions (*instituciones de asistencia privada, I.A.P.*) such as orphanages, rehabilitation centers, or other kinds of organizations, either as simple collaborators or as part of administrative boards that help to organize activities and fundraising for the institutions. In this regard, a later chapter will deal more broadly with the trajectories of people who voluntarily contribute their time and efforts to these kinds of organizations, as well as the motivations that lead them to carry out this work.

Civil society organizations (CSO) also include the actions of many people acting as volunteers who carry out different unpaid tasks for the benefit of third parties in fields such as human rights, social development, and diverse citizen demands.

Daily life offers us multiple examples that go unnoticed most of the time. This is why the researcher faces a problem of mistaken conceptualization, because it is common for a good part of the activities we carry out voluntarily in favor of others to not be considered to be unpaid volunteer work (or work in solidarity¹). But, rather we think of them simply as examples of “normal cooperation”, without giving them any other content. It is even frequently the case that when someone is explicitly asked whether they do volunteer work, they respond negatively, even though that same person might respond positively when asked about some (volunteer or free)

¹“Volunteer” and “solidarity” work are used as synonyms throughout the text.

“cooperation” they have performed. The words “to be a volunteer” or “do volunteer work” carry very concrete connotations that often induce people to think that they surely have not done this. However, it is clear that, because of the social importance of these actions, it was important to get to know the main characteristics of this kind of behavior. It was necessary to back up our perceptions with clear and extensive information about different ways in which Mexican people carry out acts of solidarity. It was also important to find out about the environments or situations in which they mainly occur, the time dedicated to them, their regularity, if they are carried out individually or in some kind of group, and other aspects. The first chapter pointed out the aspects of the social and economic importance of these kinds of actions, and the need to measure their scope in some way. In this sense, we emphasize the social value of these actions, since in most cases they probably involve collaboration and support of a horizontal type between equals or peers that normally occurs without coercion. For this same reason, these actions reinforce the social cohesion of the different groups of people who make up the society where each cultural environment has its own way of inventing, in social terms, the forms that develop in its midst. In some countries, of which the United States is a typical example, volunteer actions tend to occur mainly through formally constituted organizations ([Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007](#)). Historically, these have been a place for promoting horizontal social relations among similar actors that has not only allowed for broader democratic practices, but also brings together support for a common good with certain independence from governmental action. This allows for the possibility of developing relatively autonomous public projects, something that in the case of Mexico has not been able to develop because of the historically developed social and cultural environment in this country, as explained in the book by this writer: *Organizaciones no lucrativas. Visión de su trayectoria en México* [NonProfit Organizations: A View of their Development in Mexico] (Verduzco, 2003).

In New Spain, the presence of the Crown and of the Church, both strongly authoritarian institutions, emanating from a framework of colonial domination, imposed an equally authoritarian stamp on the population and the institutions that soon followed that suppressed any initiative that went beyond the bounds of vertical decision-making. Partly due to this, the social peace imposed by Porfirio Díaz after many years of conflict could only occur based on an authoritarian practice intensely centered on his person, and years later, also after a long period of conflict, this could only be replaced by another authoritarian practice based on a single party with unique characteristics that remained in power during almost the entire twentieth century: much longer than any other authoritarian regime in the world in that same period. This situation, which continued to encourage authoritarian forms, has denied us a freer and more spontaneous development of our own solidarity resources, including not only acts of solidarity in the strict sense studied herein, but also the spheres of social and political participation.

This is why, as will be seen further on in this chapter, the contributions of our volunteer actions or acts of solidarity have very different characteristics in the case of Mexico, at least in comparison with our neighbors to the north in the United States and Canada, although, on the other hand, they do occur with a relatively great intensity.

Similarly, as we shall see, the most common fields of action for volunteer action are also somewhat different from those of other countries. This is an indication of some of our clearest differences, while at the same time it indicates the kind of activities to which the socio-cultural environment gives the greatest importance.

About the Methodological Procedure

Before presenting the results of this investigation, it would seem to be important to also mention certain aspects of this work that we took into account before beginning. As has already been mentioned, we suspected that acts of solidarity by Mexican peoples were very widespread, but this was something that needed to be corroborated. This implied not only thinking about an information gathering instrument that would make possible national representation; but which would also be appropriate for capturing those aspects that seemed to us to be central in the Mexican case, such as those acts of solidarity that do not take place within institutional spheres. It seemed to us that we should try to capture not only what was taking place in regard to acts of solidarity at the moment of the interviews, but also what had occurred throughout the lives of the people interviewed since, based on what had been observed in our society with other investigation instruments, such as participant observation and unstructured interviews, we knew that at least a certain dedication to solidarity activities at times occurs during a period of people's lives that may be short or of intermediate duration since it has to do with certain characteristics of their life cycle, such as the period when their children attend elementary or secondary school. In these circumstances, it is easier for some mothers to perform volunteer work at the schools that their children attend. The circumstances of each person in this regard may vary, and hence, it was important to capture them. Similarly, it was necessary to prepare an information collection instrument capable of finding out about acts of solidarity that take place in institutions, in the typical form of what is called “volunteer work”, not only because this modality has been the one most studied in other countries, but also because it is the one that most easily and directly allows for international comparisons. However, the greatest challenge consisted in preparing the questionnaire in such a way that it would lead those interviewed to think about the diversity of acts of solidarity they may have carried out or were carrying out during the period the survey was applied. As mentioned previously, at times it is not easy for people to realize or identify the type of actions they are carrying out, especially when some kind of preconception exists in this regard. For example, when a person is asked whether they do volunteer work, many say no, because they do not associate “volunteer” work with some of the actions that they have in fact carried out.

Due to prior difficulties, we decided to carry out several tests with questionnaires, which we then modified and refined based on the perceptions obtained during these first exploratory experiences. This was how we developed one that was

sufficiently appropriate, although it did not completely satisfy us, as we were aware that it did not completely free us from certain limitations due to the limited time for administering the questionnaire, which would not allow for freer expression, since it would have to be applied to a national sample. In regard to the foregoing, we believe that, despite limitations, the results we present are a good sample, in which we have incorporated some of what other investigators have done, as well as exploring other veins of Mexican solidarity behavior for the first time. In this regard, some of the findings presented are surely going to surprise some people, because they go beyond the familiar stereotypes. However, the general objective of the investigation was precisely to pose some new hypotheses for well-known matters, which also lead us to other unexpected findings.

The sample was designed based on the sampling framework used by the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE, the Spanish acronym) for the Mexican Republic. Altogether, 1497 questionnaires were applied to persons of both sexes, 18 years and older. The survey is representative on both a national and regional level, as well as for both rural and urban environments. An extra sampling was done for the state of Chihuahua so as to also achieve a representative sample for that state.²

Actors in Solidarity

When studies have been made on volunteerism, normally actions or work done with certain regularity by people on a volunteer basis, i.e., without pay, through formal institutions, such as a hospice or disabled support center, has been included in this concept. Naturally, other kinds of actions are also included, such as helping to raise funds by means of different strategies (raffles, collections), but always considering actions or work carried out through institutions. However, in Mexico and certainly also in other Latin American countries, people carry out volunteer actions in very different situations and spheres that do not always have an institutional or formal character, although, of course, volunteer actions are also performed within the formal structure of institutions.

In this work, we propose to explore the different paths that Mexicans follow to carry out volunteer actions, i.e., unpaid actions to the benefit of others who are not their relatives and that are carried out or have been carried out with certain regularity. It may be asked why relatives are not included. One reason is that there is usually a sense of moral obligation toward them, together, at times, with an emotional situation that in some way makes it a more normal and frequent matter to perform

²The survey was applied under the direction of Dr. Miguel Basañéz (Global Quality Research, Princeton, N.J.). There is an appendix at the end with the details of the sample. Tables are included there that are somewhat different from those that are presented throughout this analysis. The readers will observe that the former correspond to multiple responses by those interviewed, and hence they are not completely compatible with what is presented here. However, we believe that the readers may find them useful.

actions for their benefit. In contrast, there is less inclination to perform support actions for people who are unknown or not close to the one acting. In this regard, we would be speaking of exercising solidarity to the benefit of others beyond the circle of one’s own relatives.

Originally, different mutual aid actions served as the foundations for social organization of this activity. In primitive societies, reciprocal aid actions were indispensable for the survival of the group, but as the organization of society became more complex, money, as a means of exchange, facilitated basic interchanges that made possible an initial type of social organization. In this new context, facilitated by monetary exchange, actions in favor of others not mediated by money or blood relationship had a special value, because they helped to solve other problems, especially among those bereft of material goods or family protection. In fact, among current vulnerable groups, such as the indigenous peoples in Mexico, some acts of reciprocal support are still customarily performed through customs like the “*tequio*” or “*mano vuelta*” in relation to agricultural labor or in order to repair houses and communal property. This is a matter of mutual aid when there is a shortage of money: a situation that has undergone change with the passage of time to the degree to which communities have entered more fully into the monetary economy with a growing orientation toward the exterior. In any event, although these forms are not observed very widely in the country as a whole, some of them persist. However, in this work we will not refer to this specific type of actions within the framework of particular cultural contexts, but rather to those exercised with certain regularity in favor of others who are not relatives and without any payment whatsoever.

Volunteer Actions or Acts of Solidarity

When dealing with the subject of unpaid acts of solidarity by people to the benefit of others, we must also take into account other aspects that have to do with the modalities as well as the circumstances under which these acts are performed. Up until now, a little more was known in Mexico about those who carried out their acts of solidarity through formal institutions, but there had been little exploration of acts of solidarity carried out in informal spheres and by individuals. As was indicated earlier, prior to beginning this work, we suspected, because of our own experience, both in everyday life and by means of field observation in other types of investigations, that informal and individual acts of solidarity were perhaps very widespread among the population, but the limited information in this regard was restricted to case studies that, although they provided valuable and suggestive information, did not provide sufficient clues to determine the extent of this kind of phenomena in Mexico. On the other hand, the few available studies oriented toward broader coverage, whether at the level of a city or of the country as a whole, had sought to find out more about acts of solidarity in the sphere of formal organizations, and hence, other forms of collaboration that might be very widespread were outside their sphere of consideration.

It was also necessary to consider whether those who perform a certain type of action, for example, as catechist in a church, also help in other spheres such as work in a school or neighborhood or for some political group. To what degree does people's religious orientation help or not help to extend their volunteer actions to other fields? To what degree are people who seem not to be moved by religious motivations involved in volunteer actions? To what degree and in terms of what characteristics can we speak of a profile for those who perform volunteer actions in Mexico? And, if there is such a profile, what socioeconomic and socio-demographic characteristics define it? Or perhaps might several profiles be determined? Can regional differences be identified? Are we talking about sporadic actions or frequent actions? Do they take up several hours each time or do they have a very short duration? Are they performed through some institution or organized group or do they take place in an informal or even individual way? These characteristics are important, because they provide us with elements to be able to evaluate not only the importance of these kinds of activities; but also the possible relations that might be established with other people; depending on whether these actions are performed in an organization or group or individually. These aspects have to do with the characteristics that make up the social fabric in the Mexican context.

General Characteristics of the Survey

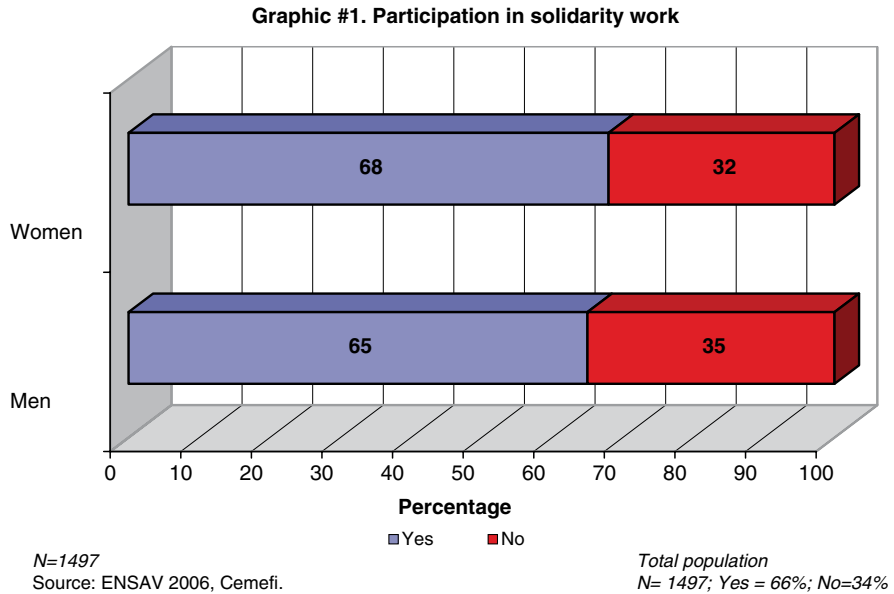
The questionnaire was applied at the end of the year 2005 and during the first months of 2006 with people who were over 18 years of age. The sample is representative of the country, the north, center, and south regions, the Federal District, and rural and urban sectors. An extra sample for the state of Chihuahua was also included so that it would be representative of that state.

In the country, the population of over 18 years of age is composed of 62,737,152 individuals of both genders, in accordance with the data from the 2005 Population Count (INEGI 2005).

The First Results

The first basic information that the survey offers us is that two-thirds of those interviewed (66%) answered that they have done something for others with certain regularity without pay and without those benefited being their relatives. This is a high percentage for the population of 18 years of age or older. In absolute terms, this proportion is equal to 41.4 million people. The differences between men and women, although small, favor women (see Graphic 2.1).

In terms of age groups, the variation is not very great, but the numbers slightly favor the adult population from 30 to 49 years old, since 69% of them have participated in these activities, as against 61% of young people between 18 and 29 years



Graphic 2.1 Participation in solidarity work

old. As we shall see, there is a slight tendency toward greater participation at a mature age than with the youth.

The comparison between rural and urban areas favors the former with 71% of the people performing or having performed acts of solidarity, as against 65% in urban areas. Undoubtedly, the greater individualism in the cities, together with the fast pace of life and the shortage of time, produces a situation in which a larger part of the population refrains from participating in these kinds of actions.

In terms of income level, it would seem that there is slightly more participation among the low-income group, although, as already mentioned, the differences are so small that it would not make sense to take them into account. A similar situation is found with the self-employed, insofar as there is a little more participation by this group in comparison with those working on a salary or wage basis.

In reality, there are no significant differences among the volunteers in terms of demographical, educational, or income variables. *The degree of participation in these kinds of actions is very similar throughout the entire population, independent of the characteristics mentioned. This is a very clear feature, which should be taken into account and which was corroborated in several ways when analyzing the information, so that we can categorically affirm that participation in acts of solidarity by the Mexican people occurs more or less equally throughout the entire population, independently of their educational and socioeconomic situation.*

We should also add that up until now, this was not something that was understood about Mexico. Of course, some of us had the impression that this was the case, but it has been more common to think that these kinds of activities had a

greater presence and intensity in some socioeconomic strata than in others. The data are now very clear in this regard in terms of the extent of this behavior.

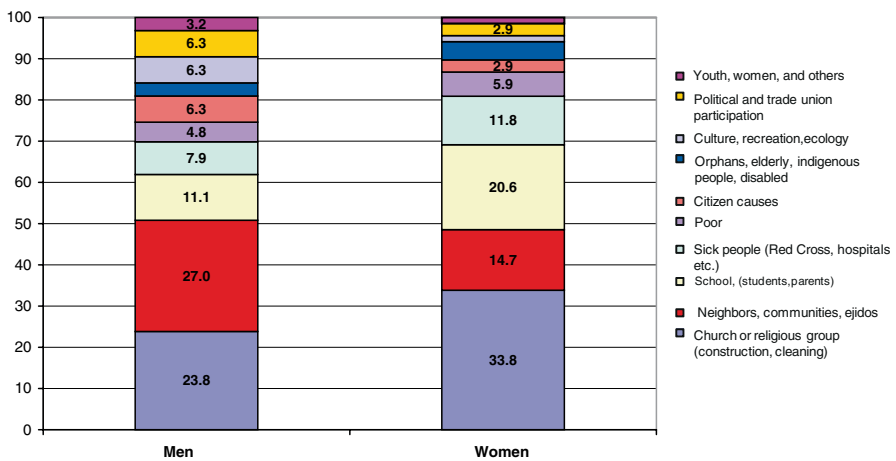
The Most Common Acts of Solidarity

In terms of the types of actions people are most inclined to undertake, it is not surprising that they are: in first place, through church or religious groups (29%), followed by activities among neighbors or the community (20%), with school activities in third place (16%), and help or support for sick people in fourth place (10%). These four types of actions are the most common among the Mexican population (see Graphic 2.2).

Church and religious group activities that those interviewed reported are very diverse, including help with cleaning churches or washing altar cloths, some construction activities, teaching catechesis to children, preparation courses for marriage or confirmation, fundraising, personal attention to churchgoers, and other common institutional matters. It should be observed that the participation of men and women is relatively distinct. Women take part in these activities more than men do.

In regard to activities involving neighbors or the community, the actions reported have to do with organizing different activities to improve the neighborhood, whether aimed at introducing different services or adapting some installations for common use, as well as raising funds and accompanying neighbors needing company and support. In this case, there is greater participation by men than women, with a ratio of 1.7 men to each woman, while in school collaborations, two women

Graphic #2. Solidarity work by type of activity and gender



Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi.

Graphic 2.2 Solidarity work by type of activity and gender

participate for every man. In activities with the sick, poor, orphans, and the disabled, there is a greater presence of women, but this is not the case with citizen causes, political groups, and projects with the government, youth, etc., where men stand out.

Activities reported for schools have to do with support for construction and improvement of the classrooms or school grounds, help with teaching itself, fund-raising, and attention to students and parents.

In terms of the preferences of those interviewed, there is, of course, a clear religious orientation which, in the case of Mexico, refers almost exclusively to the Catholic Church, but we will deal more fully with this subject later on.

It is also interesting to observe that there are important variations in regard to participation in actions in favor of others and in regard to specific solidarity activities that are carried out in different regions of the country (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

Table 2.1 Solidarity work by region

Total	<i>N</i> =	Region					
		North	West	Center	South	Federal District	Chihuahua
Yes	1,497	388	309	310	330	160	300
No	66%	60%	71%	62%	78%	59%	75%
	34%	40%	29%	38%	22%	41%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

Table 2.2 Solidarity work by type of activity and region

Type of activity	Region					
	North	West	Center	South	Federal District	Chihuahua
Church or religious group (construction, cleaning)	32.2	31.4	27.4	28.2	20.6	32.9
Neighbors, communities, ejidos	13.6	12.9	32.3	23.1	20.6	17.8
School (students, parents)	15.3	10.0	16.1	16.7	30.2	16.4
Sick people (Red Cross, hospitals, etc.)	13.6	14.3	9.7	6.4	6.3	13.7
Poor	6.8	10.0	0.0	2.6	1.6	5.5
Citizen causes	5.1	5.7	1.6	3.8	6.3	2.7
Orphans, elderly, indigenous people, disabled	1.7	4.3	4.8	6.4	3.2	5.5
Sports or recreation	1.7	2.9	1.6	2.6	4.8	2.7
Political groups or parties	6.8	1.4	0.0	2.6	1.6	0.0
Government (projects and activities)	1.7	4.3	1.6	2.6	1.6	0.0
Young people or children (boy scouts, guides, clubs)	0.0	1.4	1.6	2.6	1.6	1.4
Other (environmental, women, culture, unions)	1.7	1.4	3.2	2.6	1.6	1.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

Regional Differences

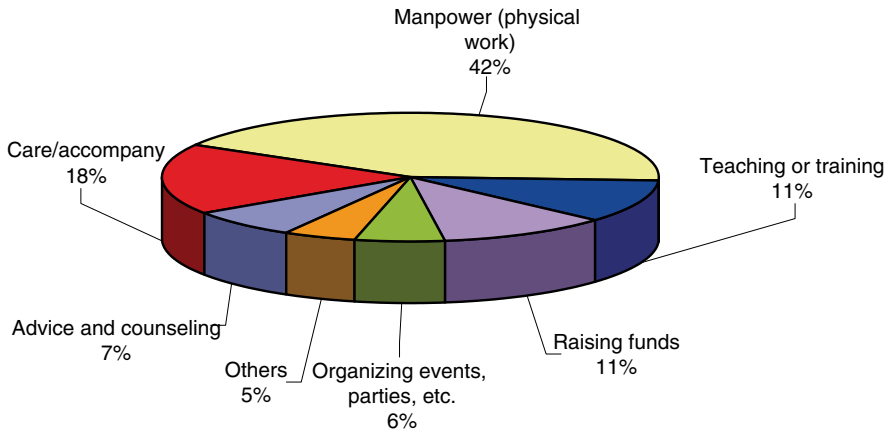
More people have performed acts of solidarity in the south (78%) than in the north (60%) or the Federal District (59%), and more people in the rural sector have done so (71%) than in the urban sector (65%).

But the preference for the trio of actions in favor of church, school, and neighbors is maintained in all regions with some differences, and thus, this kind of majority orientation seems to be a feature that goes beyond regional differences.

However, it is worthwhile to emphasize that while preferences for actions in favor of the church are lower in the Federal District (20.6%), they are greater in the west (31.4%); orientation toward actions in favor of the “sick” was also reported to be higher in the west (14.3%), as against only 6.3% in the Federal District. The inclination toward actions to benefit neighbors or the community is also lower in the Federal District (20.6%) than in the central region (32.3%), and preferences in favor of school activities are higher in the Federal District (30.2%) than in the south. We might perhaps think that the intense urban life of the Federal District reduces real possibilities for action benefiting others and that perhaps a certain school pressure to perform actions in favor of the place where their children are educated leads more people to orient themselves in this way, especially in the Federal District. It should also be pointed out that, although actions to the benefit of others in “parties or political groups” were generally reported as very low, in the north region it is twice that for the country in general.

Given the pioneering character of this investigation, the questionnaire could not have been planned to properly explore possible regional differences in acts of solidarity. However, the variations mentioned earlier indicate that there are undoubtedly also cultural and institutional influences that in some way promote one type of solidarity work more than another in the different regions of the country. For example, in the west, where the Catholic Church has had a greater institutional presence for a long time, it is probable that this has favored a relative inclination of people toward ecclesiastical activities, as well as, perhaps, help for the sick. However, another hypothesis to explore would have to do with the greater or lesser possibility of access to public health services; if there is a greater scarcity of these services, for example, the support and solidarity people express toward the sick and needy becomes more important. Emigration to the United States would be, in the specific case of the west, another vein to explore, given the intensity of the phenomenon in that region and hence greater abandonment of the elderly population. Something similar may be happening in the case of the greater presence of solidarity work in schools in the Federal District and the southern region of the country, since institutional action may, perhaps, because of different circumstances, be stronger and better structured in the Federal District, while in the more rural and poorer south, it is more difficult to encounter this kind of presence in order to channel this kind of effort on the part of parents. In short, these are a few possibilities that we are just beginning to outline here, but they open the door to new exploration efforts for future investigations.

Graphic #3. Solidarity work by kind of participation



Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi.

N = 988

Graphic 2.3 Solidarity work by kind of participation

To return to the subject of the concrete activities undertaken, those that have to do with physical labor, handicrafts, and contributions of manpower clearly stand out. This was what 42.4% of the volunteers reported. Farther behind, we find those who have provided personal attention to those who need it (17.8%). Then, in third place come fundraising activities; in fourth place, teaching and training; and finally, activities that have to do with organizing events and parties. The participation in other kinds of activities is very low (see Graphic 2.3).

We observe that more people participate in those activities where, for different reasons, manpower is required: cleaning work, handicrafts, work contributing to construction or repairs, and similar actions.

Those who support the church or schools contribute, above all, their own physical labor, followed at a distance by teaching activities and then fundraising; in contrast, those who support neighbors or the community also do so first of all with physical labor but, unlike the foregoing case, this is followed by personal attention and care and then by fundraising. These are the most common kinds of acts of solidarity by Mexicans.

Later on we shall see to what degree these tendencies seem to go along with other characteristics of the population.

Intensity of Solidarity Activities

Half of those interviewed who said they had done something for others have only undertaken only one kind of activity: for example, they have collaborated for free with church or school, but nothing else. The other half has undertaken two or more

kinds of actions: for example, they have collaborated with their neighborhood school and also with the church; others have also helped a sick neighbor. This information reveals that there is a relatively strong inclination among the Mexican population to engage in these kinds of volunteer actions, given that, altogether, considering the Mexican population of over 18 years of age, we would be talking about a third of the total population or about 20.6 million individuals. These people have undertaken at least two types of solidarity activities. We will try to go more deeply into both the modalities these actions have assumed and the characteristics of the people who have participated in them.

Trajectory of Solidarity Activities

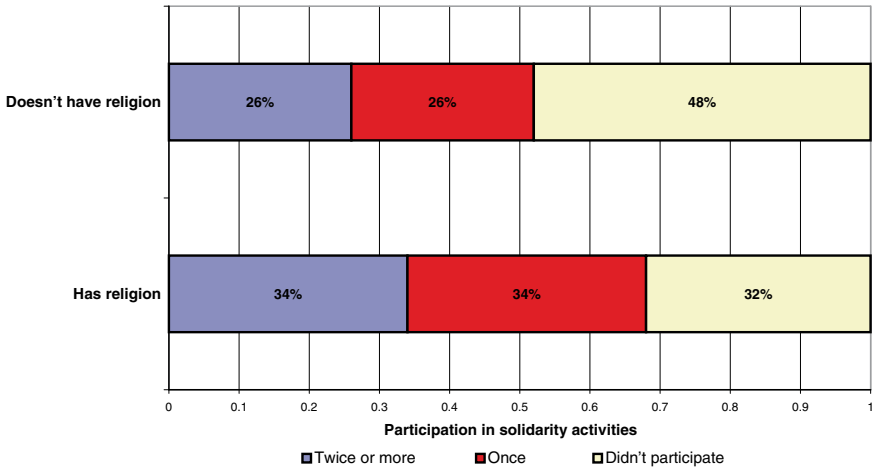
In terms of the time dedicated to these actions, 60% of all volunteers continued to participate in at least one at the time of the interview; 8.5% had stopped participating less than 3 months before; and 8.5% had stopped participating between 3 and 12 months before. That is to say, 77% of all volunteers had undertaken at least one action in favor of others in the year prior to the interview. However, if we consider the entire population of the sample, i.e., both those who performed volunteer actions and those who did not, we find that we are talking about 50% of the total population, which, projected for the entire country, would be 31.3 million people 18 years or older. This is a high percentage that surpasses countries like Canada and the United States, where volunteer participation over a year has been 45% and 27%, respectively (Corporation for National and Community Service 2007; Hall et al. 2006).

On the other hand, those who were doing something for others at the time of the interview represented 40% of all those interviewed. This corresponds, in proportional terms, to 25 million people in the population as a whole.

The foregoing data also allow us to perceive the dynamic situation with regard to when acts of solidarity in favor of others occur, since there are moments in people's lives when the performance of these kinds of actions are facilitated by different circumstances. In this regard, it is worthwhile to remember the initial figure of 66% of the total sample who reported having engaged in some act of solidarity: 40% of the total sample said that they were doing something for others at the time of the interview and the remaining 26% of the total sample reporting that they had participated in an act of solidarity prior to the interview.

Now we are going to further analyze that initial 66% of those interviewed who reported having engaged in some act of solidarity. Half of them (33%) are engaged in only one type of act of solidarity; another 17% reported having carried out two types of actions, for example, one with the church, teaching catechism, and another with a school, collaborating with school parents. The remaining 16% performed three or more types of action. In this last group, we have those persons who have been more oriented than others toward participating in these kinds of solidarity activities. In absolute numbers for the whole population, we would have a little more than 10 million people here.

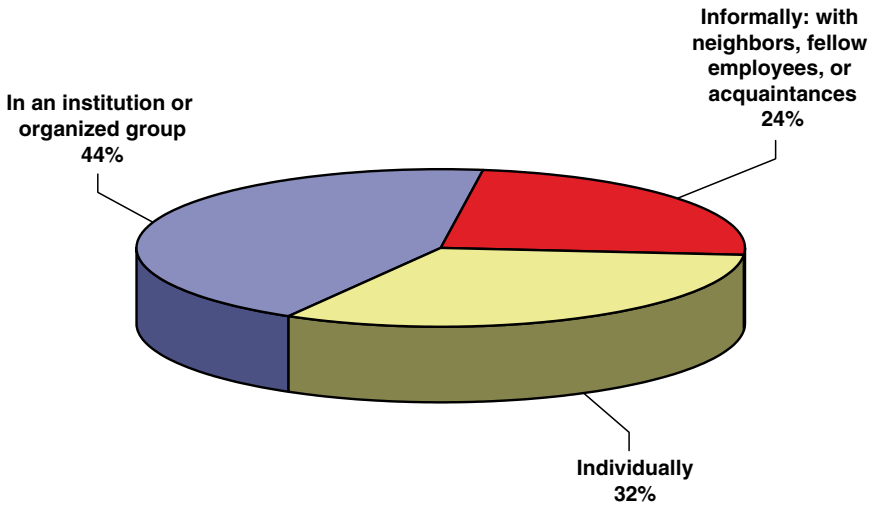
Graphic #4. Participation in solidarity activities by religious affiliation



Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

Graphic 2.4 Participation in solidarity activities by religious affiliation

Graphic #5. Ways of providing solidarity/volunteer work



Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

Graphic 2.5 Ways of providing solidarity/volunteer work

But what are the characteristics of those who have engaged in acts of solidarity in comparison with those who reported not having done so? What are the characteristics of those who have participated in more actions in comparison with those who have participated less?

Religious Affiliation and Acts of Solidarity

In the entire sample, 84% said that they were Catholic, 10% were from other religions (mainly evangelicals), and 6% without religion.³ Among those who reported having some religious affiliation, 68% have carried out some act of solidarity with others (34% at least one action and 34% two or more), while among those who reported not having a religion, only 51% said that they had participated in these kinds of actions (26% did at least one and 26% did two or more). This difference, although it is not great, is sufficiently notable to lead us to believe that belonging to a religion leads to a slightly greater inclination toward undertaking acts of solidarity in favor of others.

Among Catholics, 30% have been principally oriented toward church activities, with neighborhood or community activities in second place (20%), school in third place (16.5%) and help for the sick in fourth (10%). Among those who belong to other religions (mainly evangelicals), the order is: the church in first place (also 30%), help for the sick in second place (13%), and school and neighbors in third and fourth places (12% each).

Those who reported having no religion were oriented, in first place, toward acts of solidarity for neighbors or the community (38%), with school activities in second place (22%), and third, sports and church activities in almost equal measure (only 6% each). It is, of course, notable that, having declared that they have no religion, there are cases of dedication to church activities, although in limited numbers. On the other hand, it is also noteworthy that actions with neighbors are very high, since actions with neighbors and with the school come to 60% for this group, which appears to be logical given their declaration of not belonging to any religion.

A greater number of those who reported that they were Catholics or belonged to other religions have engaged in acts of solidarity, and a third of those who have done so have participated in more than one type; conversely, those who reported having no religion were less oriented toward these kinds of actions and fewer people engaged in more than one act of solidarity. *In this sense, we can say that religious affiliation leads not only to a greater inclination toward acts of solidarity, but also to a relatively greater intensity of participation in these kinds of actions.*

In line with the preceding commentaries, it might also be considered that, those who claim to have a religious conviction might perform acts of solidarity more often. In this respect, however, the data do not seem to confirm this hypothesis beyond the relation already mentioned between belonging to a religion and engaging in more acts of solidarity.⁴

³The differences in this regard between our sample and the population census for the year 2000 have a lot to do with the ages considered in each source: the census includes people 5 years old and older and our sample was done among people 18 years and older.

⁴Among Catholics, 54% said that they went to church once a week or more, while 42% said that they went only occasionally, and 6% said that they never or almost never went.

Acts of Solidarity and Institutions

Another important facet has to do with the modalities in which these kinds of actions are carried out. They may be carried out through some institution or organized group or in any informal way with other people without any kind of group structure, or in a strictly individual manner. But how are these activities performed in Mexico? What types of groups or institutions are most commonly involved? Is there any relation between belonging to some group and engaging in acts of solidarity?

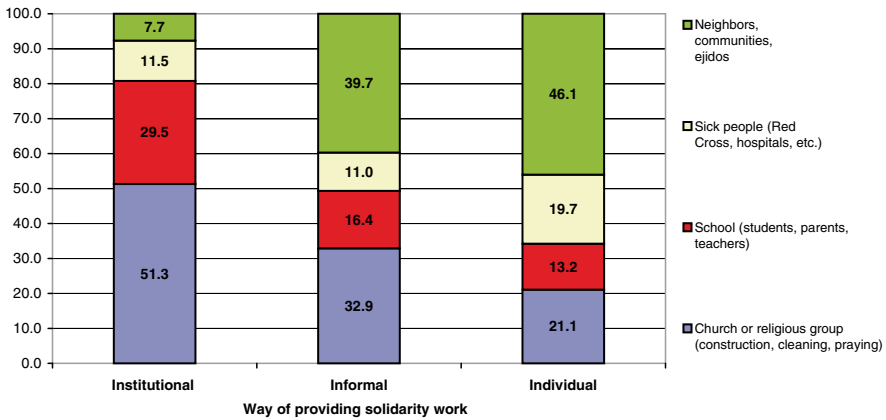
Of those who engage in acts of solidarity, 44% do so through some institution or organized group, 24% do so informally with neighbors, friends, or fellow workers, and 32% in an individual way. These results are in accordance with our hypothesis prior to applying the survey, since observation of what occurs in Mexican society led us to suspect that acts of solidarity developed individually or informally outside the institutional sphere were much more common than those taking place through institutions. The data now confirm this suspicion. In any event, the high percentage of people engaging in these activities either through informal groups or on their own, independently of institutions or organized groups, is noteworthy, since we are talking about more than half of them (56%). Similarly, those who engage in acts of solidarity in a completely individual way make up almost a third, which is also a high number.

The foregoing data reflect the population’s preferences for participating in acts of solidarity, but they also let us see to what extent institutions and groups do or do not facilitate links among those who need help and those who wish to provide it. *Independently of the reasons and circumstances, it is clear that in Mexico these acts of solidarity are mainly carried out outside institutions and organized groups.*

Before continuing, let us also examine the types of activities volunteers carry out in accordance with the modality they have chosen in order to do so, whether that is an institution or organized group, on their own, or through some informal group of friends.

As can be seen in Graphic 2.6, the four activities that monopolize the attention of a majority of volunteers are solidarity activities in church, school, with neighbors, and with the sick, which make up two-thirds or more in any of the three cases. However, there are some interesting variations, since while the church, religious groups, and schools encourage the activities of those who participate in them through institutions, activity with neighbors takes first place among informal volunteers and also among those participating as individuals. The modality in which acts of solidarity are performed is very important, since this favors one kind of action more than another, in addition to expressing a different way of relating to the subjects or causes to be benefited. It implies a different point of view about working in each context, perhaps a different degree of commitment, and more or less interaction with other people. The modalities in which these kinds of actions are performed open several doors to analyzing this behavior: How and why are these activities begun in one of the three modalities? What circumstances facilitate this

Graphic #6. Main places where solidarity work is done by way of providing it*



Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi.

* Only the first four places are considered

Graphic 2.6 Main modalities of solidarity work done in different sectors of activity

beginning? What kinds of motivations are there? How do they help to structure one or the other kind of social fabric? In this work, we have sought to initiate an exploration in this regard, although later another chapter will go more deeply into what happens mainly within the sphere of formal organizations.

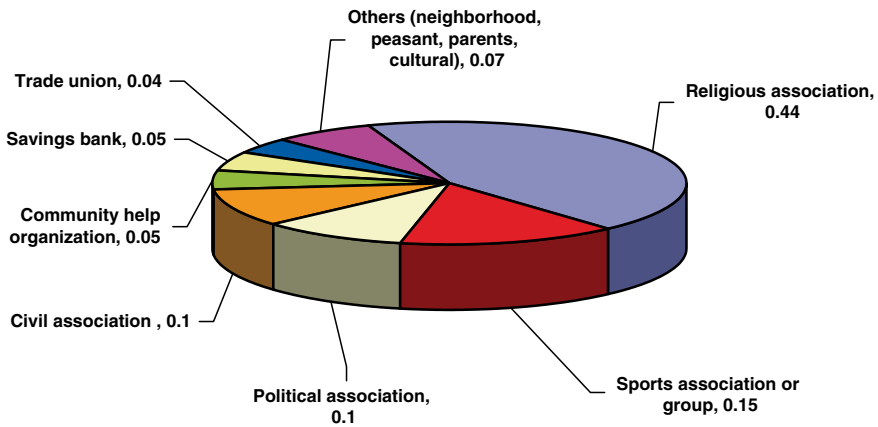
Belonging to Organized Groups

Now we will delve into another dimension of acts of solidarity: to what extent do volunteers belong to organized groups or institutions? Does this encourage participation in acts of solidarity? It should be noted that the question of belonging to organized groups is different than the question of whether acts of solidarity are carried out through organized groups or not. The foregoing information has indicated that more people in Mexico tend to carry out acts of solidarity outside the institutional sphere, although the figure for those who do so in the context of organized groups (44%) is also considerable (see Graphic 2.7).

In terms of belonging to organized groups, the survey indicates that only 362 people or 24% said they belonged to one of them. This figure seems to be low, but it is also congruent with the results of other studies.⁵ On the other hand, this information also corresponds to information from other source that indicates that the Mexican solidarity sector is small.⁶ In reality, if more people belonged to these

⁵Layton, Michael (*op. cit.*).

⁶Verduzco, Gustavo (*op. cit.*).

Graphic #7. Membership in organized groups

Source: ENSAV 2006,

N = 362

Graphic 2.7 Membership in organized groups

kinds of organizations, surely there would be many more organizations than the currently existing ones in Mexico.

What organized groups do they belong to? The majority said that they belonged to ecclesiastical or religious groups (44%), followed at a distance by associations or groups of a sports, political, or civil nature. Each of the last three categories accounts for 10%. Three-quarters of the people who said that they belonged to organized groups fall within these four types. Very few, 5% or less, said that they belonged to community help organizations, savings groups, or trade union associations.

In the light of the foregoing and the fact that the greatest organizational affiliation is to ecclesiastical or religious organizations, it is difficult to believe that a more or less robust civil society exists in the country. Less than half (12%) of those who said that they belonged to an organization participate in organizations other than religious and sports organizations. We reaffirm that we are talking about belonging to organized groups and therefore, due to the socio-historical processes that have occurred in the country, the low level of the foregoing figures should not be surprising, i.e., 24% belonging to some organization and the majority of those in religious or church groups. In this regard, the book by this author already cited (2003) may be consulted. However, considering this information in a broader context leads us to reaffirm that civil society in Mexico is weak, which is unfortunate for present and future democratic processes in the country.

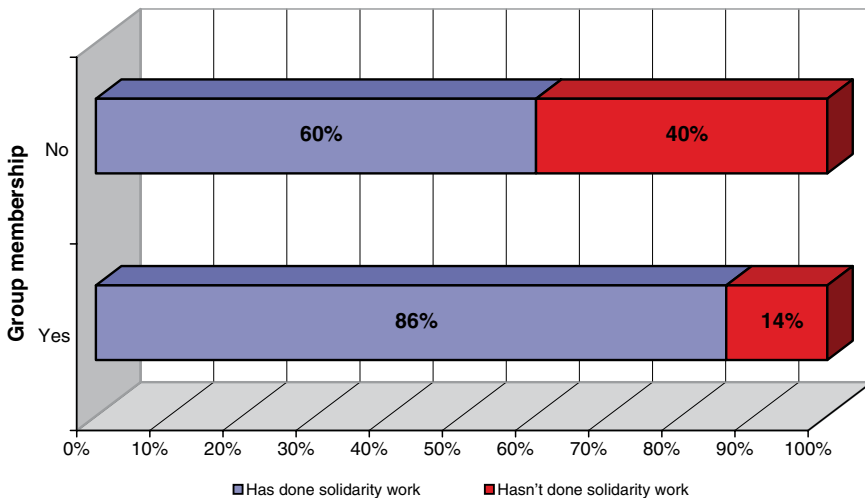
Group Affiliation and Acts of Solidarity

Let us take a look at Graphic 2.8, and then, return to the subject of engaging in acts of solidarity. Among those who have participated in these actions, a little more than two-thirds (69%) do not belong to any organized group, but among those who belong to a group, the majority (86%) have performed some kind of act of solidarity, while only 60% of the other category have done so. *This information clearly suggests that belonging to a group implies a strong inclination toward performing some kind of action in favor of others.*

But to what degree does belonging to an organized group lead to or facilitate a situation in which people also carry out acts of solidarity through some formal institution? Clearly, the majority (62%) carried out their acts of solidarity through some institution or organized group. In contrast, among those who do not belong to any group, only a little more than a third (36%) carried out an act of solidarity through some institution. It also seems that not belonging to some group implies an inclination for people to engage in acts of solidarity on their own in an individual fashion, since 40% did so in this way, while only 16% of those who belong to a group did so in an individual way. *In this sense, although group membership is very low, it seems that it represents a certain influence, leading these people to also carry out their acts of solidarity through some institution or group.*

Now let us examine another dimension of the inclination to carry out volunteer actions: to what degree is participation in acts of solidarity related to whether another member or other members of the family do so?

Graphic #8. Solidarity work by group membership



Source: ENSAV 2006

N = 362

Graphic 2.8 Solidarity work by group membership

Acts of Solidarity in the Family

In a little over half of the cases (54%), those who have engaged in these kinds of actions have other members of their families who have also participated in similar activities, while only a fourth of those who have not engaged in these kinds of practices have immediate family members who have. It would seem that in some way there is a certain influence in the home that helps or encourages other members to also engage in these types of activities. This is reinforced by the fact that, in homes where other members participate in these volunteer actions, 32% of those interviewed participate or have participated in several kinds of volunteer activity, while in cases where there are no other household members acting as volunteers, this occurs in only 18% of the cases.

This subject will be covered more extensively, later on, in a chapter about volunteers and explored in depth, based on case studies.

Frequency and Time Dedicated to Participation in Acts of Solidarity

The questionnaire also asked about the amount of time dedicated by each person to the volunteer activities they had mentioned, as well as the frequency of their participation. As will be seen, there are large variations in this regard.

A few people dedicate the entire day or every day to these activities, while others engage in them once or twice a week, or only a few times a year. Similarly, the number of hours dedicated to these activities is also quite variable.

In the information presented earlier, we have only taken into account those who said that they were participating in some kind of volunteer action at the time of the interview. This represents 40% of those interviewed which, in terms of numbers for the whole country, corresponds to a little more than 25 million people 18 years of age or older. We have limited this exercise to those who were active in solidarity work at the time of the interview. This way we were assured that they were referring with greater clarity and certainty to the facts of their current experience with regard to both the number of hours and the frequency of their volunteer activities.

Clearly, each individual dedicates different times and hours to these kinds of activities. The average for the sample as a whole shows that each person dedicated the equivalent of 27 8-h days a year. However, as we shall see presently, there is a great deal of variation.

A very few (8.3% of volunteers and 3.3% of all those interviewed) said that they were engaged in these activities every day, dedicating between half an hour and 12 h a day. On average, each one of these individuals dedicates 4.08 h to their volunteer activities. Over a period of a year, this is equivalent to 186 8-h days. In terms of the total population of the country, we would be talking about 2 million people.

Then we have those who said that they engage in these activities with a frequency of 2–3 times a week. They represent 13.2% of the volunteers and 5.2% of all those interviewed. These figures would represent about 3 million people. They dedicated 3.46 h each time, which comes to a total of 58 8-h days a year.

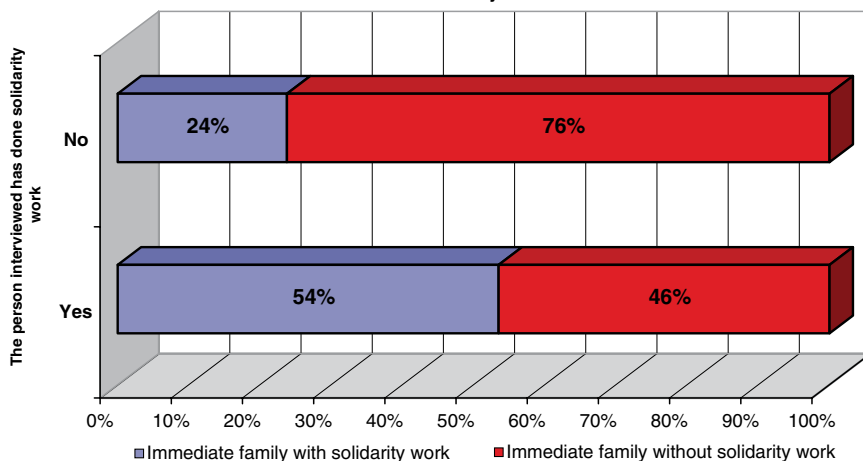
The next group consists of those who said that they participate in these kinds of activities once a week. They represent 15% of the volunteers and 6% of all those interviewed. On average, they dedicate 2.62 h each time, which is equivalent to 17.7 8-h days a year. In numbers, this is equivalent to 3.7 million people.

Those who dedicate some time every 2 weeks are only 3.5% of the sample volunteers and 1.6% of those interviewed. On average, each one dedicates 3.1 h each time, which would be the equivalent of 10.5 days a year. These people represent 1 million people in the whole country.

Finally, the majority are those who dedicate some of their time with a frequency lower than once every 2 weeks, making up 60% of the volunteers and 24% of all those interviewed. These people responded that they dedicate some of their time with a frequency that ranges from once a month to only once or twice a year. On average, each person in this group dedicates the equivalent of 1.7 8-h days a year. These figures would represent about 15 million people (Graphics 2.9 and 2.10).

As seen in the foregoing information, the global averages are deceptive, since they hide different nuances of reality. In this case, it is very clear, since although we can truthfully say that Mexican volunteers dedicate 27 working days a year to acts

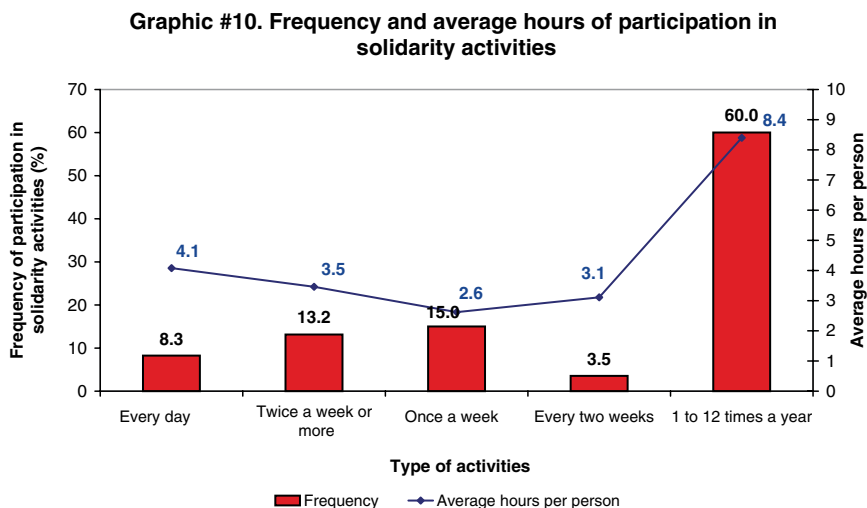
Table #9. Percentage of people interviewed whose relatives have experience in solidarity work



Source: ENSAV 2006

N = 635

Graphic 2.9 Percentage of people interviewed whose relatives have experience in solidarity work



Fuente: ENSAV 2006

N = 593

Graphic 2.10 Frequency and average hours of participation in solidarity activities

of solidarity, the more detailed data indicates a contrast between the small section of only 8% in the first volunteer group, who carry out these actions every day and dedicated the equivalent of half a year or 186 days (51% of the year) and the majority of 60%, who only dedicate an average of 1.7 days a year. These are clearly two very different groups in terms of their dedication to acts of solidarity.

Similarly, we have those who, without dedicating themselves to these activities every day, do engage in them with a frequency that ranges from 2 or 3 times a week to once every two weeks, who make up 41% of total hours and represent 32% of all people engaged in acts of solidarity. We might think that these cases represent behavior more in keeping with the image we have of volunteers, people who periodically dedicate some time to solidarity activities. Considering this proportion in regard to the population of the country as a whole, it would represent almost 8 million people (7.7 million).

A careful analysis of the data led us to discover three types of actors based on their dedication to solidarity activities. This has to do with three characteristics: the first is the frequency with which they engage in these actions, since it is very different if this occurs every day or if it is a matter of occurrences distributed in different ways over the course of a year; the second is the amount of time dedicated each time they engage in these activities, from a short while to several hours, according to the availability and desires of each person; the third refers more to the degree of dedication of these people than to time and frequency, insofar as volunteers may dedicate themselves to several types of this activity, such as accompanying and helping a sick neighbor, teaching catechism at the neighborhood church, and also helping in their children's school. In this case, we are referring to those who engage in several kinds of action.

Volunteers in Mexico

Now we are going to present some information about the three kinds of volunteer actors, first segregating those who carry out acts of solidarity every day, who we have already seen are a small group representing only 8% of total volunteers (and 3.3% of the total population surveyed). In the second category, we have those volunteers who carry out actions with certain regularity, with a frequency ranging from three times a week to once every 2 weeks. This group represents 32% of the volunteers and 12.7% of the total population. Finally, the third group is made up of those who perform their actions more infrequently, ranging from once a month to a few times a year. This group makes up the majority of volunteers, with 60% (equivalent to 24% of the total population). In the preceding paragraphs, the average number of hours each group of volunteers dedicates to these activities was indicated.

Again, for this exercise, we are only considering those people in the sample who said that they were participating in some solidarity activity at the time of the interview.

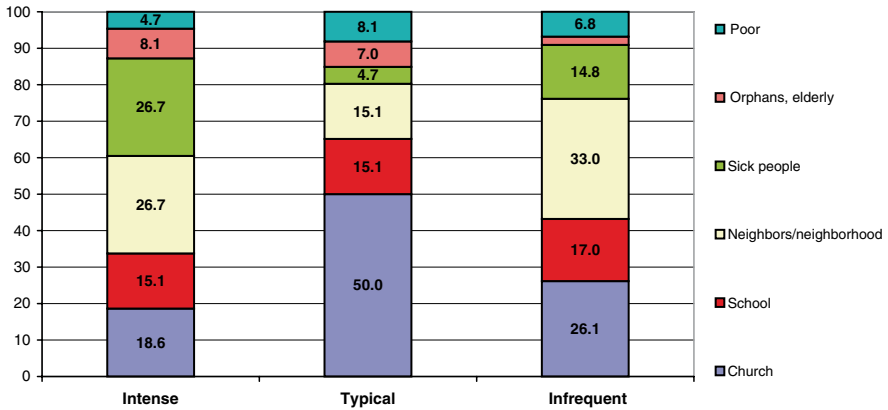
As we will try to show, we have three groups of volunteers who share in certain measure a series of behavioral attributes, although there are characteristics that distinguish the members of each group from the others.

Henceforth we will call the most dedicated group “Intense volunteers”, the second group “Typical volunteers”, and the third “Infrequent volunteers”. We believe that the members of the second group represent, in terms of their dedication, typical behavior among volunteers, since they carry out these activities with relative frequency, which ranges from one to three times a week to once every two weeks. On the other hand, the third group of “Infrequent volunteers”, who make up the majority, carry out their actions less frequently, with a maximum of twelve occurrences a year.

It is also important to consider, as we shall now see, that unlike other forms of social activity, the differences in solidarity behavior in particular do not go hand in hand with demographic or socioeconomic characteristics that are distinct from those of the Mexican population as a whole. By this, we mean to say that the presence of people of different ages is more or less the same in each group, as is the presence of people from different socioeconomic segments, without there being any particular distinction for each group. This is why the observations we will make in this regard will be relatively minor and should be considered as such.

In Graphics 2.11 and 2.12, we have indicated the set of characteristics of the acts of solidarity of the three groups. It can be seen that there are important variations in several aspects, and we will indicate only those that seem most important to us. In any event, the reader will be able to see that there are also differences in other respects that we have not mentioned here. In this regard, they may find the tables themselves to be useful for further reflection.

Graphic #11. Types of dedication to solidarity work according to place of participation*

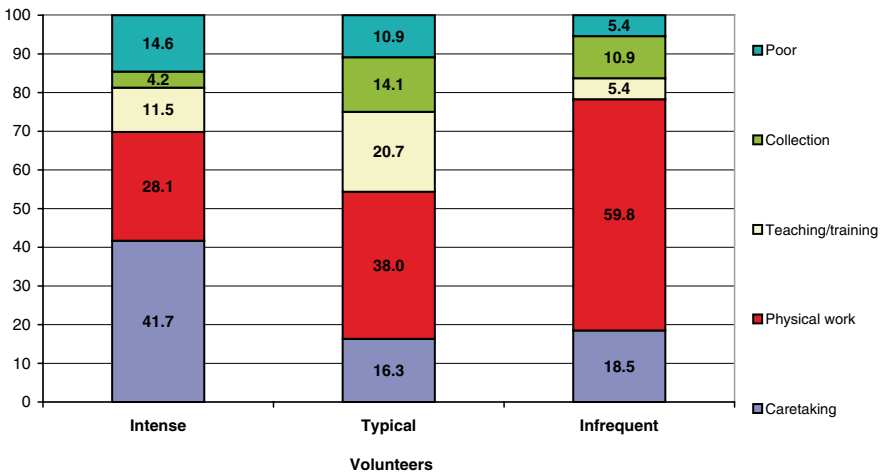


Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi.

* Only the main activities are considered

Graphic 2.11 Types of dedication to solidarity work according to sectors of activity

Graphic #12. Types of dedication to solidarity work by type of work done*



Source ENSAV 2006, Cemefi.

* Only the main activities are considered

Graphic 2.12 Types of dedication to solidarity work by type of work done*

Intense Volunteers

The members of the group of “Intense volunteers” are clearly differentiated from the rest by the fact that they engage in volunteer activities on a daily basis. In this sense, there is an abyss of difference in regard to the dedication to volunteer actions

between this group and the third group, which engages in their activities more infrequently, during only a few days a year. We should also remember that, on average, the people in this group of “Intense volunteers” dedicate the equivalent of 186 8-h days a year to solidarity activities. They are also clearly differentiated from the other two groups in terms of gender, since 66% are women, while in the third group, the “Infrequent volunteers”, women make up 50%, and among “Typical volunteers,” they come to 59%.

Among “Intense volunteers”, in addition to carrying out their actions on a daily basis, a little more than two-thirds were collaborating in two or more kinds of actions, in contrast to the other two groups. These attributes reinforce the intensity of these people’s participation in solidarity activities, since they are people who may be collaborating every day on some community project, as well as helping some sick neighbor and visiting an elderly person, or providing their services for some church or school project.

They are also the group that carries out their acts of solidarity on their own, for the most part, without recourse to formal or informal groups. This is what 43% of them do. On the other hand, in terms of the orientation of their efforts, almost half carry out their volunteer activity with neighbors and sick people, providing “personal attention and care”, as is shown in Graphic 2.11. We also present Table 2.3, which shows the whole set of data for the three types of volunteers, although we will only comment here on the data that appears most relevant.

Among those in this group who contribute their acts of solidarity through organizations (30% of the group) more than half of them teach or provide training and give administrative support. In this regard, the profile of some of these people who provide services in some third-party support organization will be seen and explored in greater detail based on case studies in the chapter on volunteers.

Almost 50% of the members of this group of “Intense volunteers” began their solidarity activities on their own initiative, although this also happened at the invitation of family members, but it seems that they were begun more because of their own design than because of some invitation (see Table 2.3). They are also the ones who contribute the least to the church (or to the parishioners), both in terms of acts of solidarity and donations of clothes or money to other people through the church. In comparison with the other two groups, they are also the ones who have received the least help from the church.

In terms of age, the people in this group are relatively concentrated between 30 and 49 years.

In terms of their religious beliefs and practices, the proportion of Catholics is higher (89%) in this group than in the others, and church attendance is also high, since 69% said that they usually attend more than once a week. On the other hand, the proportion of nonbelievers is very low, namely 2%. It is, therefore, notable that, in spite of being quite religious, they act with certain independence from ecclesiastical institutions. They are also the group with the lowest percentage among the three groups declaring that they carry out their volunteer activity because of religious beliefs.

In terms of their socioeconomic characteristics, they are situated closer to the less prosperous strata both in terms of their income and their educational level,

without this representing a strong difference with other strata, as was indicated at the beginning of this section.

In comparison with the other two groups of volunteers, in this group, almost a fifth of the people work in the public sector and there are also fewer who work in the private sector than is the case for the other groups. However, in relative terms, they are the ones who have received the least help from the government.

This group includes, in relative terms, more housewives (38%) and fewer people who work full time (23%).

In general, a clear autonomy in their acts of solidarity is perceived for this group. They seem to be people concerned about those close to them, as they carry out their activities more among neighbors and sick people, trying to provide personal attention and care. In spite of being as Catholic as the rest, or a little more so, if we let ourselves be guided by external practice, they do not seem to be close to the church, at least in terms of carrying out these kinds of actions through the church.

Before continuing, we would like to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that Table 2.3 is found almost at the end of this chapter and contains a concentration of important data differentiating the characteristics of the three groups of volunteers, since we will only comment on a few of these characteristics in the following pages.

Typical Volunteers

Let us look now at the group we have called “Typical volunteers”. They represent a third of those who were engaged in volunteer activities at the time of the interview (31.5%). We have given them this name both because of several of the characteristics that will be mentioned in the rest of the chapter and because they coincide with the most well-known image of people who undertake volunteer activities with certain regularity.

They are the ones who work the most with the church (50%), with solidarity activities through school and with neighbors following far behind with the same low percentage for each one (15%).

Almost half (49%) carry out their acts of solidarity through some organization and fewer of them do so on their own. On the other hand, a little less than half perform their action through the church, and a third (38%) are involved in physical labor such as cleaning and arranging materials. Among the three groups, they are the one that is most engaged in teaching activities (20%), which is normally a question of catechism in preparation for first communion. If we add fundraising to the foregoing activities, altogether they account for 73% of the actions performed by this group.

On average, they dedicate the equivalent of 33.8 days a year to solidarity work.

Unlike intense volunteers, here the proportion of women is lower, although it comes to 59%.

Almost half (49%) belong to an organized group and a little more than half (59%) have been invited to participate in solidarity activities either by the members

Table 2.3 Characteristics of some acts of solidarity in the three solidarity and no solidarity groups (percentages)

	Intense volunteers %	Typical volunteers %	Infrequent volunteers %	Non- solidarity %
<i>Age and sex</i>				
18–29	13	22	21	29
30–49	56	45	48	39
50 and over	31	33	31	32
Proportion of women	66	59	50	50
<i>Marital status-children</i>				
Single	13	17	19	20
Has children	80	82	81	78
<i>Education</i>				
Elementary or less	39	41	44	35
Secondary or less	62	61	63	62
Basic	41	43	46	35
Middle	55	42	45	44
Higher	4	15	9	12
<i>Work</i>				
Housewives	38	36	28	28
Full-time work	23	24	32	32
Public sector	18	7	7	6
Private sector	9	15	18	21
Self-employed	29	29	36	27
Doesn't work	45	48	38	45
<i>Income by household</i>				
Less than \$3000	32	31	33	22
Less than \$6000	63	50	58	44
More than \$6000		20	16	15
No answer		30	26	41
<i>Income barely enough</i>	63		59	50
<i>Religion</i>				
Catholic	89	84	88	81
Other	9	14	7	10
None	2	2	4	9
<i>Church attendance</i>				
More than once a week	69	75	53	5
Once a week	25	22	40	38
Almost never	6	3	6	56
<i>Other socioeconomic information</i>				
No. light bulbs 1-4	34	32	35	27
11 or more	9	17	12	15
Has telephone	52	55	49	49
Has oven	45	43	36	41
Has computer	21	24	17	18
Has internet access	5	12	11	13
<i>Area of residence</i>				
Urban	68	66	63	73
Rural	21	25	26	17
Mixed	11	9	11	10

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

	Intense volunteers %	Typical volunteers %	Infrequent volunteers %	Non- solidarity %
<i>Political party</i>				
PRIPAN	2711	2117	2310	1112
PRD	9	4	7	8
Independent	34	38	50	34
<i>Hours of TV a day</i>				
Doesn't watch	2	4	4	4
3 or more	20	25	26	37
<i>Regions</i>				
North	30	25	19	32
West	29	31	19	17.5
Center	23	19	33	36
South	18	25	29	14.5
<i>Act of donating</i>				
Doesn't give	16	16	11	20
Money	63	56	60	53
Clothes	16	21	21	19
Food	5	6	7	7
<i>Donating clothes</i>				
Through church	6	19	9	7
Religious group	2	6	4	3
Non-religious organization	2	6	10	5
Group of friends	9	3	4	1
Directly	66	66	72	83
<i>Has received help</i>				
From the church	4	23	11	9
From the government	35	36	49	52
From a private organization	4	2	5	2
From a political organization	4	6	3	6
Other	13	3	1	4
From another person	35	26	28	23
No	59	56	59	75
<i>Belonging to groups</i>	34	50	30	10
<i>Most people can't be trusted</i>				86
<i>How much time could devote to solidarity work a week</i>				
More than 3 h	48	40	45	36
Not certain	4	4	4	7
<i>Would do the following activities</i>				
Belong to a group (regular, once in a while, did it once)	45	70	47	27
Go to group meetings	45	69	46	25
Participate in neighborhood decisions	57	74	67	40
Signing a petition	46	57	53	36
Unauthorized strike (regular, once in a while, already did so)	7	14	8	8

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

	Intense volunteers %	Typical volunteers %	Infrequent volunteers %	Non- solidarity %
<i>Social relations</i>				
Has made friends	84	89	80	26
Someone else in the family participates	50	56	57	
Hasn't invited anyone	43	44	57	
<i>Age when started activity</i>				
Before 25	43	47	57	
From 30 to 39	29	24	16	
Started more than 10 years ago	43	46	53	
<i>Reasons for engaging in activity</i>				
Help the needy		28	31	
Desire to help		16	19	
Religious beliefs		17	7	
Way to feel useful, do something useful		15	11	
Help children		7	8.5	
Meet people		2	4	
<i>Frequency of participation</i>				
Once		47	51	
Two or three times		42	40	
Four or more		11	9	
<i>Place of participation</i>				
Church		43	23	
School		13	15	
Neighbors/neighborhood		13	29	
Sick people		4	13	
Orphans, elderly		6	2	
Poor		7	6	
Subtotal		86	88	
<i>Type of work</i>				
Caretaking		15	17	
Physical work		35	55	
Teaching/training		19	5	
Collection		13	10	
Advice, counseling		10	5	
<i>How help given</i>				
In organizations		49	40	
Informal		21	22	
Alone		30	39	
<i>How decided to participate</i>				
Family member invited		26	21	
Member of group		29	33	
On own		35	34	

Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

of those groups or by family members. Almost all of them (89%) say that they have made friends through their volunteer work. They are the ones who, in relative terms, donate the most money, clothes, or food through the church or some religious group (25%).

They are also the ones among the three groups of volunteers that are most willing to participate in different group and collective activities and to attend group meetings, participate in neighborhood decisions or sign some petition.

They are the ones who have received more help from the main formal institutions, the church, and the government, since more than half (59%) say that they have received this kind of support. If we add help from other organizations, 70% of “Typical volunteers” have received help from the main (government and church) institutions and from other organizations.

In terms of their age, they are not different from the others, but in terms of religious practices, they are the ones who go to church most often, particularly in the category of those who go more than once a week.

In regard to their socioeconomic characteristics, without being very different from the rest, they generally tend to be situated a bit more for the middle sectors. They work less in the public sector than in the private sector and they tend more toward the average in terms of self-employment.

As we have already seen, they are the group among the three that participates most with institutions or organized groups. Also, perhaps due to these very characteristics, they have learned to receive help from institutions and at the same time they donate their time, even though they are not among the most economically disadvantaged.

Among the three groups of volunteers, the members of this one are the ones who, in relative terms, have the least philanthropic motivation to help others in need or the desire to give support to others, but rather tend to refer more to issues like “making friends” or “being recognized”. On the other hand, they are the ones who most profess religious beliefs as the reason for participating. Similarly, continuing with relative comparisons, they were the ones with the smallest number who said that they performed their acts of solidarity as a form of occupational therapy. To repeat, these results and others not mentioned here can be consulted in Table 2.3, which summarizes the most important characteristics of the three types of volunteers.

Infrequent Volunteers

Once again, this group is made up of those who perform volunteer actions less frequently and who may do so once a month or only several times a year, which is why we have referred to them as “Infrequent volunteers”. On average, as we saw earlier, they contribute the equivalent of 1.5 days a year. In this sense, they are clearly differentiated from the rest, and this is why we have considered them to be a distinct group.

Activities with neighbors, church, and school are the three types of activities accounting for 76% of those belonging to this group, but, in relative terms, this is the group with the highest proportion of solidarity activities with neighbors or the community.

More than half (59%) contribute physical or manual labor as their volunteer activity, and this is much higher than for the other two groups. They are also the ones who perform fewer teaching and counseling activities. Due to their more infrequent participation, it is perhaps logical that they are more involved in physical support than in teaching or training, which are activities which might, perhaps, require a more regular presence.

A little more than half (51%) have performed only one type of volunteer actions and fewer of them have been involved in more than one, in comparison with the other two groups.

They carry out their solidarity activities in both organizations and on their own with almost the same percentages in both cases, which differentiates them from typical volunteers in this regard, but they are also the ones who are least often members of organized groups.

In regard to the custom of donating money, clothes, or food, they are the group that most often does this directly, instead of through organizations or institutions. On the other hand, although more than half said that they had not received help from others, they were the group who, in relative terms, had received the most help from the government.

The proportion of people who declared that they were Catholics was almost the same as of the rest, but they have a lower rate of religious practice than the rest.

This group has exactly 50% of men and 50% of women and it is the one with the fewest housewives as well as the largest proportion of people who work full time. It is also the group with the highest proportion of self-employed people. In comparison with the other groups, these characteristics may reflect the situation of people for whom, for different reasons, it is more difficult to participate in this kind of activity.

In regard to this group which, as well have seen, has its particularities, we would like to point out that in the National Survey on Time Use (*Encuesta Nacional de Uso del Tiempo*, ENUT, INEGI, 2002), there is a section on the number of people who contribute “free labor” to the community and the number of hours they do so. We mention it here because it seems to us that, due to the characteristics of those who we have referred to here as “Infrequent volunteers” and have just examined, there may be a relatively close correspondence between these two groups in the two surveys. As we have seen, almost a third of “infrequent volunteers” (29%) said that they have participated in activities that have to do with neighbors or the community and another 15% said that they work with the sick and old people. In a way that could be similar, the ENUT indicates that 2.49 million people 12 years of age and older have contributed free labor to the community and 3.6 million have contributed free labor to “other households”, for a total of 6.01 million people. In our case, the 29% of “Infrequent volunteers” who responded that they were participating in some kind of solidarity activities with neighbors or the community would be approximately

4.36 million people. The ENUT criteria do not distinguish whether the other households assisted were relatives or not, while in our case, we made that distinction, and thus it is clear that the two surveys are not directly comparable. However, it is worth noting that, considering the differences, the ENUT indicates that 6.01 million people 12 years of age and older contributed free labor to the community and other households. Having clarified these points, if we consider that the age in the ENUT (12 years or older) is lower than in our survey (18 years or older), as well as the differences in terms of whether or not help for other households includes relatives, the figures in both surveys are nevertheless relatively close to one another: 4.36 million in our survey and 6.01 million in the ENUT. We know that although it is speculation, we believe that similar populations might be involved, and we wish to make this point.

In order to have a better appreciation of these three groups of people who engage in acts of solidarity, let us take a look now at some of the characteristics of those who said that they had not participated in these kinds of activities, since this provides us with a perspective on actors who, for different reasons, have taken the opposite position (at least up until now) from those who have been the center of our interest.

Nonvolunteers

In this group, half are men and the other half are women, contrary to the situation in two of the three groups of volunteers whose characteristics were gone into above. In this case, they are the youngest group, and perhaps for that very reason they have a somewhat higher educational level than the rest since, as is well known, in Mexico the younger generations have a higher educational level. On the other hand, in relative terms, their socioeconomic level is slightly higher than that of the volunteer groups. Although there are an equal number of men and women, there are fewer housewives among the women and a few more people working full time (the data is shown in Table 2.3).

From the point of view of our main interest, which is solidarity activity, the people in this group not only have not engaged in this activity but also, compared with the other groups, there are more people who report that they do not customarily donate money either. In terms of clothes and food, they give the same amount or a little less than the others. Similarly, compared with the three groups of volunteers, they are the least willing to dedicate time to these kinds of activities.

In comparison with the other three groups, the percentage of people in this group who reported not having any religion was comparatively high, and those who said that they were believers attended church with less regularity.

In terms of group membership, the nonvolunteers are the ones who participate least in this kind of experience, given that 30% of the volunteers belong to some group, while only 10% of these groups do. They are also the ones least willing to belong to a group, attend meetings or participate in collective action.

The foregoing characteristics reveal, at least generally speaking, a set of people perceived to be less oriented toward others than the rest of the groups and, as will be seen, this would also suggest a certain individualism, closed to the outside. To the question, "What is the main reason why you have not contributed with any kind of help?", they responded as follows: more than half (57%) gave the excuse of lack of time, but a little more than a third (37%) expressed negative responses like the lack of motivation to engage in these kinds of activities, not wanting to commit themselves, having other priorities, or not believing that helping others does much good, etc. A few (6%) said they do not do so because they do not make enough money.

The foregoing responses, with the exception of the first and perhaps the last, are responses that tend to reaffirm the negative perception toward whatever is external to them as individuals.

Then again, those who, having engaged in acts of solidarity in the past, no longer continue to do so were asked a similar question, but their answers were different, except for those who also mentioned a lack of time. In these cases, the responses referred more to external circumstances, such as having moved away, the completion of the activities themselves, health problems, and similar situations, and not simply responses with negative connotations, as was the case with some of those who have never been volunteers.

Certainly these limited perceptions do not allow us to affirm something substantial yet concerning this kind of behavior, but they do clearly express a different attitude toward others, accompanied by some concrete features in terms of beliefs and behavior that at least are an indication of a road for us to follow in order to delve more deeply into these differences in the future.

A Few Conclusions

The willingness of the Mexican population to participate in acts of solidarity seems to be quite high, since this involves two-thirds of the population 18 years of age and older. In terms of the whole country, we would be talking about 41.4 million people. This tendency is also reinforced by the fact that half of all the volunteers reported having undertaken more than one type of solidarity activity, that is to say, a little more than 20 million people.

If we recall that the average number of days per volunteer was 27 a year, or 2.2 a month, and if we extrapolate that amount to include 40% of the total Mexican population over 18 years of age (the percentage of people who at the time of the survey were participating in these actions), we would have about 23 million people over 18 who would be contributing an average of 2.2 working days a month each.

If we calculate the foregoing in monetary terms and compare it with the total value of the labor done in the country, this would surely represent an economic contribution of great importance.

In order to proceed as indicated, it would be necessary to indicate that the population employed in nonagricultural activities, according to the Economic Census for 2003 (INEGI) came to 23 million people.⁷ Hence, if we convert the total number of hours contributed as volunteer or solidarity work as reported in the interviews, and if we convert them into units of 8 h (i.e., one work day), and then calculate 260 working days a year, we would obtain the number of equivalent job positions. The calculation would be as follows: 677,561,247 million days divided by 260 working days a year would give us 2.6 million jobs positions, or the equivalent of 11.3% of the employed population outside the agricultural sector: a figure that would appear to be a truly important contribution, because we would be talking about a contribution of free labor that, in monetary terms, could be the equivalent of from 29.33 to 88.082 billion pesos.⁸ The last figure would represent 1.14% of the GNP in 2004. Or if, for the purposes of comparison, we compare this figure with total GNP for communal, social, and personal services, which is the category that is most similar to the one for solidarity activities, the contribution would reach 4.7%. We believe that these figures speak for themselves and that, in monetary terms, we would be talking about a considerable contribution by the Mexican population in terms of unpaid actions to the benefit of third parties. However, rather than underlining the monetary aspect, what is most important to emphasize is the social quality of these actions, which help to maintain the social fabric for the country's inhabitants. As was mentioned earlier, participation in these kinds of actions is quite similar throughout the population, independent of their socioeconomic characteristics. This is a very clear feature that should be taken into account and that was reaffirmed in several ways when analyzing the information, so that it can be categorically affirmed that participation in acts of solidarity by the Mexican population occurs more or less equally among the entire population, independently of their educational and socioeconomic situation. The poor, the rich, and those in intermediate levels engage in acts of solidarity with about the same intensity, whatever their educational level. This conclusion is of great importance, because it allows us to perceive an enormous contingent of volunteer actors in Mexican society whose presence contradicts the typical view of “philanthropic volunteerism” which in some way is commonly associated with people in medium and upper socioeconomic strata.

On the other hand, a clear preference is noted in Mexico for the trio of actions in favor of church, school, and neighbors in all regions of the country, with some differences, but this kind of majority orientation seems to be a common feature that goes beyond regional differences. This has to do with the characteristics of our idiosyncrasy: in the first place, the strong religiosity of Mexicans, as well as the very important role schools have played in processes of social mobility for the population and the circumstances of poverty and marginalization that perhaps

⁷We subtract 196,481 people included there as dedicated to fishing and aquaculture.

⁸This depends on whether a day's work is assigned the value of 1 or 3 times the daily minimum wage.

require greater support from others. Similarly, helping neighbors and the immediate community is another feature that has to do with the difficult conditions of life for many people who, in the case of Mexico, attract the attention of those who are able to contribute through solidarity activities.

Although in the population as a whole the numbers indicate that only a limited number of people are inclined to undertake other kinds of actions more in keeping with the causes of civil society, there are areas of the country that show greater dynamism in this regard, so it would be important to explore this kind of behavior in greater depth in the future, in order to support strategies that make possible a greater development of these kinds of activities, which, as we know, are the ones that are most clearly oriented toward molding a civic attitude of concern for the improvement of democratic processes in different spheres of life.

But the best religious practices not only encourage people to undertake acts of solidarity of a religious nature; they also lead to participation in other kinds of acts of solidarity. So it would seem that new and well-structured acts of solidarity could be encouraged among these population sectors that could be oriented toward social problems that have not received enough attention up until now. These kinds of people would seem to constitute a good human contingent that could have potential for recruiting future volunteer actors that might possibly come to also foster civic causes in favor of a more defined democratic life among the population.

Although it may seem that nonreligious people are less inclined toward solidarity activities, in fact, it would be necessary to find out about their behavior in greater detail, since their solidarity contributions probably have other characteristics that have not been appropriately captured by the survey instrument used here.

Even though in Mexico, acts of solidarity mainly occur outside institutions or organized groups, almost half of all volunteers are accustomed to providing their services through these kinds of institutions, so, without minimizing what occurs outside an institutional framework, it would in any case be necessary to examine how to facilitate greater integration of volunteer actors into institutional activities.

The survey data confirm not only the low level of affiliation with organized groups, but also a very low presence of groups other than church and school organizations: a situation that has to do with the relative lack of a civic orientation among the Mexican population. This is a very entrenched problem; it does not seem that it will be easy to change, at least in short or medium term. In this sense, a strategy that would seem to be useful for the future would be to promote more actions through organized groups, since, as the data show, people participate more in acts of solidarity when they belong to some organized group, but it should also be added that we need to participate more in peer groups without the hard-and-fast hierarchies that we have become accustomed to historically, first in church and then in school. This is a great burden and has been so for a long time.

In conclusion, perhaps it could be said that although the Mexican people engage in many acts of solidarity, we still have not learned that solidarity with others can be transformed into a civic vision, where participation with others encompasses different spheres of social life for the benefit of common goals of the civil society within which we live. This is one of our most fundamental challenges.

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