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Tax-price Elasticity of Charitable Donations - Evidence from the German Taxpayer Panel

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Abstract

Tax-price Elasticity of Charitable Donations – Evidence from the German Taxpayer Panel

I estimate permanent and transitory tax-price and income elasticity of charitable giving in Germany using a rich panel data of tax return for the years 2001–2006. Income tax reforms were implemented in 2004 and 2005. The results suggest that the permanent tax-price elasticity varies significantly by income class, ranging from -0.2 for low incomes to -1.6 for higher incomes. Permanent income elasticity does not vary much among income classes, is rather low, and ranges between 0.2 – 0.3 . The donors adjust their donations gradually after changes in the tax schedule and respond to future predictable changes in price. They respond to changes in current and, to a smaller extent, in future income.

In dieser Studie wurde die permanente und transitorische Steuerpreis- und Einkommenselastizität der Spenden in Deutschland geschätzt. Basis für die Schätzung ist das umfangreiche Taxpayer-Panel, welches alle Steuermerkmale der Steuerzahler in Deutschland für die Jahre 2001–2006 erfasst. Die Ergebnisse suggerieren, dass die permanente Steuerpreiselastizität, je nach Einkommensklasse, sich stark unterscheidet; sie reicht von -0.2 für niedrige Einkommen bis -1.6 für höhere Einkommen. Dahingegen ist die permanente Einkommenselastizität für unterschiedliche Einkommensklassen ähnlich; insgesamt ist sie sehr niedrig und liegt zwischen 0.2 und 0.3 . Spender passen ihre Spendenentscheidung nach Steueränderungen verzögert an, sie reagieren auch auf zukünftige vorausschaubare Preisänderungen. Sie reagieren auf aktuelle und weniger auf zukünftige Änderungen des Einkommens.

Keywords: charitable giving, price elasticity, tax incentives.

JEL classification: H24, H31, D12.

1 Introduction

The tax system in many countries is designed to encourage private donations to charities. In some countries, including Germany, donations can be deducted from gross income and therefore reduce individual tax liability. However, this imposes a cost on governments in the form of foregone tax revenue. For example, in 2001 in Germany the taxpayers declared a total of €3.7 billion of donations of which €2.9 billion has been recognized as deductible, thus reducing the tax revenue by approximately €0.9 billion.¹ Thus, policy makers have a vital interest in assessing the effectiveness of allowing deductions to increase donations. The tax-price elasticity of donations is crucial for making this assessment and for evaluating potential policy changes. However, its value is unknown and has to be estimated. While there are numerous studies estimating tax-price elasticity of giving for the US, the evidence for other countries is rather sparse.² However, one should not believe that the estimates for the US are also valid for other countries. Specifically, Germany differs much from the US when it comes to the role of the government and the tradition of charitable giving. Total public social expenditures in Germany in 2001 amounted to 27.4% of GDP. By contrast, they were 14.7% of GDP in the US.³ National giving levels are 1.67% of GDP in the US and they are 0.22% of GDP in Germany. Moreover, there are also strong regional differences in Germany. While in former East Germany the giving levels are 0.12% of GDP, they are 0.26% of GDP in West Germany.⁴ The US and Germany also differ in the charitable goals that are primarily supported. While in 2010 35% of US donations went to support religious goals,

¹The average marginal tax weighted by income in 2001 was around 32 percent (own calculations). For more income tax statistics, see Buschle (2006).

²See the literature section of this paper.

³For more information, see Welfare Expenditure Report (2001), <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/56/37/31613113.xls>.

⁴For more information, see International comparisons of charitable giving (2006), <https://www.cafonline.org/publications/archive/international-giving.aspx>. The numbers for Germany exclude the church tax, which is between 8-9% (depending on the state) of the tax due.

14% to educational goals and 9% to support human services,⁵ the numbers for Germany were: 33% for emergency relief, 24% for child welfare and 24% for foreign aid.⁶ Around two thirds of private donations in Germany are paid in form of membership fees for nonprofit associations and organizations.⁷ Membership fees are usually of a fixed, prespecified value and are often automatically debited from members' bank accounts.⁸ This could imply that German donors will be less responsive to small changes in price or that adjustments in contributions may occur after a time lag.

Given that donations have not been studied extensively in Germany,⁹ this paper contributes to closing this gap in a number of ways and fully exploits the advantages of the longitudinal character of the data set. First, it accounts for omitted variable bias coming from individual unobserved characteristics (like education, wealth or degree of altruism) that are potentially correlated with income and marginal tax, and are known to be important determinants of donations. Second, it accounts for the endogeneity of the tax-price and after-tax income variables by appropriate instruments. Third, it helps to overcome the identification problems while using the tax reform implemented gradually in 2004 and 2005. Moreover, it allows me to identify permanent and transitory tax-price and income elasticity and to understand whether donors adjust their charitable giving gradually in response to tax changes and possibly respond in advance to known future changes. Finally, this study allows the tax-price and income elasticity to vary by income class.

The paper is divided into the following parts. The next section presents a review of the relevant literature. Section 3 explains the treatment of donations

⁵For more information, see Giving USA (2011), <http://www.givingusa.org/pressreleases/gusa/GUSA-2011-Final-Release.pdf>.

⁶For more information, see Deutscher Spendenmonitor (2011), www.tns-infratest.com/presse/presseinformation.asp?prID=832.

⁷For more information, see Sommerfeld (2009).

⁸Most of the organizations offer the possibility of membership, examples include WWF and Greenpeace. The members usually receive a regular magazine informing about the program achievements etc.

⁹See the literature section of this paper.

in the German tax law. Section 4 explains empirical methodology. Section 5 presents estimation results. In section 6 some robustness checks are presented and section 7 concludes.

2 Literature

There is a vast empirical literature investigating the tax-price and income elasticity of donations in the US. Initial research was conducted with cross-sectional data, using OLS or Tobit methods. Examples include Feldstein and Taylor (1996) and Feenberg (1988). The estimated price elasticity was large and on average -1.5 (US). Later, the availability of panel data allowed researchers to exploit techniques accounting for individual heterogeneity of donors and found much lower price elasticities (for example Broman 1989). Recently, a new line of research has tried to distinguish permanent from transitory effects using the availability of long panels (see for example Randolph 1995, Barrett et al. 1997, Bakija 2000 etc.). However, the discussion concerning the nature of the “true” tax-price elasticity is still ongoing.

Studies on tax-price elasticities from other countries are rather scarce, though tax deductions for donations are widely employed. Given different attitudes toward giving in different cultures as well as different roles governments play in the provision of public goods in different countries, the magnitude of the response to fiscal incentives in these countries might be very different from the US. For example, Fack and Landais (2009) using nonparametric method of quantile regression found rather low elasticities for France ranging from -0.6 to -0.2.

There are only a few empirical studies for Germany. Pioneering work was done by Paqué (1996). Using tax data aggregated on a state and income-group basis for 1961 to 1980 in 3-year intervals and using the OLS method he found an elasticity in the range of -1.8 to -1.4. Auer und Kalusche (2010) implemented a Tobit estimator on a 1998 cross section with individual data and found an elasticity of -1.11 to -1.05. Borgloh (2008) used a Tobit and a two-step Heckman model applied to pooled 2001–2003 individual tax data and provided estimates

in the range of -2.08 to -0.84. Bönke, Massarat-Mashhadi and Sielaff (2011) applied a censored quantile regression to (pooled) cross sections of the years 1998, 2001, and 2004 and obtained results ranging between -1.45 and -0.45.

This paper differs from previous studies because it makes use of the longitudinal characteristics of the available panel data for 2001–2006. First, I control for unobserved individual characteristics. Second, changes in tax rates were implemented in the years 2004 and 2005 (see figure 1 and 2), thus, exogenous variation in price is available.

The methods used in this paper are most similar to Bakija and Heim (2011). They worked with a very long panel of US tax returns from 1979–2006. Bakija and Heim, relied on both tax changes in the federal tax law and on the differences in tax evolution between different states. In Germany, there is only one uniform tax schedule. In this paper, tax-price elasticity can be identified because individuals with different incomes were affected differently by tax schedule changes. Instead of using the so called first-dollar (first-euro) price as proxy for the actual price, I apply an IV approach using the first-dollar price as an instrument for the actual price. I take the same approach for after-tax income.

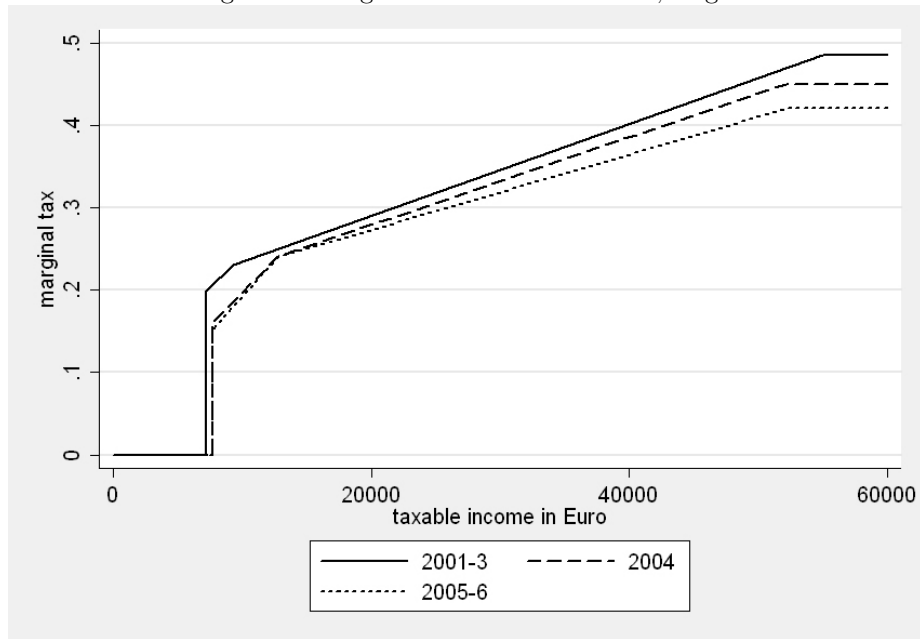
3 Donations and the Tax System in Germany

In Germany, both individual tax liability and the treatment of donations are regulated in the German Income Tax Act (ITA). The German fiscal year is equal to the calendar year. Roughly speaking, tax liability is determined in two steps. In the first step, all income from seven sources is added together and then different deductions are subtracted. These include allowances for the elderly and farmers, loss deduction, special expenses deduction (including donations), deduction for extraordinary expenses, and personal allowances. The remaining amount is the taxable income (TI). If a couple opts for joint declaration, the taxable income for each spouse is determined as the average of the taxable incomes of both spouses. In the second step, the tax due is computed. The formula is $TAX = a_i TI^2 + b_i TI + c_i$ where $i = 0, 1, 2, 3$ defines different income

thresholds such that this function is continuous but not smooth. Marginal tax is then given by $MT = 2a_i TI + b_i$. Figure 1 presents the marginal tax as a function of taxable income for a single household in 2001–2006. A tax reform was implemented gradually in 2004 and 2005 lowering the marginal tax for all incomes, however, to a different extent.

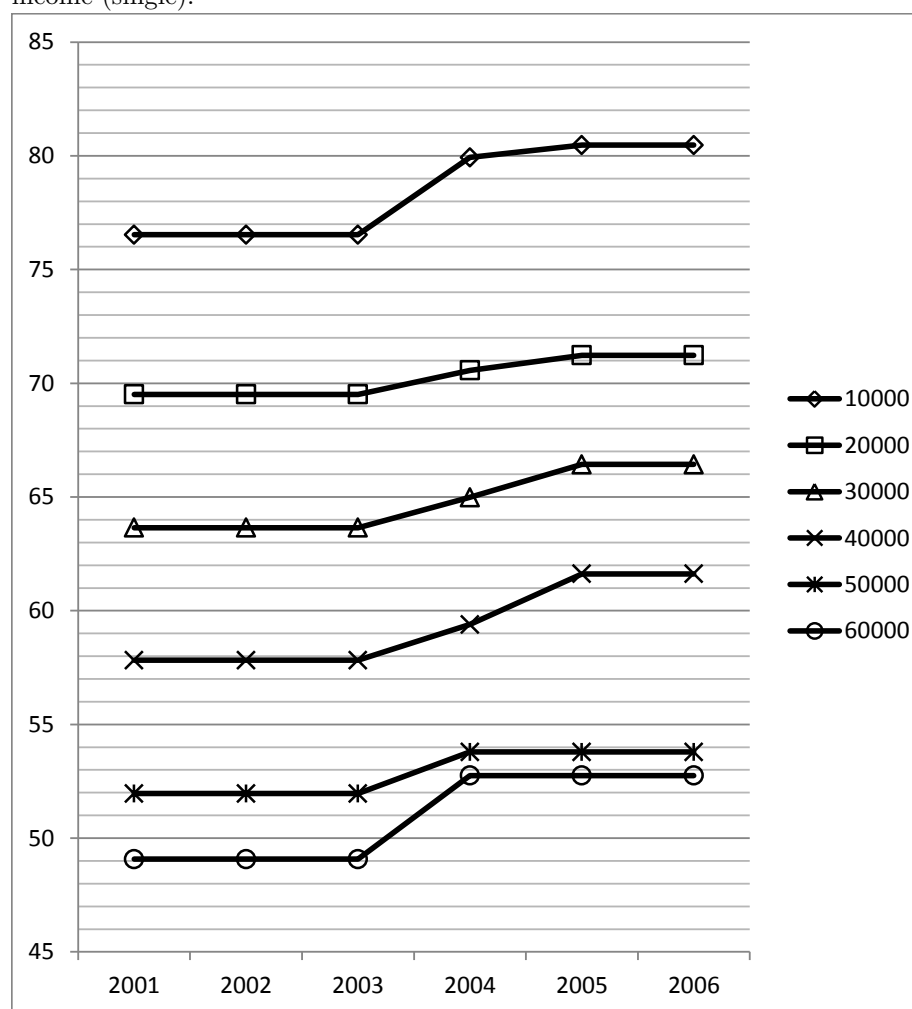
Figure 2 shows the changes in the tax-price for individuals with different

Figure 1: Marginal tax rates 2001–2006, single



values of taxable income. It indicates that individuals with €10,000; €30,000 and €60,000 taxable income experiences a larger increase in the tax-price than, for example, individuals with €50,000 taxable income.

Figure 2: The evolution of the tax-price 2001–2006 for different values of taxable income (single).



The deductibility of donations is regulated in §10b and §34g ITA. §10b addresses donations and membership fees to organizations that pursue scientific, charitable and cultural goals that are recognized as eligible. These are deductible up to an amount 5% of gross income. Furthermore, §10b allows deductions of donations and membership fees to organizations pursuing church-related, religious, and charitable goals that are recognized as eligible. These are deductible up to an additional 5% of gross income. Additionally, one can deduct donations to foundations up to €20,450 and grants to newly established foundations up to €307,000. Donations to political parties are governed by §34g and §10b ITA. 50% of the first €1650 (singles) or €3300 (married) given is directly deducted from due tax, having thus a fixed price of 0.5 for each €1 given. Each euro donated above this threshold up to €3300 (singles) or €6600 (married) reduces the taxable income in keeping with §10b. The price of those donations is given by one minus the marginal tax. In the following sections I will focus specifically on those donations which can be deducted from gross income, the price of which is given by one minus the marginal tax.¹⁰

Among different and separate deductions, German law allows for the deduction of extraordinary expenses (§10, §10a ITA). These include childcare, tax advice, alimony, and other ongoing financial obligations, deductible church tax, education and training, expenses of a provident nature, school tuitions, donations, and other. Those who do not itemize any of those obtain a blanket allowance of €36 (€72 for couples choosing joint declaration).

Sommerfeld (2009) provided a statistical overview of charitable giving in Germany. Her survey revealed that 83.5% of taxpayers are aware of the deductibility of donations. According to Sommerfeld, 70% of the population donates and 43% declare donations in tax declarations.

¹⁰The church tax is not included, because it is automatically deducted from the income of all members of the Catholic and Protestant church as well as of some Jewish and some free church congregations and amounts to between 8-9% (depending on the state) of the tax due. For a study on the interrelation of church tax and charitable giving in Germany see Borgloh and Wigger (2012).

4 Empirical Methodology

4.1 Empirical Specification

Usually, the literature assumes that the demand function for donations, $DON = f((1-\tau), Y)$, is linear in a natural logarithm, and imposes the following empirical specification:¹¹

$$\ln DON_i = \mu + \delta \ln(1 - \tau_i) + \beta \ln Y_i + X_i \gamma + u_i, \quad (1)$$

where for each individual i DON_i is the amount of the donations, τ_i is the marginal tax, Y_i is a measure of disposable income, X_i is a vector of other characteristics,¹² μ is some constant, and u_i is an error term. Given the nonlinear dependence of the right-hand-side variables, i.e. tax price, income, marital status, and other characteristics leading to different deductions, there is the serious risk that if equation 1 is misspecified, the coefficients of interest might not be identified. The issues that accompany attempts to determine the tax-price effect and the income effect separately are discussed in Triest (1998). Identification is only possible if there is a variation in tax rates (price) independent of individual characteristics that may affect charitable giving. Feenberg's (1988) solution is to exploit the variations in state income taxes in the US. For Germany, there is only one national income tax law. The needed variation in price is provided because changes in national income tax occurred in 2004 and 2005 and they affected individuals with different incomes differently. Adopting the wide-spread approach from the previous literature on charitable giving, and in order to interpret the coefficients directly as elasticities, I estimate the above log-log specification with some modifications explained below.

One of the most important issues is the omitted variable bias in the specification above. The available data is missing characteristics such as education, wealth, and altruism which are known to be important determinants of charita-

¹¹See for example Feldstein and Taylor (1976) or Feenberg (1988)

¹²See 4.3 for the enumeration of control variables used in the estimation.

ble giving.¹³ Likewise, these variables are known to be correlated with income.¹⁴ Given that, a simple regression analysis will not identify the parameters of interest. Therefore, in the donations equation I account for the individual-specific fixed effects α_i . I assume that these individual-specific fixed effects α_i do not vary (significantly)¹⁵ in time. However, these fixed (time-invariant) individual-specific effect are potentially correlated with other explanatory variables, i.e. $E\{X_{it}\alpha_i\} \neq 0$. To account for factors influencing donations from year to year, the time effect δ_t is included in the specification. This might be especially important, as the Elbe flooding happened in 2002 and the Tsunami at the end of 2004, thus increasing donations shortly afterwards. The time-varying, individual-specific error term is accounted for by including u_{it} . I assume that $E\{X_{it}u_{it}\} = 0$ for each t . The donations' equation becomes:

$$\ln DON_{it} = \delta \ln PRICE_{it} + \beta \ln Y_{it} + X_{it}\gamma + \alpha_i + \delta_t + u_{it}. \quad (2)$$

The next important issue concerns endogeneity. Clearly, the tax price is determined by income, marital status, the amount donated, and other deductions. For most levels of income it holds true that the higher the amount of donations is, the lower the marginal tax rate is, and consequently the higher the tax price is. Similarly, after-tax income depends on taxes, which in turn depends on the amount donated. The simple OLS estimation of the equation of interest would yield biased estimates. Here, I address the endogeneity by using an instrumental variable estimator. For the variables of interest I propose instruments correlated with the endogenous variables but uncorrelated with unobserved characteristics which determine donations. For each individual I calculate a hypothetical

¹³McClelland and Brooks (2004) find that more education is significantly correlated with donations. Brooks (2002) finds similar effects for wealth.

¹⁴Individuals can be more or less altruistic which may affect the choice of occupation and consequently the income.

¹⁵Most observations in my sample will have finished their education and, if not, education years will change linearly which does not pose a problem. Wealth changes will be captured to some extent by time effects.

marginal tax at zero donations which is clearly uncorrelated with the the dependent variable. Similarly, for after-tax income I calculate a hypothetical after-tax income at zero donations. There is a convention in the literature on charitable giving of regressing donations directly onto these hypothetical variables which are usually called first-dollar price and first-dollar income. This seems to be the second-best approach when the IV method is feasible. Not taking the IV approach leads to the estimation of what may be termed as “first-dollar price elasticity”. But this will be different to the actual tax-price elasticity especially because first-dollar price elasticity is measured at a lower quantity and a lower price.

In the data, a significant portion of taxpayers do not itemize. Clotfelter (1980), Boskin and Feldstein (1977) and Reece and Zieschang (1985) suggests that excluding nonitemizers and border itemizers might lead to a selection bias. Therefore, I follow Feldstein and Taylor (1976) by calculating a modified first-euro price as if the itemization was possible regardless of the actual value of donation.¹⁶ This first-euro price is used in the IV approach as an instrument for the actual price, which is strictly lower than one for border itemizers and differs for each individual. I proceed accordingly for nonitemizers.

Many donors do not report donations in their tax declarations. It is difficult to account for censoring and fixed effects at the same time.¹⁷ Panel studies from the US widely employ demeaning or first differencing, for example Bakija (2000) or Randolph (1995) and I follow this approach. Nonetheless, I will compare my results from the estimation of equation 2 with the results from an estimation

¹⁶Indeed, in Germany, the blanket allowance for extraordinary expenses including donations is low (€36) as compared to the US treatment.

¹⁷The following programs offer partly solutions: Pantob implements Honoré (1992), LIMDEMP implements the fixed effects Tobit model with up to 50,000 individual effects. However, Bradley, Holden and McLelland (2005) criticize applying such methods like Tobit or Heckman’s two-stage method to address censoring in charitable donations. They observe that specification tests reject the assumptions about the form of the likelihood function in the selection equation, which is necessary for the consistency of these estimators. While they opt for semi- and nonparametric methods, they claim that their elasticities are similar to those obtained using panel data estimation methods.

that accounts for censoring in section 6.3.

The availability of a 6-year panel allows me to identify permanent and transitory effects. Therefore, the specification 2 is extended to:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \ln DON_{it} = & \delta_1 \ln PRICE_{it-1} + \delta_2 \ln PRICE_{it} + \delta_3 \ln PRICE_{it+1} + \\
 & + \beta_1 \ln Y_{it-1} + \beta_2 \ln Y_{it} + \beta_3 \ln Y_{it+1} + \\
 & + X_{it} \gamma + \alpha_i + \delta_t + u_{it}.
 \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

The permanent price effect is given by $\delta_1 + \delta_2 + \delta_3$, the transitory effect by δ_2 , and the effect of an anticipated increase in price next year by δ_3 .¹⁸ Similarly, the permanent income effect is given by $\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3$ and the transitory income effect by β_2 respectively. When the actual values for the future tax price and income are included into equation, one assumes perfect foresight. However, future expectations are what matters for charitable giving and not realizations. To address this caveat I implement a similar solution to the one chosen by Bakija and Heim (2011). In one specification (perfect foresight) I treat future realizations of price and income as erroneous measurements of future expectations. In an alternative specification (predictable tax change) I implement the IV approach in which I assume that the tax formula of the following year is known but the one's own income in the following year is not known. This means that in the first step I predict the following year's income using broad information available about the subjects, especially the income and price from the year in question and the year before as covariates. In the second step I use this predicted income to calculate the (predicted) future after-tax-income and the (predicted) future price using the appropriate tax formula.

Finally, to allow for heterogeneous effects of price and nonprice variables, I mul-

¹⁸Bakija and Heim (2011) include one more lag in their specification but their panel is much longer. They estimate an equation equivalent to 3. Their price coefficients enter as $\gamma_1(\ln PRICE_{it} - \ln PRICE_{it-1}) + \gamma_2 \ln PRICE_{it} + \gamma_3(\ln PRICE_{it+1} - \ln PRICE_{it})$. Rearranging, this gives $(-\gamma_1) \ln PRICE_{it-1} + (\gamma_1 + \gamma_2 - \gamma_3) \ln PRICE_{it} + \gamma_3 \ln PRICE_{it+1}$ such that $\delta_1 = -\gamma_1$, $\delta_2 = \gamma_1 + \gamma_2 - \gamma_3$ and $\delta_3 = \gamma_3$. Then the persistent price effect is given by $\gamma_2 (= -\gamma_1 + \gamma_1 + \gamma_2 - \gamma_3 + \gamma_3)$, the transitory effect by $\gamma_1 + \gamma_2 - \gamma_3$, and the effect of an anticipated increase in price next year by γ_3 . They treat their income coefficients analogously.

tiply them by dummies for four different income classes (gross income in €: 1–29,999; 30,000–59,999; 60,000–89,999; and $\geq 90,000$ for single households and twice the amount for married couples). Recall that the price is based on taxable income which might be very different from the gross income. This means that the income groups are more based on status than on disposable income and price. If there is indeed heterogeneity, the last step is also necessary due to the selectivity of the available sample in which high income taxpayers are overrepresented (see the data description below). Therefore, the specification 3 is extended to:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \ln DON_{it} = & \sum_{j=1}^4 D_j * \\
 & * [\delta_{j1} \ln PRICE_{it-1} + \delta_{j2} \ln PRICE_{it} + \delta_{j3} \ln PRICE_{it+1} + \\
 & + \beta_{j1} \ln Y_{it-1} + \beta_{j2} \ln Y_{it} + \beta_{j3} \ln Y_{it+1} + X_{it} \gamma_j + \delta_{jt}] \\
 & + \alpha_i + u_{it},
 \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

where D_j are dummies for the four income groups $j = \{1, 2, 3, 4\}$. This approach allows, moreover, for a more flexible relationship between income and charitable giving, thus relaxing the assumption imposed by equation 1.

4.2 Data

The analysis in this paper is based on 5% stratified sample from the German Taxpayer Panel 2001–2006 made available by the German Federal Statistical Office. It is a rich panel of individual income tax return data in which high income taxpayers are strongly overrepresented. The stratas are based on region, joint or separate declaration, main income source and the average of the gross income over the six years. It contains around a million of observations per year and detailed information on income and taxes, and some demographic characteristics such as age, state of residence, religion, and the number and age of children. The panel is available for distant computations with SAS. Tables 8 and 9 in the appendix present some descriptive statistics.

4.3 Variables

The dependent variable, $\ln(DON_{it} + 1)$, is the natural logarithm of donations declared according to §10bEStG. Given that there are households that do not declare any donations and in order to assure that this variable takes values larger than zero, I add one euro to the amount of donations. The US literature usually adds the amount of \$10. However, the average donation in those studies is 5 to more than 250 times higher than in the data used for this study.¹⁹ This suggests that €1 is a better choice. However, the choice is still arbitrary. Later, I present robustness checks adding alternatively €5 and €10 to the amount of donations.

The first independent variable, $\ln PRICE_{it}$, is the natural logarithm of the price which is 1 minus the marginal tax rate. The actual tax rate is endogenous, as it changes with the amount donated. Therefore, I calculate for each individual a hypothetical marginal tax at zero donations and use its natural logarithm, $\ln \widetilde{PRICE}_{it}$, as an instrument.

The second independent variable, $\ln Y_{it}$, is the natural logarithm of the after tax income. Respectively, I calculate a hypothetical after tax income at zero donations and use its natural logarithm, $\ln \widetilde{Y}_{it}$, as an instrument.

Additionally, I include other control variables: dummies for each of the six income sources other than income earned as an employee (income from agriculture and forestry, from business, from self-employment, from dependent employment, capital income and income from rent and leasing properties), a dummy for joint declaration, for living in West Germany, for the age squared, for religious affiliation and one control variable for the number of children.

5 Estimation Results

Table 1 presents the results from the estimation which allows the coefficients for all nonprice variables to differ across income classes and uses the IV approach to

¹⁹For example, in the sample used by Bakija and Heim (2011) the average donation is \$125,000 (in 2007 dollars). However, the average after-tax income is greater than \$1 million.

price and income. The estimates for permanent price elasticity are -0.57 (Table 1, column I) assuming perfect foresight and -0.82 (Table 1, column II) when relying on predictable changes of future income and price. The estimates for permanent income elasticity are around 0.2–0.3, slightly varying among different income classes. The estimates of price elasticity are rather low when compared with previous cross-sectional studies from Germany.²⁰ However, if the price elasticity differs among income groups, those estimates are rather meaningless and depend strongly on the composition of the sample. Therefore, in the next table we move on to relaxing the assumption of homogeneity of price elasticity.

²⁰For example Paqué (1996) found the price elasticity to be between -1.8 and -1.4 and Borgloh (2008) between -2.08 and 0.84.

Table 2 presents the results from the estimation, which allows the coefficients on all variables to differ across income classes (equation 4) and uses the IV approach to price and income. It allows for the heterogeneity of tax responsiveness among different income groups and corrects for the sample composition in which high income groups are overrepresented. The results show that permanent tax-price elasticity varies significantly between income classes. It is as low as around -0.26 (perfect foresight) and -0.17 (predictable changes) for pretax incomes below €30,000 for singles and €60,000 for married couples, respectively. It is as high as -1.40 (perfect foresight) and -1.56 (predictable changes) for incomes €30,000–59,999 for singles and €60,000–119,999 for married couples. Higher incomes show elasticity of around -1 when assuming perfect foresight and around -1.35 when assuming predictable changes. Overall, there is evidence of heterogeneity among income classes. Consequently, this table presents results from the preferred specification (equation 4) and the results are referred to in conclusions from this paper. Given that the distribution of the income classes in the whole population is approximately 50%, 30%, 10%, and 10% and their shares of total giving are 23%, 26%, 14%, and 37%,²¹ the average weighted permanent elasticity is slightly below -1. The conclusion is, that fiscal incentives in Germany are effective in stimulating charitable giving.

The comparability with other empirical studies for Germany is limited because they all estimate "first-euro" elasticity. Regardless of the differences in the definition, my estimates predict rather lower responsiveness to tax incentives. This is especially true with respect to previous studies relying on OLS and Tobit methods.

The estimates for permanent income elasticity are around 0.2–0.3, slightly varying among different income classes.

I find evidence that donors adjust their charitable contributions gradually. They respond strongly to the former price. Moreover, I find evidence for all income classes, apart from the highest, that donors respond to predictable future changes in the price (see Table 2). The actual income and to some extent the

²¹See Priller and Schupp (2011).

future income drive the donations. The effects of past income are negligible.

variable: $\ln DON_{i,t}$

[illegible]

6 Robustness Checks

This section presents a number of important robustness checks.

6.1 Assuming that coefficients are uniform across income classes

Table 3 presents the results from a regression when assuming that all coefficients are uniform across income classes (equation 3) and using the IV approach to price and income. Column I presents the results from a regression that assumes perfect foresight and column II presents the results when using predictable-tax-change instruments. The coefficient estimates of permanent price elasticity (-0.33 and -0.37) are low in magnitude when compared to the estimates from cross-sectional studies for Germany. Similarly, the coefficient estimates for permanent income elasticity (0.31 and 0.43) are rather low. However, given the selectivity of the available sample those results cannot be carried over to the whole population. More importantly, the conclusions from table 1 and 2 are that the assumption of homogeneity among different income classes is clearly violated. This table, however, is the basis for the comparisons with the subsequent robustness checks.

Table 3: Permanent and transitory effects: assuming coefficients are uniform across income classes, using the IV approach to price and income. The dependent variable is $\ln DON_{i,t}$.

| | (I) perfect foresight | (II) predictable tax change instruments |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t}$ | -0.03** (0.01) | 0.05** (0.02) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t-1}$ | -0.33*** (0.01) | -0.43*** (0.02) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t+1}$ | 0.02** (0.01) | 0.01 (0.03) |
| permanent price elasticity | -0.33*** | -0.37*** |
| $\ln Y_{i,t}$ | 0.21*** (0.00) | 0.26*** (0.01) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t-1}$ | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02** (0.01) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t+1}$ | 0.07*** (0.00) | 0.15*** (0.02) |
| permanent income elasticity | 0.31*** | 0.43*** |
| other controls | yes | yes |
| year effects | yes | yes |
| fixed individual effects | yes | yes |
| N in million | 3.36 | 2.72 |
| Notes: | | |
| ^a Source: taxpayerpanel 2001–2006, author’s own calculations | | |
| ^c standard errors in parenthesis | | |
| ^d *** significant at 0.01 level, ** significant at 0.05 level, * significant at 0.1 level | | |

6.2 First-euro price and income instead of IV approach

Table 4 presents the results when estimating the basic specification (assuming coefficients are uniform across income classes) without the IV approach and using the the first-euro price and, similarly, hypothetical after-tax income at zero donations instead. The estimates of permanent tax-price elasticity are higher in absolute terms when compared to the basic specification with the IV approach (table 3). It changes from -0.33 to -0.59 when assuming perfect foresight and from -0.37 to -0.95 when assuming predictable tax change instruments. This might suggest that the estimates of tax-price elasticity from previous studies for Germany are overestimated. The estimates for permanent income elasticity are somewhat lower, changing from 0.31 to 0.25 when assuming perfect foresight and from 0.43 to 0.20 when assuming predictable tax change instruments.

Table 4: Permanent and transitory effects. Assuming coefficients are uniform across income classes. First-Dollar Price. Dependent variable: $\ln DON_{i,t}$

| | perfect foresight | predictable tax change instruments |
|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t}$ | -0.22*** (0.01) | -0.30*** (0.01) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t-1}$ | -0.38*** (0.01) | -0.55*** (0.01) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t+1}$ | 0.00 (0.01) | -0.10*** (0.01) |
| permanent price elasticity | -0.59*** | -0.95*** |
| $\ln Y_{i,t}$ | 0.17*** (0.00) | 0.18*** (0.00) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t-1}$ | 0.02*** (0.00) | -0.01*** (0.00) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t+1}$ | 0.06*** (0.00) | 0.03*** (0.00) |
| permanent income elasticity | 0.25*** | 0.20*** |
| other controls | yes | yes |
| year effects | yes | yes |
| fixed individual effects | yes | yes |
| N in million | 3.36 | 2.73 |
| Notes: | | |
| ^a Source: taxpayerpanel 2001–2006, author’s own calculations | | |
| ^c standard errors in parenthesis | | |
| ^d *** significant at 0.01 level, ** significant at 0.05 level, * significant at 0.1 level | | |

6.3 Censoring

Because for around 50% of observations I do not observe donations there is a serious concern that because of censoring my coefficients are biased. Can the comparably low coefficient estimates of price elasticity be explained by neglecting the censoring? I estimate a Tobit model²² on pooled data regressing donations directly on the first-euro price and other variables. I compare then the results with analogous OLS regression which do not account for censoring. The estimated coefficients as compared to simple OLS regression on pooled data are presented in table 5. The marginal effects from the Tobit regressions are similar to those obtained from the OLS estimation. This does not support the hypothesis that the estimates of the elasticity obtained in previous section are biased.

²²Due to the computational constraint of the statistical office, this estimation was only possible with an 0.05% sample. Consequently, the number of observations is 10 times lower than in the other estimations.

Table 5: Accounting versus not accounting for censoring: Tobit versus OLS.

First-Euro Price. Assuming perfect foresight. Dependent variable: $\ln DON_{i,t}$

| | Tobit marginal ef- fects | OLS | Tobit marginal ef- fects | OLS |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t}$ | -1.16*** (0.24) | -1.11*** (0.03) | -0.60*** (0.11) | -0.68*** (0.08) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t-1}$ | | | -0.41*** (0.07) | -0.58*** (0.06) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t+1}$ | | | -0.14*** (0.02) | -0.18*** (0.07) |
| permanent price elasticity | | | -1.14*** | -1.43*** |
| $\ln Y_{i,t}$ | 0.51*** (0.11) | 0.51*** (0.01) | 0.08*** (0.01) | 0.13*** (0.02) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t-1}$ | | | 0.15*** (0.03) | 0.13*** (0.01) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t+1}$ | | | 0.39*** (0.07) | 0.36*** (0.02) |
| permanent income elastic- ity | | | 0.61*** | 0.61*** |
| Other controls | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| year dummies | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| N in tausend | 366.5 | 366.5 | 306 | 252 |
| Notes: | | | | |
| ^a Source: taxpayerpanel 2001–2006, author’s own calculations | | | | |
| ^c standard errors in parenthesis | | | | |
| ^d *** significant at 0.01 level, ** significant at 0.05 level, * significant at 0.1 level | | | | |

6.4 Adding different amounts to donations

Because of the numerous observations with zero donations and because the logarithmic function is not defined at zero, I have added an additional euro to the individual contribution. Given the steepness of the log function at low levels of donations I conduct a robustness check by adding €5 or €10 alternatively. This results in slightly lower absolute coefficient estimates of price elasticity due to the shift towards a less steep part of a logarithmic curve (see table 6).

Dependent variable: $\ln DON_{i,t}$

| | +1 | | +5 | | +10 | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | perfect foresight | predictable change instruments | perfect foresight | predictable change instruments | perfect foresight | predictable change instruments |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t}$ | -0.03** (0.01) | 0.05** (0.02) | 0.00 (0.01) | 0.07*** (0.01) | 0.01** (0.01) | 0.07*** (0.01) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t-1}$ | -0.33*** (0.01) | -0.43*** (0.02) | -0.23*** (0.01) | -0.31*** (0.01) | -0.19*** (0.01) | -0.26*** (0.01) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t+1}$ | 0.02** (0.01) | 0.01 (0.03) | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.05** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.06** (0.02) |
| permanent price elasticity | -0.33*** | -0.37*** | -0.17*** | -0.19*** | -0.12*** | -0.12*** |
| $\ln Y_{i,t}$ | 0.21*** (0.00) | 0.26*** (0.01) | 0.17*** (0.00) | 0.21*** (0.00) | 0.15*** (0.00) | 0.19*** (0.00) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t-1}$ | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02** (0.01) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.01*** (0.00) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t+1}$ | 0.07*** (0.00) | 0.15*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.00) | 0.11*** (0.01) | 0.05*** (0.00) | 0.10*** (0.01) |
| permanent income elasticity | 0.31*** | 0.43*** | 0.24*** | 0.33*** | 0.21*** | 0.30*** |
| other controls | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| year effects | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| fixed individual effects | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| N in million | 3.36 | 2.72 | 3.36 | 2.72 | 3.36 | 2.72 |

Notes:

^aSource: taxpayerpanel 2001–2006, author's own calculations

^c standard errors in parenthesis

^d *** significant at 0.01 level, ** significant at 0.05 level, * significant at 0.1 level

6.5 Excluding nonitemizers and border itemizers

Finally, I present the results from a regression in which I exclude nonitemizers and border itemizers (see table 7). On average, 30% of the tax units take the standard deduction and less than 1% are classified as border itemizers. As some individuals switch between itemizing and not itemizing in subsequent years, I lose around 42% of my sample. The estimates of tax-price elasticity are slightly lower and those of income elasticity slightly higher than those in table 3.

Table 7: Permanent and transitory effects. Assuming coefficients are uniform across income classes. IV approach to price and income. Excluding nonitemizers and border itemizers. Assuming perfect foresight. Dependent variable: $\ln DON_{i,t}$

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t}$ | 0.06** (0.02) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t-1}$ | -0.29*** (0.02) |
| $\ln PRICE_{i,t+1}$ | -0.02 (0.02) |
| permanent price elasticity | -0.25*** |
| $\ln Y_{i,t}$ | 0.27*** (0.01) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t-1}$ | 0.02*** (0.01) |
| $\ln Y_{i,t+1}$ | 0.10*** (0.00) |
| permanent income elasticity | 0.39*** |
| other controls | yes |
| year effects | yes |
| fixed individual effects | yes |
| N in million | 1.97 |
| Notes: | |
| ^a Source: taxpayerpanel 2001–2006, author’s own calculations | |
| ^c standard errors in parenthesis | |
| ^d *** significant at 0.01 level, ** significant at 0.05 level, * significant at 0.1 level | |

7 Conclusions

This paper analyzes the effectiveness of fiscal incentives for charitable giving in Germany. While there are numerous studies estimating tax-price elasticity of giving for the US, we know little about European countries. Given this lack of knowledge as well as different role of the government and different tradition of charitable giving, the wide-spread preferential treatment of donations in the income tax is striking.

This paper provides new evidence from the German Taxpayer Panel 2001-2006. The availability of longitudinal data allows for the estimation of the permanent and the transitory tax-price and income elasticity of donations while controlling for individual unobserved characteristics. The results suggest heterogeneous effects of the tax price among different income groups. The estimates of permanent tax-price elasticity range between -0.2 for lower incomes and -1.6 for higher incomes. The average permanent price elasticity weighted with the amount of giving by different income groups is slightly below -1 meaning that fiscal incentives for donations in Germany are effective. There is evidence that donors adjust their donations gradually after changes in the tax schedule and respond to future predictable changes in price. They respond mainly to changes in current and, to a smaller extent, in future income. The estimates for permanent income elasticity are around 0.2–0.3, slightly varying among different income classes. Actual income and to some extent future income drive donations. The effects of past income are negligible.

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Table 8: Descriptive statistics

Note: This table presents raw sample averages.

Weighted averages are presented in brackets.

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| avg. donation (€) | 474.73 (118.99) | 537.54 (133.24) | 511.34 (127.57) | 580.73 (140.57) | 647.77 (153.31) | 665.48 (147.39) |
| donors share (%) | 45.55 (34.70) | 47.64 (36.98) | 46.75 (35.89) | 48.77 (37.88) | 50.34 (38.93) | 47.71 (36.55) |
| avg. price (per 100 €) | 71.03 (75.09) | 71.32 (75.02) | 71.36 (75.05) | 72.20 (74.76) | 72.93 (74.97) | 72.85 (74.95) |
| avg. gross income (€) | 80287 (33344) | 76677 (33272) | 76018 (33297) | 82302 (34531) | 92919 (33346) | 96941 (36753) |
| avg. age | 47.20 (44.10) | 48.18 (45.09) | 49.17 (46.08) | 50.16 (47.07) | 51.16 (48.07) | 52.15 (49.06) |
| joint declaration share (%) | 60.30 (57.77) | 60.53 (57.97) | 60.71 (58.23) | 60.86 (58.55) | 61.12 (58.72) | 61.06 (58.76) |
| west share (%) | 84.77 (85.35) | 84.79 (85.34) | 84.80 (85.32) | 84.83 (85.31) | 84.85 (85.30) | 84.87 (85.31) |
| religion share (%) | 23.26 (23.08) | 23.18 (23.09) | 22.92 (23.00) | 22.40 (22.72) | 21.97 (22.33) | 23.61 (23.21) |
| self-employed share (%) | 18.13 (6.36) | 18.26 (6.40) | 18.50 (6.53) | 18.77 (6.75) | 18.86 (6.85) | 18.77 (6.93) |
| number of children | 0.82 (0.75) | 0.81 (0.75) | 0.80 (0.74) | 0.79 (0.73) | 0.78 (0.72) | 0.76 (0.71) |
| N in million | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.93 |

Table 9: Descriptive statistics

Note: This table presents raw sample averages.

| single | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| gross income (€) | 1–29,999 | 30,000–59,999 | 60,000–89,999 | ≥ 90,000 |
| avg. price | 99.59 | 76.13 | 62.03 | 55.45 |
| N in million (total 6 years) | 0.37 | 0.93 | 0.35 | 0.37 |
| joint declaration | | | | |
| gross income (€) | 1–59,999 | 60,000–119,999 | 120,000–179,999 | ≥ 180,000 |
| avg. price | 99.66 | 73.21 | 61.12 | 54.80 |
| N in million (total 6 years) | 0.39 | 1.28 | 0.52 | 1.09 |

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