EMBARGOED

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The Connection Opportunity

Insights for Bringing Americans Together Across Difference

More in Common

ABOUT MORE IN COMMON

The report was conducted by More in Common US, part of a non-partisan, international initiative aimed at building societies and communities that are stronger, more united, and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarization and social division. We work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media and government to connect people across lines of division.

Principal Authors:
Calista Small — Research Manager
Daniel Yudkin, Ph.D. — Senior Advisor
Jordan Wylie, Ph.D. — Research Fellow

With contributions from:
Kate Carney — Deputy Director
Tim Dixon — Co-Founder
Ashley Fabrizio, Ph.D. — Head of Research
Samantha Hasani — Democracy Communications and Research Associate
Jason Mangone — Executive Director

More in Common
www.moreincommonus.com

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Foreword

Even in an age where we live on our devices—averaging almost five hours per day on our phones[1]—the most memorable and transformative experiences in our lives often come from the people we encounter and experiences we share.

Until our generation, most people experienced regular connection—often with people different from themselves—throughout their daily lives: at the store, the office, in their local community, at sports events, and so on. For the many of us who live in relatively homogeneous communities, social media promised to help broaden our worlds and connect us at a scale not possible before today.

That promise remains unfulfilled. While our worlds have expanded in ways that past generations could never have imagined, in practice, our lives are increasingly structured for isolation. As we embrace remote working, online classrooms, doing shopping and banking on smartphones, buying groceries at the self-checkout terminal, and other frictionless transactions where we no longer engage at a person-to-person level, ordinary Americans now encounter far fewer strangers and are missing opportunities for connection in their day to day lives.

Americans today are yearning for connection, as many struggle with loneliness[2] and a lack of belonging[3]. This report shows that even in a polarized America, most are keen to meet people who are different from themselves and see value in doing so. But with stressed, busy, and segregated lives, few opportunities present themselves. For many, finding space to make those connections can feel like a luxury limited to those with the privilege of education and wealth.

Connection across lines of difference—or, simply put, connection between people who do not share the same backgrounds or beliefs—is at the heart of the challenge of overcoming social isolation, strengthening community life, and building an America where everyone can feel they belong. The abstraction of a republic cannot work without people knowing and trusting others who belong to the same community. This report provides a sweeping overview of how Americans feel about connecting with each other when they do not belong to the same race, socioeconomic status, faith, or political tribe. It finds five key insights around engaging across lines of difference and identifies practical steps to foster greater connection.

This work is not easy. There are significant obstacles to overcoming the ways in which Americans are increasingly separated from each other. The details of how we overcome the obstacles demands a study of its own. This report, however, provides many starting points. The findings underscore the potential for making connection a design feature, not an afterthought, in the places where we cross paths with people different from ourselves. Leaders, innovators, and policymakers will be surprised with the positive results.

Of course, not all interactions with strangers are easy, positive, or even all that meaningful. But humans flourish when their lives are more people-centered and less isolated and tribalized. As the deployment of artificial intelligence changes many aspects of our lives in the months and years ahead, we will have the choice to accept by default increasing social isolation or make small changes that give us more options for connection.

We hope this report can inform efforts to create more opportunities for connection across difference, strengthening our society's resilience against polarization and the erosion of social trust, and enriching our individual, family, and community life.

Tim Dixon, Co-Founder & Jason Mangone, Executive Director, More in Common

Introduction

The Connection Opportunity

A Crisis of Connection

Humans are wired to connect. From an early age, we seek out familiar voices and faces,[4] we monitor the needs and emotions of others,[5] and we engage in play and mimicry to ingratiate ourselves with the people around us.[6] This need for connection is so fundamental that being deprived of it can contribute to negative health outcomes, ranging from heart disease to mental illness.[78] Although the frequency with which people interact with others naturally fluctuates across the lifespan[9]—often dipping during such major life transitions as adolescence and early adulthood—sustained periods of social isolation pose a serious risk to lifelong well-being.[10]

Social connection isn't only important for individuals; it's also essential to the formation of a flourishing society. Social connection strengthens the economy, encourages neighborhood safety, and even helps increase resilience to natural disasters.[11] Most crucially, perhaps, it is vital for promoting the conditions for a thriving democracy,[12] whose success depends on deliberation and debate, participation in civic life, and a sense of shared fate.

Yet, in recent decades, social connection in the United States has been on the decline.[13] Quality time spent with others, both at home and in public life, has significantly diminished,[14] leading to increased feelings of loneliness.[15] Participation in local communities, unions, and social clubs has dropped precipitously,[16] and Americans report having fewer close friends: almost half (49 percent), for instance, reported having three or fewer close friends in 2021 (27 percent reported this in 1990).[17] The COVID-19 pandemic only compounded these trends,[18] and Americans' feelings of social isolation continue to this day.[19]

Alongside this general retreat from public and communal life is an additional force serving to disconnect Americans: namely, the continued fragmentation of American society. Despite the fact that the US has become more demographically diverse over the past few decades,[20] Americans continue to live and socialize in largely homogeneous communities.[21] Neighborhood racial segregation persists,[22] and income-based segregation has grown.[23] Schools are separated by race and income.[24] Religious diversity, when present, tends to be confined to specific geographic areas.[25] Furthermore, counties across

the country have become more politically homogeneous, and nearly half of Democrats and Republicans say they have "just a few" or "no" friends from the opposing party.[26]

In other words, Americans are both spending less time with each other *overall*,[27] and spending even *less* time with those who are different from them. Lacking these types of connections, people's opinions of one another are more likely to be influenced by narratives formed by what they read or watch rather than by lived experience—making it easier for fear and division to take hold. This tearing of the social fabric has already had notable consequences for US society, contributing to alarmingly high levels of distrust[28] and the erosion of democratic norms.[29]

Recognizing the serious consequences of such a confluence of negative social dynamics, some now refer to this moment as a "crisis" of connection.[30]

Fostering Connection Across Difference

One solution to this crisis is clear: Americans need to reconnect—and not just to people who share the same qualities, but also to those whose backgrounds or beliefs differ from their own.

In other recently published reports, researchers explored social connection (and lack thereof) as a general social phenomenon.[31] In this report, we focus specifically on connection *across* lines of difference—or, more simply, connection between Americans who do not share the same backgrounds or beliefs.[i] We focus on these connections because, given the trends in the United States mentioned above, this behavior is both particularly important and in relatively short supply. Additionally, the United States is, by design, made up of people who are not all the same. Fostering positive connections across differences is necessary for people in this country to be able to peacefully work, live, and thrive together.

We set out to answer the following main questions:

- Who is open to connecting across lines of difference in the US, and why?
- What are the social, psychological, and environmental barriers that prevent people from connecting more across lines of difference?

We focused on four lines of difference:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Politics
- Religion
- Socioeconomic Status

Answering these questions can help stakeholders, such as philanthropists, policymakers, community leaders, and even individuals, adopt learnings and

[i] Social scientists often distinguish between two types of social connection: "bonding" and "bridging." Bonding refers to forming close connections within a group that shares similar traits or values. By contrast, bridging involves creating relationships across lines of difference. Our study's focus on connection across lines of difference does not intend to suggest that people do not share commonalities–or that our commonalities should not also be celebrated; bonding, and the process of discovering commonalities, is essential to individual and community well-being as well. For a brief review of these concepts, see: Claridge, T. (2024, February 27). *What is the difference between bonding and bridging social capital?*. Institute for Social Capital. https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/difference-bonding-bridging-social-capital/

strategies to foster more connection across lines of difference within their communities.

Our investigation focused on four lines of difference, selected due to their relevance to current social and political divides. Namely, we studied differences in:

- race/ethnicity
- political viewpoint
- religion
- socioeconomic status

We explored how Americans feel about connecting across each line of difference, what kinds of everyday "bridging activities" (activities where they connected with others across difference) they have experienced in the past, and what barriers prevent them from connecting more in the future. For a comparative perspective, we collected data at both the national and regional level.

Key Findings

Our investigation reveals several key insights about the state of connection across difference in the US today:

Most Americans see value in connecting across difference and are most interested in activities where they can work together.

- Seven in ten (70 percent) Americans feel that they have a sense of responsibility to connect with people whose backgrounds and viewpoints are different from their own—what we call "connective responsibility."
- Most (66 percent) Americans believe they can learn a lot from interacting with people who are different from them.
- A majority of Americans are interested in participating in "bridging activities" across differences of race/ethnicity, political viewpoint, socioeconomic status, and religion.
- Americans, on average, are most interested in working across lines of difference to achieve a mutual goal that improves their community (compared to other types of bridging activities).

The most common reason Americans give for not interacting more with people from different backgrounds is a "lack of opportunity."

- About a quarter of Americans, on average, say that a "lack of opportunity" prevents them from connecting more across all lines of difference (race/ethnicity: 28 percent, politics: 21 percent, socioeconomic status: 30 percent, religion: 26 percent).
- The next most frequently cited reasons are: "interacting more isn't important to me" (race/ethnicity: 14 percent, political viewpoint: 21 percent, socioeconomic status: 19 percent, religion: 17 percent) and "I don't think the [other group] wants to interact with *me*" (race/ethnicity: 12 percent, political viewpoint: 19 percent, socioeconomic status: 16 percent, religion: 12 percent).

Compared to other lines of difference, Americans are most apprehensive about connecting across political differences.

- While a majority of Americans express interest in activities where they connect across political differences, they report overall less interest in those activities compared to those that would involve connecting with people of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, or religions.
- Americans are more likely to report the following as barriers to

connecting across political differences, compared to connecting across other lines of difference: They "don't have the energy" (18 percent), they think it would be uncomfortable (17 percent), and that they would be misunderstood (17 percent). People were also more likely to cite "concerns for my personal safety" (13 percent) as a challenge to connection across political lines of difference.

Two factors–community norms and intergroup anxiety–stand out as the strongest predictors of interest in connecting across difference.

- Community norms—shared beliefs about how common and valued connecting across difference is within one's community—is the strongest predictor of interest. When individuals believe that their community values and frequently practices connecting across difference, they are more likely to show interest in doing so themselves.
- Intergroup anxiety—the fear of having an awkward or uncomfortable interaction with someone from a different group—is the strongest predictor that decreases interest in connection across difference. The higher this anxiety, the less likely individuals are to be interested in connecting.
- Other important predictors of interest include: a person's social curiosity, sense of connective responsibility, and sense of local community belonging. How often someone is already connecting is relevant as well.
- These factors are more predictive of interest than demographic characteristics, suggesting that psychological factors may play a more significant role than identity in shaping people's approach to connection.

Connection is cumulative: the more people have an opportunity to connect, the more interested they are in connecting.

- Experiences of connecting across difference can lead people to be more interested in connecting again in the future, suggesting that connection experiences can build on themselves in a virtuous cycle.
- We term such cycles "connection cascades" and suggest they may be a powerful way to build stronger cultures of connection.
- Our regional analyses show how experiences of connecting across difference may be associated with more positive attitudes toward integration and stronger norms of social connection.

Through this research, we also identified seven evidence-based strategies that can guide community leaders, stakeholders, and individuals to foster greater connection across lines of difference in their communities. Strategies include:

- Provide more opportunities for connection
- Increase the perception that connecting across difference is the "community norm"
- Foster feelings of local community belonging
- Highlight commonalities, like shared interests or goals, when wanting to broaden appeal of bridging opportunities
- Reduce intergroup anxiety through correcting misperceptions and skill-building
- Emphasize the importance of "connective responsibility"
- Seek opportunities to create "connection cascades"

These recommendations are outlined in greater detail in Chapter 5, along with resources that can help leaders implement them.To better understand what this work looks like in practice, we also provide examples of seven organizations that are incorporating these strategies in their work.

Ultimately, promoting connection across lines of difference will depend on the participation of everyday Americans as well as stakeholders across a variety of sectors, including in academia, civil society, media, philanthropy, and government.

This work is neither quick nor easy; in many ways, our day-to-day life pulls us away from connecting with those around us, especially those who are different.

However, the good news is that fostering greater connection is possible. We remain wired to connect. And as our research shows, majorities of Americans value connection, desire unity, and believe "now more than ever" that it is critical for us to engage across lines of difference—even after a divisive 2024 election.[ii] Achieving this is not only doable—it is essential for building a flourishing society.

[ii] A January 2025 More in Common poll of *N* = 2,000 US adults found a majority of Americans (57 percent) agree that "now, more than ever, it is important to connect across difference" (only 9 percent disagree), and over 8 in 10 Americans agree that "our success as a nation depends on our ability to work across differences." We also found that, when asked to picture their ideal America ten years from now, most Americans chose "united" as the top quality they want for the country. See: More in Common.(2025, January 29). *Trump's return*. More In Common. https://moreincommonus.com/publication/trumps-return/

Glossary

Barriers to connection across difference: Factors that hinder meaningful interactions across people from different social groups. These can be psychological (e.g. prejudice, anxiety about the interaction), social (e.g. threats to safety), environmental (e.g. lacking opportunity, time constraints), or a combination of one or more of the above.[32]

Bonding: Forming strong, close relationships with other people in a group that shares similar traits, values, or characteristics.[33]

Bridging: Establishing connections across lines of difference, such as differences of race, socioeconomic status, or ideology, to build relationships between diverse groups.[34] Among scholars, the term "bridging" is often used to describe processes of connecting across lines of difference that are more intentional (as opposed to incidental). In this report, we tend to refer to the social activities that we asked about in our surveys as "bridging activities." When talking about establishing connections between groups more generally, we sometimes use the terms "bridging" and "connection across difference" interchangeably.

Community belonging: The feeling of being socially connected, accepted, and valued within one's local group or community.[35]

Connection across difference: Interactions between people from different social groups, such as those differing by race, political views, religion, or socioeconomic status.[36] For rhetorical purposes, in this report we sometimes use the terms "connection across difference"and "bridging" interchangeably.

Connective responsibility: The belief that individuals have a moral obligation to engage with people from different backgrounds.[37]

Connection cascade: A phenomenon in which positive experiences of cross-group connection foster more interest in future engagement.[38]

Empathic concern: An emotional response that involves compassion and care for others' well-being, and which may underlie prosocial behavior.[39] In this study, we measured participants' levels of empathic concern towards specific groups of people (e.g. "people from a lower socioeconomic status." See Survey Question Wording in the Appendix for more information).

Intellectual humility: The recognition that one's beliefs and knowledge have limits, coupled with openness to new evidence and willingness to revise one's views.[40]

Intergroup anxiety: Fear or apprehension during or preceding interactions with members of an outgroup, driven by the belief that these interactions may lead to negative consequences like embarrassment, rejection, or negative evaluation.[41]

Line of difference: A categorical distinction separating people from different groups based on factors like race, religion, socioeconomic status, or political affiliation.

Perceived community norms: Individuals' perceptions of the behaviors and attitudes that are common or expected within their community, influencing actions through social conformity.[42] In this report, we focus specifically on perceived community norms of cross-group interaction, meaning beliefs about how common (descriptive norm) and acceptable (injunctive norm) it is to connect across differences in one's community.

Intergroup self-efficacy: The belief in one's ability to successfully engage with and navigate discussions with people from different backgrounds, which is essential to building confidence in the interaction.[43]

Social curiosity: An interest in the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of other people.[44]

Social dominance orientation: A tendency to prefer hierarchy within social groups and a belief that certain groups should dominate others.[45]

Social norms: Shared expectations within a community about what behaviors are common (descriptive norm) or acceptable (injunctive norm).[46]

Methods Summary

From 2023 to 2024, More in Common conducted a comprehensive study on social connection across lines of difference in the US, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative component included national, regional, and recontact surveys conducted in partnership with the international polling company YouGov, with samples weighted to be representative of the US adult population. The qualitative component involved focus groups in three metropolitan areas and a longitudinal online research community. For a full explanation, see the Appendix.

Across these surveys, the researchers asked specifically about four lines of difference: difference of race/ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and political viewpoint. These were chosen because of their present and historical importance in US society. Other differences, such as those related to sexual identity, age, gender, and immigration status are also important, but beyond the scope of this project.

In this report, we often refer to the people that we contacted as "Americans" rather than "respondents." For the sake of simplicity, "Americans" is intended to refer to anyone age 18 or above who currently resides in the United States.

To measure political ideology, we asked respondents to self-report their identification with different political labels with a standard 5-point scale (ranging from "Very Liberal" to "Very Conservative"). This scale is commonly used by political and social scientists in the US. See the Appendix for more information.

Given the vast number of comparisons possible with this data, we present only what we thought was most illustrative of broad trends in the US population in this report. For additional findings and data tables, see our website. If you are interested in viewing further analyses, please contact us at us@moreincommon.com.

Chapter One

Americans' Attitudes toward Connecting Across Difference

> **Being able to interact with people from different cultures makes us richer.**
>
> —Clara, a 40-year-old conservative white woman from Florida

> **Surrounding yourself by people who are different than you—that's how you grow. That's how you learn from each other.**
>
> —Niana, a 51-year-old liberal Black woman from Texas[iii]

Key Insights

Few words capture the state of US society today better than the word "fragmented." Economic inequality remains high,[47] racial inequities persist,[48] and toxic rhetoric proliferates online and in mainstream media.[49] People are increasingly pessimistic about the future,[50] and, following a contentious 2024 election season,[51] many are purportedly withdrawing from civic life.[52]

In this environment, it would be understandable if Americans showed limited interest in connecting with those whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own. After all, interacting across lines of difference presents a host of potential risks, ranging from challenges to one's belief system to threats to one's sense of safety.

However, while these challenges are real, our research finds that a majority of Americans nonetheless value connecting across differences: two-thirds (66 percent) agree that they can "learn a lot" from connecting with people who have different backgrounds and viewpoints than them, and many express interest in doing so more in the future. Most also agree that greater racial, religious, and socioeconomic integration would make their community "a better place to live."

Americans report valuing connecting across lines of difference for a variety

[iii] All quote attributions in this report are based on participants' self-reported identification of their race/ethnicity, gender, age and political ideology. For further explanation, see the Appendix.

of reasons. Many view it as a chance to learn how others see the world. Others see it as an opportunity to strengthen community bonds. A majority (70 percent) also feel a sense of "connective responsibility"—that is, a social obligation to engage with those who are different from them.

In sum, the majority of Americans think that connecting across lines of difference has both personal and social benefits—suggesting that many may be receptive to efforts to foster more cross-group ties in their own lives.

A Learning Opportunity

> **"People should not be afraid to learn about other cultures and religions because this diversity is what makes our country great."**
>
> —Aaron, a 39-year-old liberal white man from California

> **"I think that connecting with other people helps us grow more within ourselves and learn more about other cultures and other people."**
>
> —Jill, a 36-year-old white conservative woman from Missouri

Our research suggests that a main reason Americans value connection is that they perceive it as an opportunity to learn about themselves or the world. For example, two thirds (66 percent) of Americans believe they can "learn a lot from interacting with people whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from [their] own." Nearly as many (63 percent) say they "want to understand how people from other backgrounds and with different viewpoints see the world."

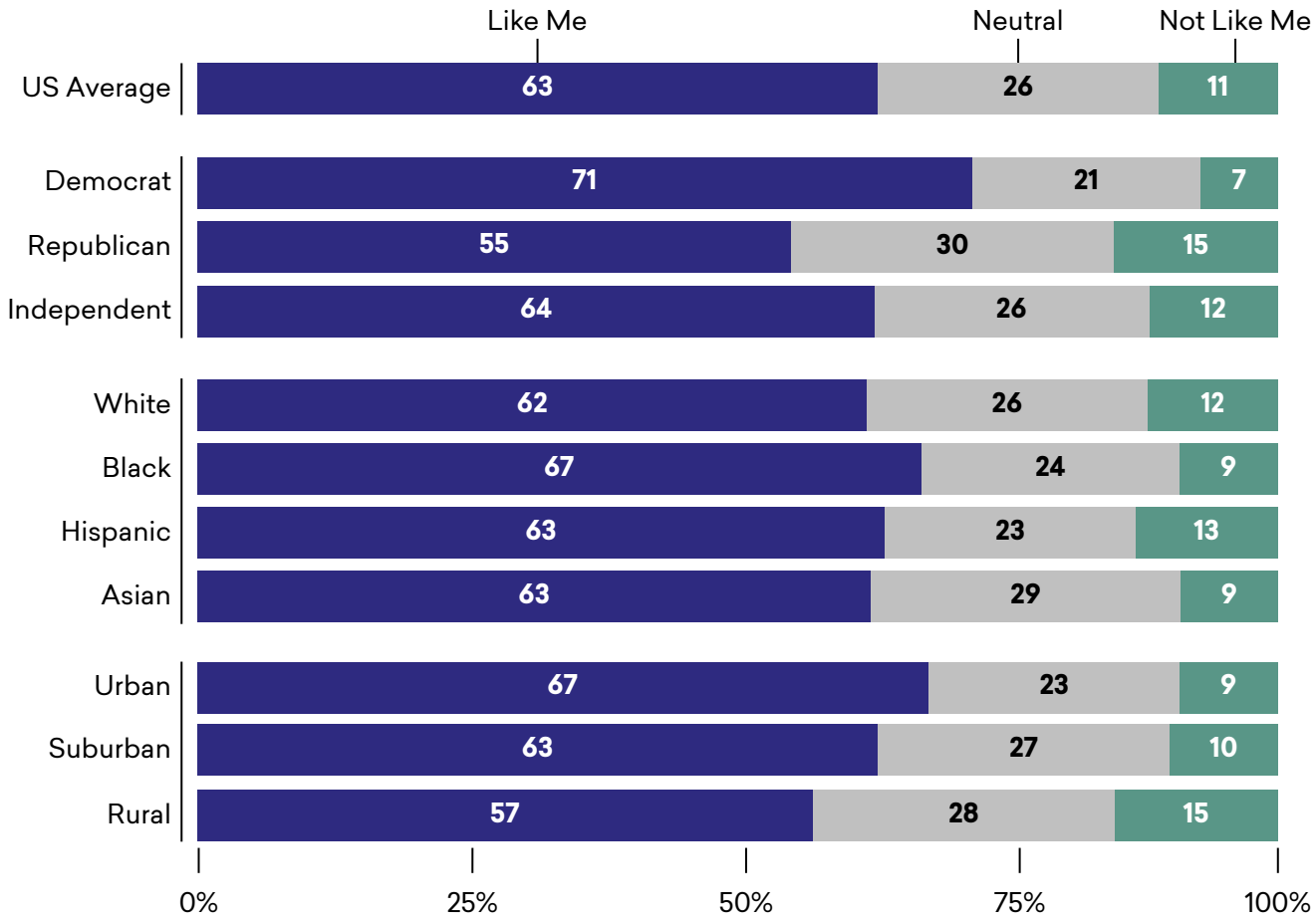
Majorities of all major demographic groups hold this view (See **Figures 1.1 and 1.2**). For example, 64 percent of white Americans, 71 percent of Black Americans, 64 percent of Asian Americans, and 63 percent of Hispanic Americans say they can learn a lot from interacting with other people with different backgrounds or viewpoints. Also, while there are some differences in responses by political party, a majority of Americans from all political affiliations say they can learn from those with different backgrounds (Democrat: 74 percent, Republican: 57 percent, and Independent: 64 percent) and want to understand how they see the world (Democrat: 71 percent, Republican: 55 percent, and Independent: 64 percent). Overall, this suggests that most Americans see value in connecting across lines of difference regardless of their own identity.

Figure 1.1

Seeing New Perspectives

Majorities across demographic groups want to understand others' points of view

"Please indicate how well the following statement describes you: I want to understand how people from other backgrounds and with different viewpoints see the world."



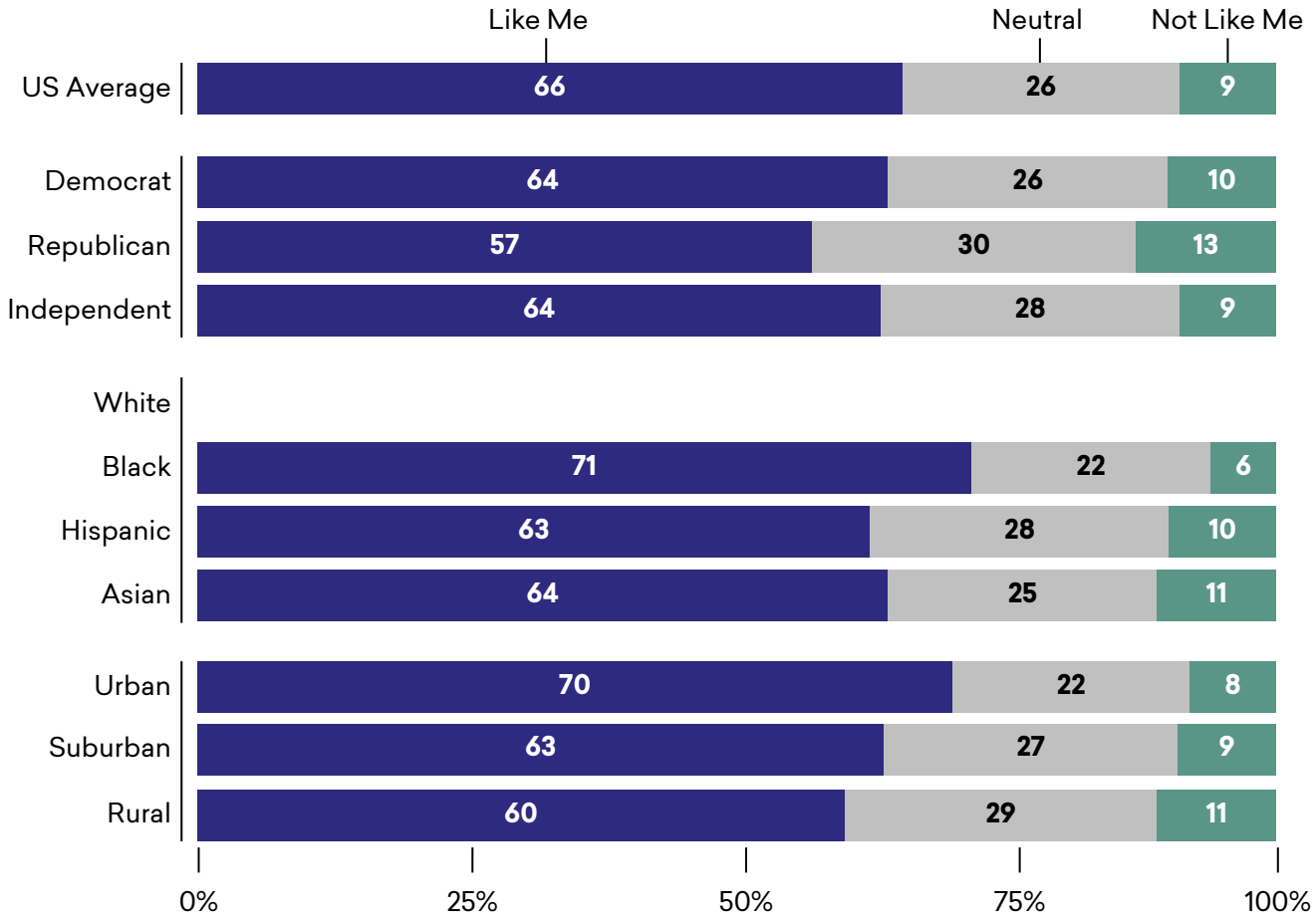
Response Scale: 1 = Not at all like me to 5 = Very much like me. Respondents who selected 1 and 2 were categorized as "Not Like Me"; those who selected 3 were categorized as "Neutral"; those who selected 4 and 5 were categorized as "Like Me." Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

Figure 1.2

Learning From Others

Majorities across demographic groups think they can learn from others whose backgrounds differ from their own

"Please indicate how well the following statement describes you: I feel like I can learn a lot from interacting with people whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from my own."



Response Scale: 1 = Not at all like me to 5 = Very much like me. Respondents who selected 1 and 2 were categorized as "Not Like Me"; those who selected 3 were categorized as "Neutral"; those who selected 4 and 5 were categorized as "Like Me." Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

A Social Duty

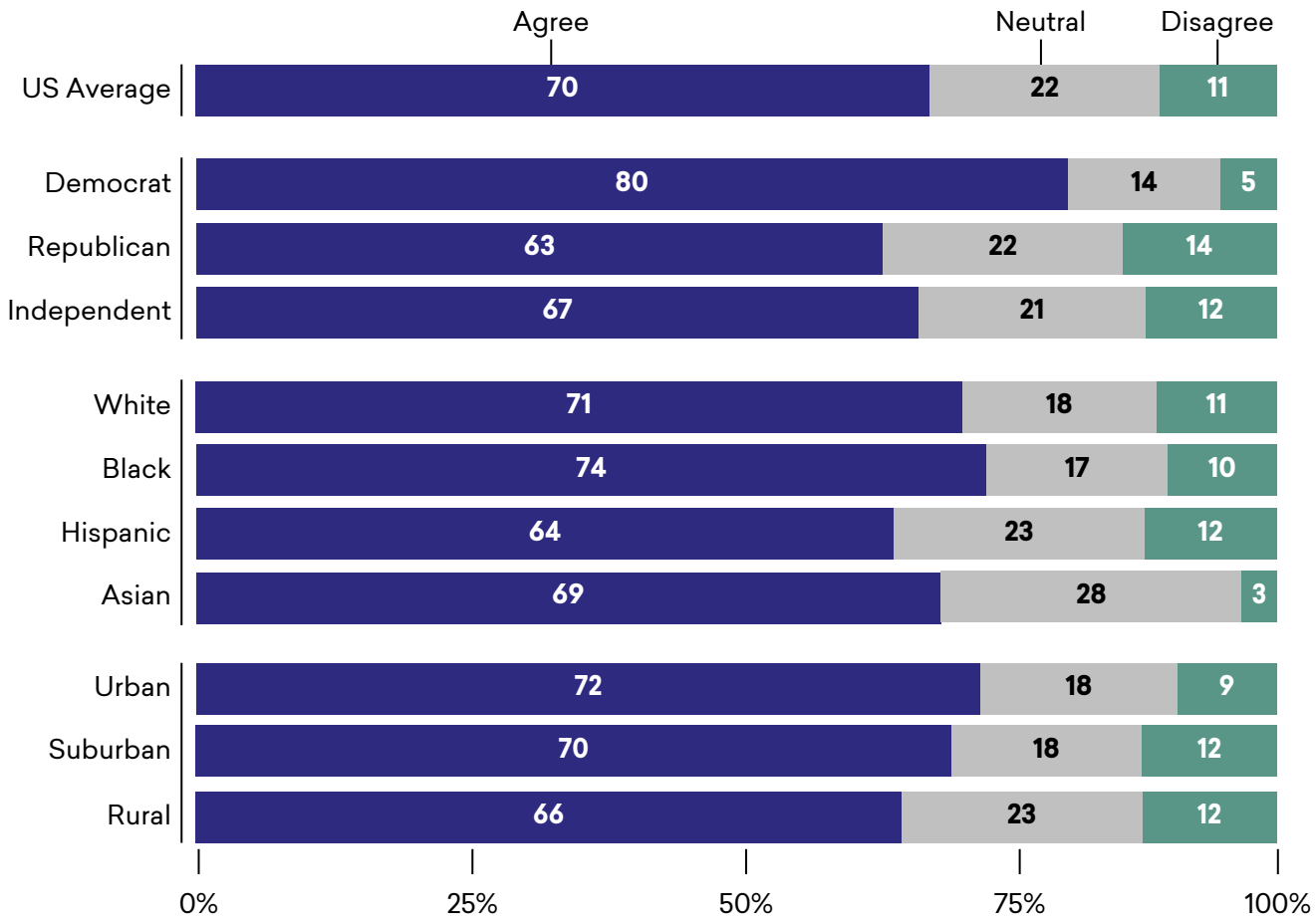
More than two thirds of Americans (70 percent) also believe that people have a "shared responsibility to engage with those whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own"—a belief that we refer to in this report as "connective responsibility." This view is shared across many different segments of the US population (see **Figure 1.3**). For example, majorities of white (71 percent), Black (74 percent), Asian (69 percent), and Hispanic (64

percent) Americans feel a sense of connective responsibility, as do majorities of members of all political parties (Democrat: 80 percent, Republican: 63 percent, and Independent: 67 percent). This suggests that many Americans see connecting across lines of difference as an activity with not only personal benefits, as highlighted in the previous section, but societal ones as well.

Figure 1.3

"Connective Responsibility"

A majority of Americans across demographic categories feel a responsibility to connect across difference



Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement. [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree]. Respondents who selected 1 through 3 were categorized as "Disagree"; those who selected 4 were categorized as "Neutral"; those who selected 5 through 7 were categorized as "Agree." Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

Other Benefits of Bridging Connection: Taking Others' Perspectives; Strengthening Communities

Conversations with Americans across the country reveal important nuances to how people think about connecting across lines of difference. Some Americans, for instance, feel that interacting across differences, especially in person, can help foster shared understanding and even a sense of unity between individuals with divergent views.

> **"When you meet a person in regular life, you can better understand their viewpoint and hopefully persuade them to have a better understanding of your viewpoint."**
>
> —Harry, a 67-year-old liberal white man from Pennsylvania

> **"I've been with people who I completely disagree with on basically every question on any ballot possible. But, our kids are playing together. They're having fun… Going to meet other people and just working towards the same project together, I think, can unify people, you know, regardless of the differences generally."**
>
> —Lillian, a 32 year-old conservative bi-racial (Native American & white) woman from Texas

Some also mentioned how understanding others' points of view can also be important for social change.

> **"I definitely think that it's good to get to know people with different outlooks because, if everybody's outlook is the same, when does change happen? So, if you can tell me: *oh, well, if you look at it this way*…I can then see it from a different view, maybe a view I had never thought about. So, I definitely think it's great to connect with people that don't necessarily share your mindset."**
>
> —Bree, a 36-year-old liberal Black woman from Texas

Others suggest how even brief encounters across lines of difference, if they happen regularly, can create opportunities for cultural exchange. For example, one woman suggested that, by living in a diverse apartment complex, she was able to "share community" with people from different backgrounds:

> **"If you live in an apartment complex, you can share community with different people, with different cultures. So just going downstairs to walk with your dog or with your little one to the park, you can know different people…You can share moments, assets, ideas, music."**
>
> —Emily, a 29-year-old liberal bi-racial (Hispanic and white) woman from Missouri

Indeed, research also shows that everyday interactions in shared spaces—such as running into a neighbor on the street or making small talk at the park—can help build familiarity and, subsequently, trust between different groups of people.[53] Similar to what Emily described in her apartment complex, these interactions can also lead to opportunities to exchange ideas, share experiences, and appreciate differences—in turn strengthening social bonds within a community.

Finally, our respondents expressed that they value connecting across lines of difference as an opportunity for self-expansion through the development of new relationships with others (a sentiment that is also found in academic research).[54] For example, one respondent remarked:

> **"I always say it would be a pretty boring world if everybody was all the same, right? And if you don't ever look outside of what you are, then you just become stagnant in the world. You're not living. You're just existing."**
>
> —Marty, a 58-year-old conservative bi-racial (Native American & white) woman from Texas

Americans' Recent Experiences Connecting Across Difference

The frequency with which Americans report engaging in connection behaviors varies considerably according to the behavior in question. Of seven different possible bridging activities (activities where people connect across lines of difference) presented to respondents, our findings show that having "an extended conversation" was reported most often (47 percent for race/ethnicity, 42 percent for religion, 40 percent for socioeconomic status, and 42 percent for political viewpoint), followed by attending "a function or social event" (38 percent for race/ethnicity, 34 percent for religion, 31 percent for socioeconomic status, 30 percent for political viewpoint). Working "to achieve a mutual goal" was reported the least (19 percent for race/ethnicity, 17 percent for religion, 17 for socioeconomic status, and 15 percent for political viewpoint).

However, while some Americans are already connecting in various ways, almost half, on average, are not (for a breakdown of this data by demographics, see our website). The relatively low number that report engaging in these behaviors could be related to the fact that most Americans have homogeneous social networks,[55] which make it more difficult to connect across lines of difference. Chapter 2 and 3 discuss other potential barriers to connection in more detail.

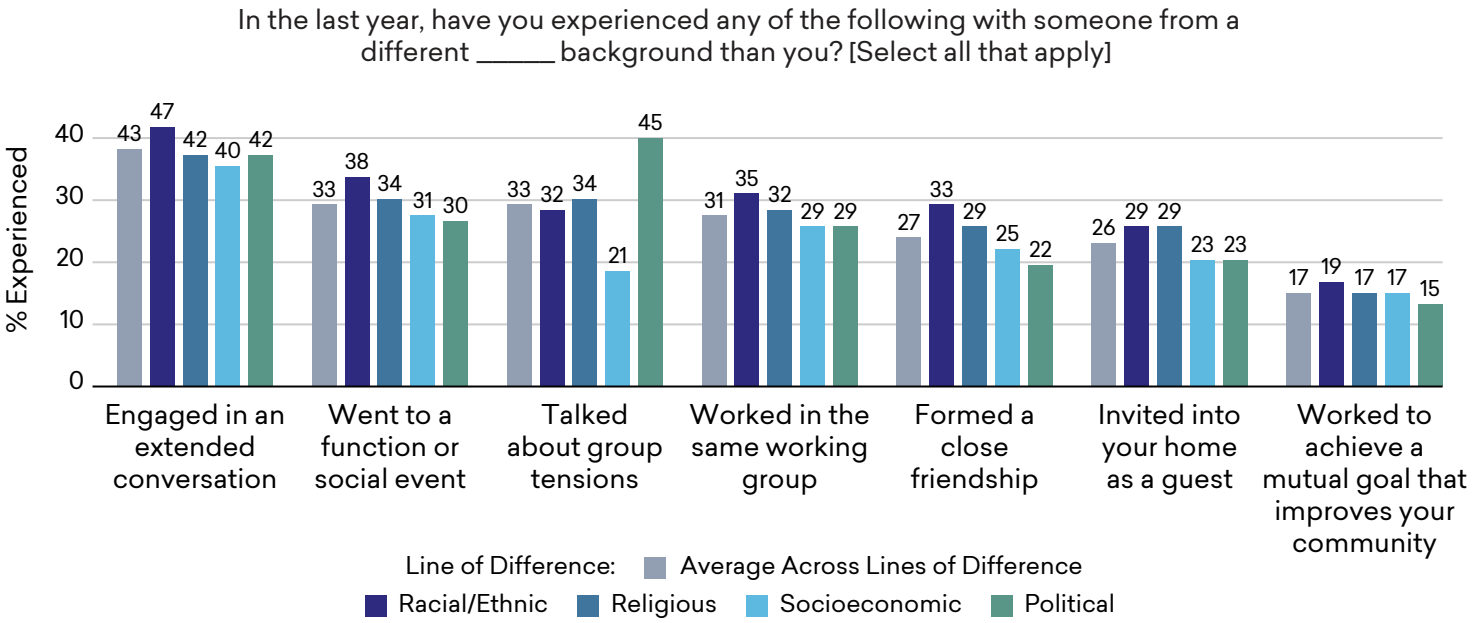
Another notable finding concerns talking about group tensions.[iv] Overall, the proportion of Americans who report talking about possible sources of tension with someone who holds different political views than them (45 percent) is at least ten percentage points higher than the proportion who report engaging in this behavior across any other line of difference. This reflects the prominence of political divisions in American life right now.[56]

By contrast, relatively few US adults (21 percent) report talking about potential sources of tension with people from a different socioeconomic status than them, indicating that either people don't have much opportunity to do this, or this topic is simply not often mentioned. The lack of discussion of class tensions could also be due to the fact that Americans regularly underestimate existing wealth inequalities in the US,[57] thereby making socio-economic differences perhaps seem less stark and thus less worthy of conversation.

Figure 1.4

Recent Experiences of Different Bridging Activities

The most people reported having extended conversations; fewest worked toward a mutual goal



Percents do not add to 100 due to multiple responses. The item "None of the above" was omitted from this graph due to the fact that participants were allowed to "Select all that apply." The wording of response options has been modified for clarity.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

[iv] Specifically, we asked respondents if they had done the following in the past year: 1) "talked about race or racial tensions with someone from a racial or ethnic background that is different than yours," 2) "talked about politics or political tensions with someone who has a political views that are different from yours," 3) "talked about religion or religious tensions with someone who has a different religion than you," and 4) "talked about class or class tensions with someone who has a higher/lower socioeconomic status." See the Appendix for more details on survey question wording.

Interest in Connection Across Difference

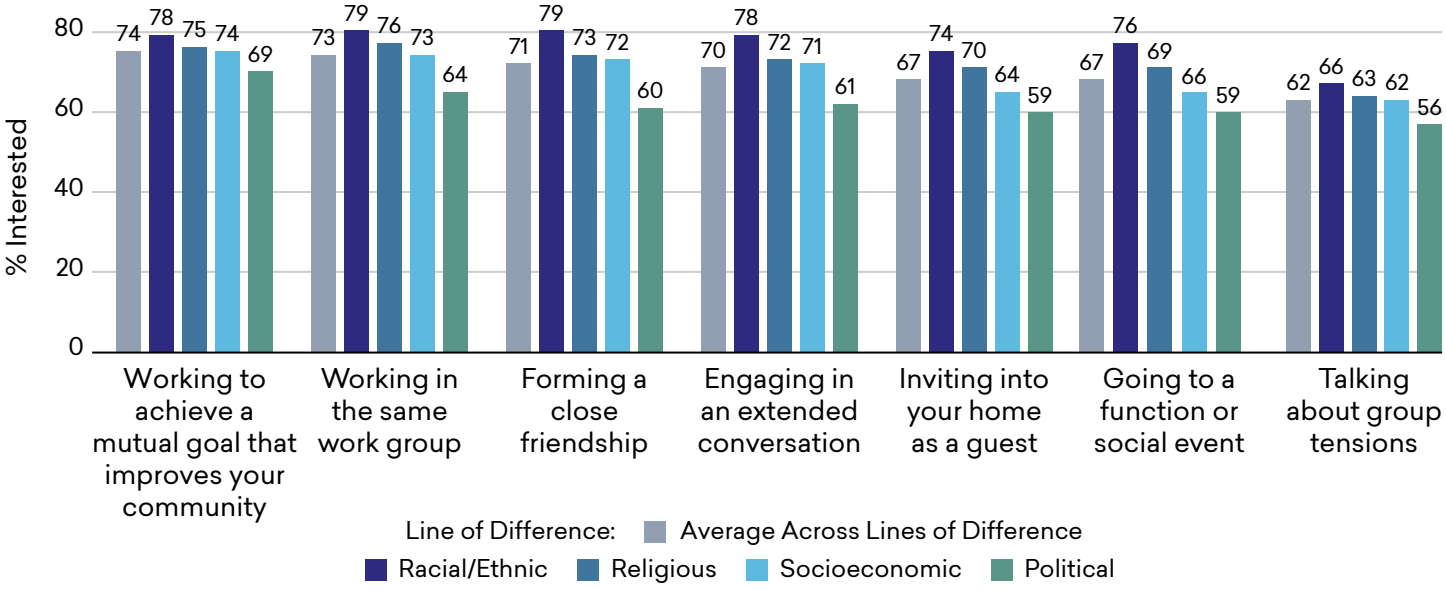
Despite the low number of people reporting experiences of bridging in the past year, a majority of Americans do express interest in engaging in a range of bridging activities in the near future. For instance, about three quarters are at least moderately interested in "working to achieve a mutual goal that improves [their] community" (average across racial/ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and political lines of difference: 74 percent). Similar percentages are also at least moderately interested in "working in the same work group" (average across all lines of difference: 73 percent), "forming a close friendship" (average across all lines of difference: 71 percent), and "engaging in an extended conversation" (average across all lines of difference: 71 percent) with someone of a different background or viewpoint.

Figure 1.5

Americans Report Broad Interest in Engaging in Bridging Activities

Working to achieve a mutual goal is the most appealing, on average

Thinking about the near future, please indicate how interested you are in doing each of the following with someone from a different _____ background than you.



Response Scale: 1 = Not at all interested to 5 = Extremely interested. Respondents who selected 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very, and 5 = Extremely interested were combined together to form "% Interested." The wording of the response options has been modified for clarity.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

Levels of interest vary somewhat depending on the activity. For instance, Americans report comparatively lower levels of interest in "talking about group tensions" (averaged across lines of difference: 62 percent), and higher levels of interest in "working to achieve a mutual goal that improves [their] community" (averaged across lines of difference: 74 percent).[58] This finding is notable because the number of people who are interested, on average, in "working to achieve a mutual goal" is about four times the percent of people who report actually doing this behavior in the past year (averaged across lines of difference: 17 percent; see **Figure 1.4**).

The discrepancy between interest and engagement for "working to achieve a mutual goal" is likely reflective of the fact that this behavior often requires intentional coordination, resourcing, and planning. For example, volunteering to clean up a community park with new neighbors requires more time and logistical organization than having a conversation about politics at a family dinner, even though volunteering may be of more interest. While further research is needed to identify more specifically how to close the gap in self-reported behavior and interest, this finding does underscore a possibility for action. Creating more spaces for people to work together and solve community problems[v]—and incentivizing engagement in these spaces by removing barriers to entry—could be an important way to engage more Americans in all forms of bridging behavior.

Another notable trend is that Americans' interest in bridging activities also varies by line of difference. Americans are most interested in interacting with someone of a different race or ethnicity (average interest across activities: 76 percent) and least interested in engaging with someone of a different political affiliation (average interest across activities: 61 percent). Though most Americans still do express at least some interest in engaging across political lines of difference, the fact that interest is lowest for this group points to Americans' exhaustion with the country's polarization[59] and subsequent desire to avoid political conflicts. As one focus group participant put it:

> **"Our country is in a world of hurt…everyone [is] so emotionally wound up that there is nearly a zero chance that the emotions won't take over and an argument will start."**
>
> —Daniel, 63-year-old white conservative man from Missouri

Such apprehension likely contributes to feelings of anxiety about encounters with people who share different political views—understandably affecting interest in further engagement, a subject we discuss at length in Chapter 3.

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[v] In previous reports, More in Common refers to spaces that are intentionally designed to bring people together to solve community problems as "collective settings." Research has found that these spaces can help people build the skills, habits, and dispositions necessary to successfully navigate an unknowable future in ways that preserve and strengthen democratic norms and institutions. See More in Common's report on collective settings here: Vallone, D., Han, H.,Campbell,E., & Tranvik, I. (2023, December 6). *Searching for a new paradigm: Collective settings*. More In Common & SNF Agora Institute.

Overall, however, there is widespread interest in engaging in a range of bridging activities across all four lines of difference. Furthermore, in the Additional Findings section of our website, we explore how appeal varies by demographics (e.g. by race, religion, party identification, etc.), finding broad interest across all major demographic categories. In sum, Americans of various backgrounds and beliefs appear to appreciate the value of connecting across lines of difference—provided it occurs under the right conditions.

Support for Greater Community Integration

Americans see value in connecting across difference not only for themselves but also for their communities. Most Americans respond positively about the prospect of greater mixing between groups within their communities (see **Figure 1.6**). Three in five Americans (59 percent) believe that "greater integration of people from different racial and ethnic groups would make my community a better place to live," and more than half (54 percent) say they would like to "live in a community where there is greater mixing and interaction" across lines of racial difference. Similarly, approximately half of Americans endorse these statements in relation to socio-economic integration (51 percent and 46 percent, respectively) and religious integration (52 percent and 47 percent, respectively). Our data also show that the majority of the demographic groups we investigated support greater integration across racial, class-based, and religious lines of difference (see our website for this data).[vi]

> **"I live in a dominant Black neighborhood. I would love for white, or Hispanic, people to move to my neighborhood. I'm not prejudiced or racist. I love everybody. And love diversity."**
>
> —Barbara, a 59-year-old liberal Black woman from Ohio

Americans are somewhat more reluctant when it comes to greater integration across political lines in their communities: slightly less than half (46 percent) say that greater political integration would improve their communities, and only two in five (40 percent) say they would like to live in a community with greater political integration.

Around one in four Americans offer fairly neutral responses to both questions on the value of integration, suggesting that while they may not be strongly in favor of additional integration, they are also not opposed to it.

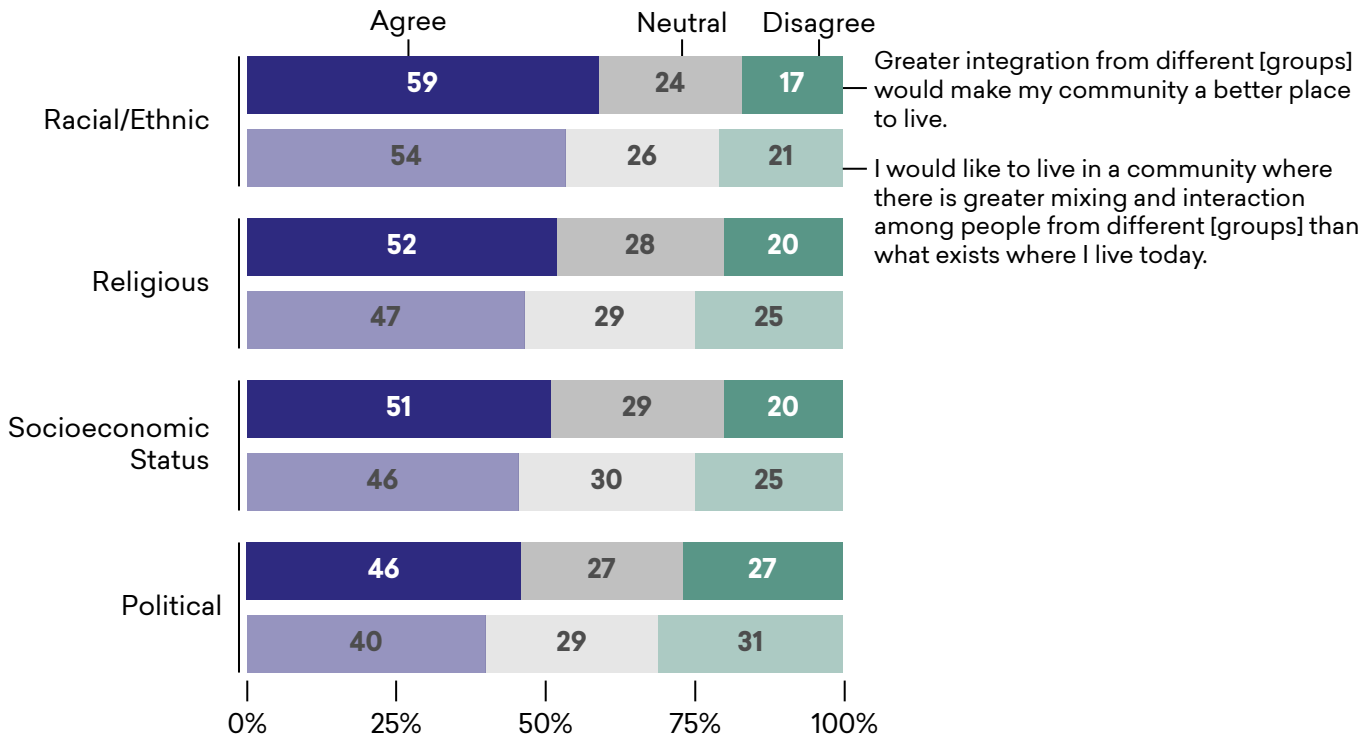
Thus, at a broad level, Americans seem to appreciate the value that greater social integration can bring and are open to having more integrated local communities across multiple lines of difference.

[vi] While a majority of Americans see value in "integration" and "mixing" across differences, valuing of integration is nonetheless lower than Americans' reported interest in engaging in bridging activities. Seeing value in integrating communities is shaped by historical contexts, community trust, ongoing relationships, and personal experiences—factors that are not fully captured in this research. Understanding the many factors that shape Americans' attitudes and beliefs about integration is beyond the scope of this report but rightfully warrants further study.

Figure 1.6

Support for Community Integration

A majority think greater integration would be a good thing; some express neutrality—while a minority are opposed.



Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree]. Respondents who selected 1 through 3 were categorized as "Disagree"; those who selected 4 were categorized as "Neutral"; those who selected 5 through 7 were categorized as "Agree." Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

Conclusion

The majority of Americans across all demographic groups and political affiliations recognize the value of connecting across lines of difference. They express interest in a number of different bridging activities, the most prominent being "working to achieve a mutual goal that improves [their] community," and support a number of different reasons for valuing bridging, including both personal and societal reasons.

However, their interest in connection generally exceeds the frequency with which they report doing it. For example, even the most frequently cited activity, "engaging in an extended conversation," is exceeded in interest by about 30 percent, on average.

Out of all of the bridging activities listed in this study, "talking about group tensions" received the least support. This has important implications for

bridging organizations, many of which offer people opportunities to connect by engaging in dialogue about group conflicts. While being able to talk about group tensions is an important skill, and necessary for social repair, slightly greater proportions of Americans expressed interest in attending bridging activities when framed as opportunities to work together towards a mutual goal (as mentioned above). When people are working together, cross-group interaction becomes incidental, rather than central, to the activity. Framing these opportunities as collaborative efforts could therefore attract a wider audience of people.

Chapter Two

Barriers to Connecting Across Difference

> **The town I live in isn't very diverse, and while I interact with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds at school and work, they are both mostly attended by white people. I would welcome a more diverse place, but moving isn't an option currently.**
>
> —Ella, a 21-year-old liberal white woman from Indiana

Key Insights

As we saw in the previous chapter, the frequency with which people connect across lines of difference is often exceeded by their interest in doing so. In this chapter we explore why this might be. In particular, we examine the barriers that inhibit people from connecting across lines of difference and identify what conditions might need to be met for them to engage more in this behavior.

The barrier most Americans say prevents them from connecting more across all lines of difference is a "lack of opportunity." This suggests that many Americans may simply not have the chance to interact more because features of their circumstances prevent it. Some (although fewer) say bridging connection simply isn't a priority for them. Others are impeded by the belief that their counterparts have no desire to interact with *them*.

In addition, people say that the condition that would make them most eager to connect across lines of difference is "if we had a common goal we were working towards." This further supports the observation in the previous chapter that emphasizing commonalities, such as shared goals, might be helpful for fostering connection across lines of difference.

Barriers to Connection Across Difference

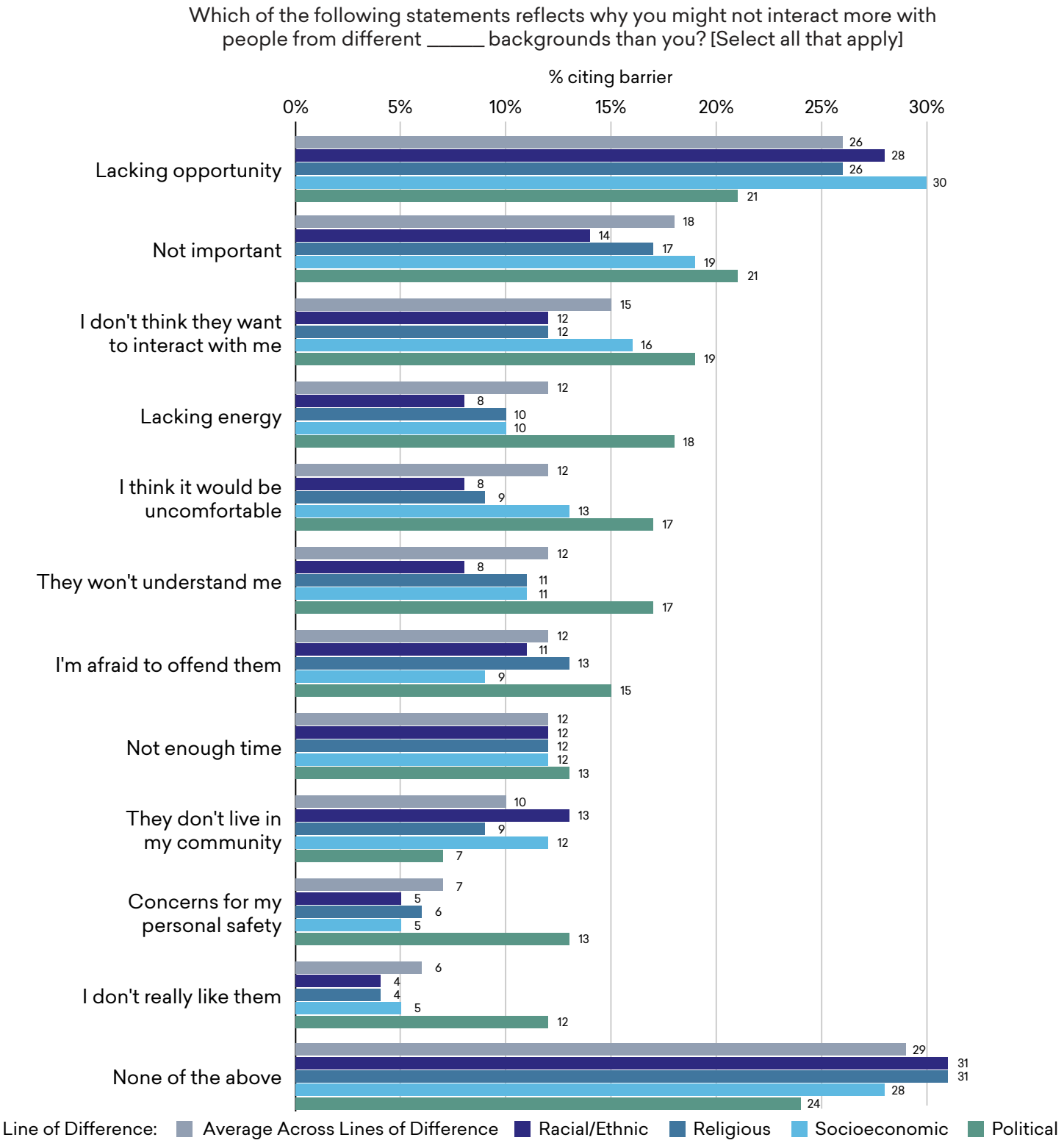
We asked survey respondents to indicate which (if any) of thirteen factors might make it challenging for them to connect more across difference.[vii] The most commonly selected response, averaged across all lines of difference, is "none of the above," (29 percent) meaning that almost a third of Americans do not regularly experience difficulties connecting across difference. This is likely because they already have at least some connections across lines of difference (more information on who is more likely to select "none of the above" can be found in our website). The remaining two thirds of Americans, however, cite experiencing at least some challenges.

[vii] This list of factors was generated after a review of the academic literature on intergroup contact, and then tested in a pilot study. A final list of thirteen factors was then selected based on the results of the pilot study. See the Appendix for the complete wording of the full list of items.

Figure 2.1

Challenges to Connection Across Difference

The greatest barrier people report is a lack of opportunity



X-axis: Percent of participants selecting each response. The items "I don't think other people in my life would approve," "I don't have the social support to do this," and "Another reason" were omitted from this graph due to low percentages across all lines of difference. The wording of the response options has been modified for clarity.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

Lacking Opportunity

The most frequently cited barrier is a "lack of opportunity" (average across lines of difference: 26 percent). This topic was also mentioned frequently in focus group interviews, though for different reasons depending on what group was being discussed.

For connecting across differences of socioeconomic status, many focus group participants mentioned lacking the opportunity to encounter others due to their lifestyle:

> **"I spend my time at work with people in a similar economic situation as myself, then my free time with people I've met from hobbies and clubs—all which mean I am usually surrounded by people in a similar socioeconomic background. There are very few organic opportunities to [connect]."**
>
> —Jason, a 28-year-old liberal Asian man from Massachusetts

> **"I classify as middle class. I work with middle class individuals. I don't really have the privilege of knowing or working with anyone in the upper class."**
>
> —Carla, a 35-year-old conservative Hispanic woman from New York

In contrast, for connecting across differences of race, ethnicity, and religion, people often mentioned the lack of racial or religious diversity in their communities.

> **"Pittsburgh has historically not been a very diverse area...where I live, I'm out in Westmoreland County. Westmoreland County to this day is 90 plus percent white."**
>
> —Meredith, a 64-year-old liberal white woman from Pennsylvania

> **"I'm very open to and welcome dealing with others that are different from me. But, in the area that I live, it's not very diverse."**
>
> —Jacie, a 50-year-old liberal Hispanic woman from South Carolina

> **"There isn't a diverse group around me. I would very much like to interact with different religious groups to learn more about them."**
>
> —Mason, a 49-year-old liberal white man from Pennsylvania

Amara, a 30-year-old liberal Black woman from Ohio, noted that she personally doesn't lack opportunities for cross-race connection because she lives in a majority-white community. Though, she added that it might be more difficult for others in her neighborhood to connect: "for the white people around me, it'd be difficult because there aren't that many folks around! And lack of diversity feeds lack of diversity."

Not a big priority

The second most commonly selected barrier, on average, is: "Interacting more isn't important to me" (average across lines of difference: 18 percent).

Some focus group participants echoed this sentiment by discussing how they were simply not very interested in forming new relationships with anyone—regardless of background.

> **"[I am] a natural introvert. I don't interact with anyone I don't have a reason to."**
>
> —Katherine, a 53-year-old conservative Hispanic woman from Florida

Other participants cited they lacked the time to be able to connect with others (average across lines of difference: 12 percent)—even if they may think it is important to do so.

> **"I think a big hindrance, honestly, is everybody's too busy to...make that real connection with somebody. Is it worth it in the end? Yes, absolutely. It's worth it, taking the time. But, finding the time is another story."**
>
> —Jake, a 57-year-old conservative white man from Pennsylvania

> **"Time. I think having the time to connect and scheduling and prioritizing social time...I think that would be the biggest barrier to connection."**
>
> —Madison, a 30-year-old liberal white woman from Missouri

Other Barriers to Connection Across Difference

Some participants also express concerns about how others might perceive or respond to their efforts to connect. A significant number of survey respondents indicated that they think people from other groups don't want to interact with *them* (average across lines of difference: 15 percent),[60] that they won't be understood by other groups (average across lines of difference: 12 percent), or that they are afraid to offend people from other groups (average across lines of difference: 12 percent).

These concerns were also voiced in our focus groups. Some talked about how they feel worried about starting conversations with people that they might not know well because they don't want to make them uncomfortable.

> **"You can't just approach someone and start talking to them unnecessarily because they're going to think you're a creeper or you're out to hurt them or whatever."**
>
> —Josephine, a 30-year-old conservative white woman from Texas

> **"I would be slightly uncomfortable with making a mistake in conversation. I would not want to say or do something they would find uncomfortable due to my lack of knowledge."**
>
> —Caroline, a 75-year-old liberal white woman from Rhode Island

Others expressed worries that they would not be understood or respected.

> **"I believe those from higher socioeconomic status wouldn't understand my struggles. I think it would be an uncomfortable experience to interact with someone who can't understand my experiences."**
>
> —Bryan, a 23-year-old liberal Asian man from California

> **"People of color don't want to live in a place where we have to teach white neighbors a history lesson every day and deal with microaggressions and people who will freak out when called out on their racism."**
>
> —Amara, a 30-year-old liberal Black woman from Ohio

Prior research has also found that specific concerns about offending people or being misunderstood during interactions across lines of difference vary based on group identity. Specifically, people from historically advantaged social groups, like high income and white Americans, often express more concerns about making others uncomfortable or saying something offensive—whereas people from historically disadvantaged social groups, like low-income adults and people of color, express more worries about being misunderstood or not respected.[61] Our qualitative findings reflect these trends, and more research is needed to better understand how to address these concerns prior to and during a bridging interaction.

Barriers to Connecting Across Political Differences

Notably, challenges associated with interacting across political lines stood out in significant ways. More people tended to say that they "don't have the energy" to connect across political lines of difference (18 percent), or that they think it would be "uncomfortable" (17 percent), or that they would be misunderstood (17 percent). People were also more likely to cite "concerns for my personal safety" (13 percent) as a challenge to connection across political lines of difference.

Worries about tense emotional situations while interacting across political lines of difference were frequently voiced in focus groups. This reflects the feeling that people "don't have the energy" to interact or think it would be "uncomfortable."

> **"Currently the political climate is very fraught with hatred and resentment, and I find it hard to interact with those who loudly express their hatred."**
>
> —Georgette, a 72-year-old liberal white woman from Texas

> **"Some people are so set in their views that they do not engage in a conversation and are unable to understand views that do not align with their own. People fear bringing up a topic would lead to an argument not a discussion."**
>
> —Valerie, a 48-year-old conservative white woman from New York

Others thought they would not be respected:

> **"I think that another barrier [is] probably the lack of a safe space to be able to connect in the sense of, like, just physical safety—or even emotional safety of not having your opinions be berated."**
>
> —Annie, a 35-44-year-old liberal white woman from Pennsylvania

> **"For me, I believe that the liberal wing of people are so condescending and set in their ways that they look down upon others that don't share their same views. This causes me to not necessarily want to pursue or have interactions with that group."**
>
> —Horace, a 55-year-old politically moderate white man from Arkansas

These sentiments reflect feelings of exhaustion and partisan animosity that many Americans have reported feeling over the past decade of intense political polarization.

Conditions for Fostering Connection Across Difference

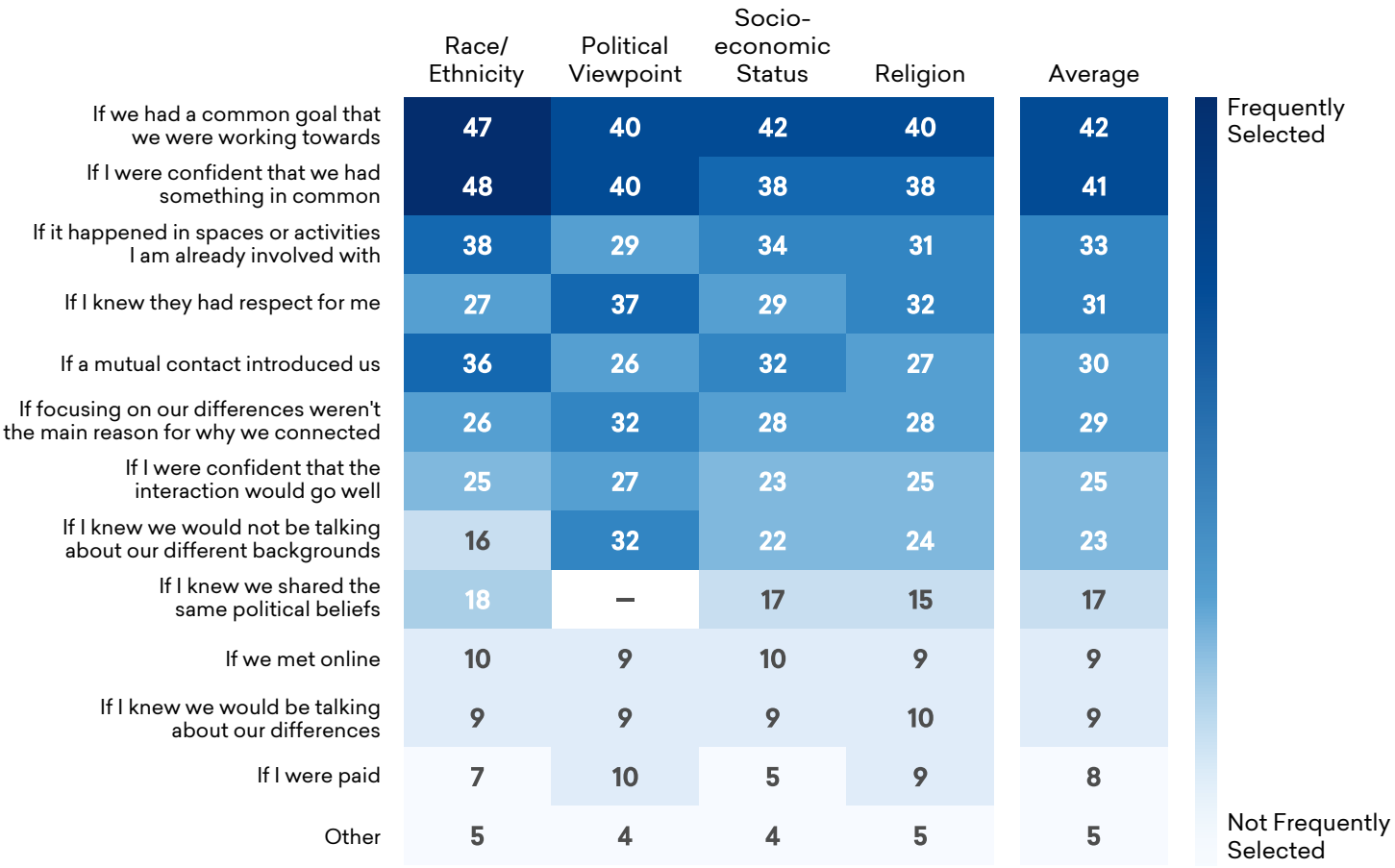
Given some of the reported challenges, we also wanted to know what people thought would help facilitate more engagement. When asked what would make them more likely to connect with someone from a different race, socioeconomic status, religion, or political viewpoint, the most frequently selected answer was: "If we had a common goal we were working towards" followed by "If I were confident we had something in common" (See **Figure 2.2**). Similar to what we found in Chapter 1, focusing on shared interests, characteristics, and goals seems to be important for increasing interest in bridging, according to individuals' self-reports. Additionally, the statement "If I knew they had respect for me" was commonly selected. By contrast, financial incentives were not often selected.

Figure 2.2

Conditions to Connection Across Difference

Many report wanting the interaction to focus on commonalities

What would make you more likely to socialize with someone new who is from a different _____ than you? (% Selected)



Question: What would make you more likely to socialize with someone new who is from a different _____ than you? (Choose up to 5). We did not collect data for "sharing the same political beliefs" for political viewpoint. The wording of the response options has been modified for clarity.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 2,009 US adults.

As we highlight in Chapter 1, many adults see value in connecting across lines of difference and appreciate the personal and social benefits of these types of relationships. At the same time, however, people report that they want to have experiences with others that focus on common goals and shared interests. They also want these interactions to come from a place of mutual respect and understanding. Ensuring these factors exist during bridging experiences is therefore important—and highlighting them has the potential to draw in wider audiences.

Conclusion

While some Americans hesitate to connect across lines of difference due to concerns about how these interactions might unfold, many say that they simply lack the opportunity to do so. This suggests that, to foster more connection across difference in the US, interested stakeholders can start by creating more meaningful opportunities for these interactions to occur.

Some Americans also report that they don't think connecting across difference is very important. While this is a somewhat neutral sentiment and not an explicit problem, talking about "connective responsibility" (see Chapter 1), and highlighting the social benefits of connection, might motivate more people to engage.

Some also say that they don't connect more because they think the other side doesn't want to interact with *them*. Findings from Chapter 1 suggest this impression may be mistaken: a majority of Americans do in fact have interest in connecting across all lines of difference. So, taking intentional measures to communicate and provide assurance that people are interested in connecting with other groups can potentially help correct this misperception and motivate participation.

Finally: people report that they would be most interested in connecting across difference if they felt they also had something in common with the person or group in question as well, like a personal characteristic or a shared goal. This suggests that efforts to foster connection across difference could be served by focusing on shared interests.

We share these insights as starting points to help foster more connections across lines of difference. As stated, this is challenging work. It requires building opportunities as well as conditions that can engender trust and respect between people—all of which take time, intentionality, and investment.

Chapter Three

How Beliefs, Values, and Emotions Shape Interest in Connection

> **[Connecting] does bring a lot of anxiety. You know, trying to deal and cope with people and their feelings.**
> —Joey, a conservative white man from Missouri[viii]

> **To me, [connecting] is an intellectual responsibility or responsibility towards yourself to really reach out to others.**
> —Lillian, a 32-year-old conservative bi-racial (Native American & white) woman from Texas

Key Insights

The previous chapter explored the barriers that may prevent Americans from connecting across difference. In this chapter, we examine the *psychological* factors, including fears, beliefs, values, and motivations, that shape interest in connection. Our data show that these factors tend to be slightly stronger predictors of interest in connection than demographic characteristics (such as gender, race, and family income). As such, they play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors that enable individuals to connect meaningfully across lines of difference.

We find that the strongest predictor of interest is **perceived community norms**—that is, the belief that connecting across lines of difference is common and valued within one's community. Other strong predictors include **social curiosity, connective responsibility, frequency of cross-group interaction,** and **sense of local community belonging.** Conversely, **intergroup anxiety** is the most significant negative predictor of interest in connection across lines of difference. With the exception of intergroup anxiety, higher scores on each of these factors are associated with greater interest in connecting with others.

See the Glossary for definitions.

Our findings also reveal that the influence of psychological factors varies depending on the specific type of difference: **intellectual humility** more

[viii] Joey did not provide his exact age; his age range is 35-44 years.

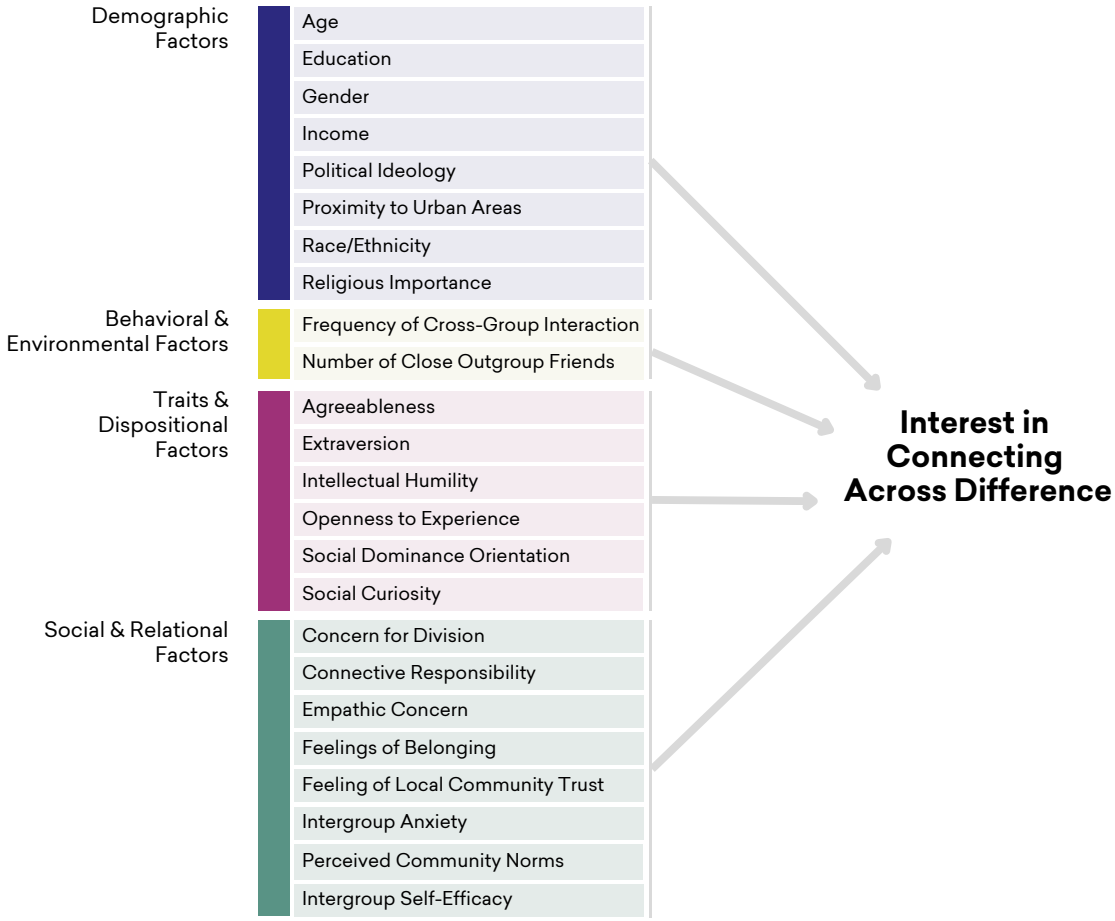
strongly predicts openness to engaging in cross-political connection; low **social dominance orientation** plays a key role in predicting interest in connection across difference of race/ethnicity; a strong sense of **local community belonging** is particularly influential for cross-socioeconomic differences; and the **importance of religion** in one's life more strongly influences cross-religious connection. Together, these patterns underscore how distinct psychological, social, and relational factors shape interest in connection with different groups, offering insight into the beliefs and motivations that drive these interactions.

This chapter also illustrates that as people report more experiences of meaningful social connection, they also report greater interest in connecting again in the future. We term this dynamic "connection cascades," reflecting the virtuous cycles in which positive interactions foster greater connection over time.

Figure 3.1

Overview of Variables Explored

Our analysis examined which variables could best predict interest in connection



In our analysis, we focus on a set of factors derived from a review of the literature on relationships between different groups of people ("intergroup relations"). The variables presented in the chart represent those we identified as potentially influential for interest in connection across difference. However, this list is not exhaustive of all possible influences. Variables that significantly predict interest in connection are listed in Figure 3.2. For survey question wording, see the Appendix.
Source: More in Common (2025).

What Predicts Interest in Connecting Across Difference?

To examine how beliefs, emotions, and values influence willingness to connect across lines of difference, we conducted a multiple regression analysis, which allowed us to compare the role of each factor while accounting for all other variables (see **Figure 3.1**). By identifying the variables most strongly associated with interest in connection, these findings highlight actionable insights that can help community leaders, policymakers, and organizations foster stronger connection across difference. For example, these findings point to specific areas—like promoting community norms or reducing intergroup anxiety—where interventions may help increase interest

in connection. Readers looking for detailed guidance based on these insights can refer to the Resources for Stakeholders section at the end of this report, which provides practical guidance for applying these findings to real-world contexts.

The following section explores the six strongest predictors of interest in connection. This analysis distinguishes between four categories of predictors (see **Figure 3.1**).

- **Demographic factors** refer to characteristics of individuals that correspond to statistical estimates of a population, such as age, gender, and geographic location.
- **Behavioral factors** include the activities in which individuals are currently engaged, such as the frequency of connecting across difference.
- **Dispositional factors** refer to relatively stable characteristics of individuals, such as personality traits or orientations, that influence behavior consistently across different contexts.
- **Social and relational factors** refer to emotions, beliefs, and attitudes related to how people see and feel about other people, social groups, and society as a whole.

As shown in **Figure 3.2**, the strongest predictors of interest in connecting across difference are perceived community norms, frequency of cross-group interaction, social curiosity, connective responsibility, local community belonging, and intergroup anxiety. Each of these factors positively predicts interest in connection across difference, with the exception of intergroup anxiety, which negatively predicts interest. This means that, with the exception of intergroup anxiety, the higher people score on each of these factors, the more interested they are in connecting with people who are different. (For intergroup anxiety, the higher people score, the less interested they are.) The following paragraphs explore each of these factors in more detail.

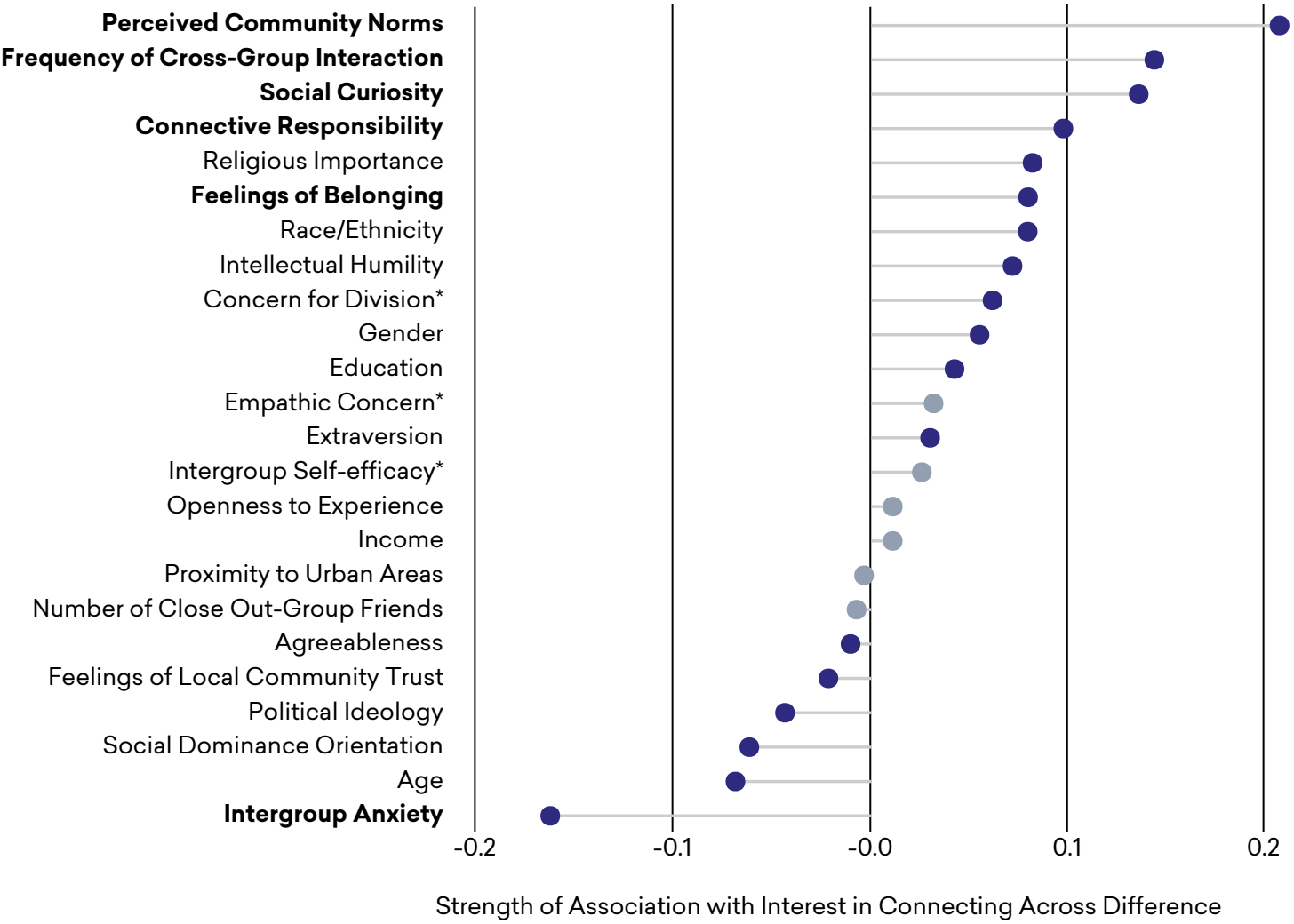
The strongest factor overall in predicting interest in connecting across difference is **perceived community norms** of connection, or the belief that connection across difference is both common and valued in one's community. For example, a majority of Americans agree that "people in [their] local community often spend time with" people from backgrounds that differ from their own (56 percent), and that "if given the choice, people should spend time" with people who differ from them "because it is the right thing to do" (59 percent). Furthermore, people who have these strong perceived norms of connection are more than twice as likely to express interest in connecting across differences compared to those who have weak perceived community

norms (68 percent vs. 32 percent).[ix]

Figure 3.2

Predictors of Interest in Connecting Across Difference

Behavioral, dispositional, and social and relational factors all tend to outweigh demographic ones



Refer to the Glossary and Appendix for definitions and details on how variables were measured

This chart depicts the strength of various predictors in determining interest in connection across each of the lines of difference, estimated from a weighted multiple regression model, with standardized beta values on the x-axis. Positive values indicate a stronger positive influence, while negative values suggest an inverse relationship. Blue circles indicate a statistically significant predictor (Main Survey, *N* = 4,522). Gray circles indicate a non-significant predictor. Variables with asterisks come from a Recontact Survey (*N* = 2,009; additional information is available in the Appendix) and use a modified outcome variable. Bolded variables are those discussed in detail in this section.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

[ix] Percentages for strong perceived community norms were determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 5 to 7 on the 7-point agreement scale, averaged across lines of difference. High interest in connecting across difference was determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 3 ("moderately") or higher on the 5-point scale, averaged across all activities and all four lines of difference. See Appendix for more details.

The next strongest positive predictor of interest in connecting across difference is **frequency of cross-group interaction**, or how often people already engage in this behavior in their daily lives. Among those who frequently connect across difference, about 7 in 10 are interested in connecting again in the future, compared to less than 3 in 10 among those who rarely connect across difference.[x]

Social curiosity—or the extent to which people are interested in the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others—also plays a key role.[62] People who are high in social curiosity are about two times as likely (or 40 percentage points) to be interested in engaging across difference than those with low social curiosity.[xi]

The next strongest positive predictor is **connective responsibility**. As discussed in Chapter 1, many Americans feel a responsibility to connect across difference, and those who do are much more likely to express interest in future connections as well: people high in connective responsibility (82 percent interested) are about 70 percentage points more likely to be interested in future connection than those who are neutral (12 percent) and 77 percent more likely than those who are low in connective responsibility (5 percent).[xii]

A sense of **local community belonging**—the feeling of being socially connected, accepted, and valued within one's local group or community—is also positively associated with interest in connection. People with a high sense of belonging are about 2.5 times more willing to connect (70 percent vs. 30 percent) than those with a low sense of belonging.[xiii] This finding is consistent with research showing that when people have a strong sense of belonging, they are more open to meeting people from different groups and feel less anxious about doing so.[63] Feeling secure within one's group can create the confidence needed to reach out and engage with others

The strongest factor in *negatively* predicting interest in connection is **intergroup anxiety**—feelings of worry people experience about the prospect of connecting with people who are different from them. This anxiety can have a number of sources, ranging from a fear for one's personal safety to concern about offending someone else. Unlike the other variables mentioned above, intergroup anxiety reduces interest in connection, with higher anxiety linked to less willingness to engage across difference. For example, people who

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[x] Frequent connection across difference was determined by calculating the percentage of people who scored 4 ("often") to 5 ("all the time") on a 5-point scale, averaged across lines of difference. High interest in connecting across difference was determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 3 ("moderately") or higher on the 5-point scale, averaged across all activities and all four lines of difference. See Appendix for more details.

[xi] Percentages for "high" social curiosity were determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 4 to 5, and "low" is the proportion who scored 1 to 3, on a 5-point scale. See Appendix for more details.

[xii] Percentages for "high" connective responsibility were determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 5 to 7; "neutral" is the proportion who scored 4; and "low" is the proportion who scored 1 to 3 on a 7-point agreement scale. See Appendix for more details

[xiii] Percentages for "high" community belonging were determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 5 to 7 on average across the 7-point agreement scale Community Belonging items; "low" belonging was defined as those scoring 1 to 4. See Appendix for more details

report higher levels of intergroup anxiety are about half as likely (34 percent vs. 66 percent) to be willing to engage across difference than those who report low anxiety.[xiv]

Our data also reveal how demographic characteristics are associated with interest in connection across difference—although the relationship is weaker than the factors explained above. In particular, high levels of income, high levels of educational attainment, being younger, being white (vs. non-white), and being politically liberal are all positively associated with interest in connecting across difference.

One possible reason for the association with political liberalism—measured by asking people to place their political beliefs on a scale from "very liberal" to "very conservative"—is that connecting across difference may be more consistent with a "liberal" worldview, which research has shown tends to place greater value on universalism and multiculturalism than a "conservative" worldview.[64]

In any case, it is worth noting that, in predicting interest in connection, the predictive value of all demographic characteristics is outweighed by the predictive value of the psychological factors mentioned above. This pattern of findings suggests that people's values, beliefs, and emotions play a stronger role in shaping their interest in connecting across lines of difference than their demographic characteristics. For additional findings, including insights from More in Common's Hidden Tribes, see our website.

Overall, with the exception of social curiosity, the strongest predictors of interest in connecting across lines of difference are behavioral or social and relational factors, which may be more malleable than some of the other dispositional or demographic variables tested. This is good news for those interested in fostering stronger cultures of connection since it suggests that many of the factors shaping interest may be subject to change.

How Behavioral, Dispositional, and Social and Relational Factors Vary by Line of Difference

The findings above explore which factors predict interest in future connection, averaged across *all* These results can help inform interventions aimed at fostering more connection across lines of difference, broadly speaking. However, it is also important to examine whether the strength of the various factors depends on the specific type of difference. To explore this, we

[xiv] Percentages for "high" intergroup anxiety were determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 1 ("Very comfortable") to 3 on a 10-point scale, averaging across all four lines of difference. "Low" intergroup anxiety was defined as those scoring 4 to 10 ("Very uncomfortable"). See Appendix for more details.

compared which factors most influenced interest in connecting across each type of difference separately. The results show that some factors are uniquely linked to interest in connection for each specific type of difference (**Figure 3.3**).

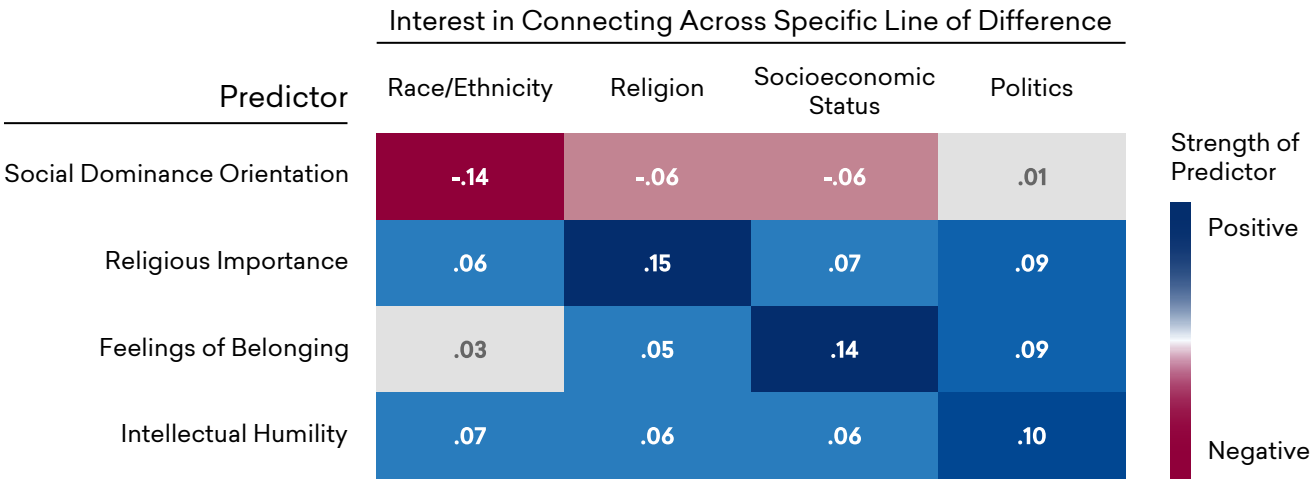
- **Connection across political viewpoints:** High levels of **intellectual humility** are the strongest predictor of interest in connecting across political differences compared to other lines of difference. This suggests that people who are more willing to question their own beliefs are also more open to engaging with others who hold different political views.
- **Connection across racial/ethnic difference:** The belief in group equality, known in psychological research as having low **social dominance orientation**, is particularly predictive of interest in connecting across racial and ethnic lines. This means that beliefs about hierarchy and how resources or outcomes are distributed among groups are especially relevant for fostering connections with people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- **Connection across socio-economic divides:** A strong sense of **local community belonging** is more predictive of interest in connecting across socio-economic differences than other lines of connection. This finding suggests that people who feel secure and connected within their local communities are more open to interactions with individuals from different economic backgrounds.
- **Connection across religious difference:** Counterintuitively, perhaps, the **importance of religion** in a person's life is the strongest positive predictor of interest in connecting across religious differences. People who already hold religious beliefs are more interested in connecting with others who do, and those who do not already hold religious beliefs are less interested.

Overall, these patterns show how different social and dispositional characteristics uniquely predict interest in connecting across lines of difference, highlighting the distinct beliefs and motivations that come into play when people encounter members of various groups. More detailed information about the characteristics of people who are more (vs. less) interested in connecting across lines of difference can be found on our website.

Figure 3.3

Unique Predictors of Interest in Connecting Across Specific Lines of Difference

Different psychological factors predict interest in connecting with different groups



This figure depicts the relationship between a subset of social and contextual factors and interest in connection across each of the different social categories. Dark blue indicates a strong positive relationship, dark red indicates a strong negative relationship, and gray means there is no statistically significant relationship. Values are estimated from weighted multiple regression models. Values represent standardized beta values from a regression analysis. Full variable breakdown across each line of difference is available in the Appendix. All associations are statistically significant at $p < .05$ except Social Dominance Orientation with Politics and Feelings of Belonging with Race/Ethnicity.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

The numbers in the figure represent the strength and direction of the relationship between each predictor and interest in connection with specific groups. Values further from zero (either positive or negative) indicate stronger relationships, while values closer to zero indicate weaker relationships, suggesting little to no association.

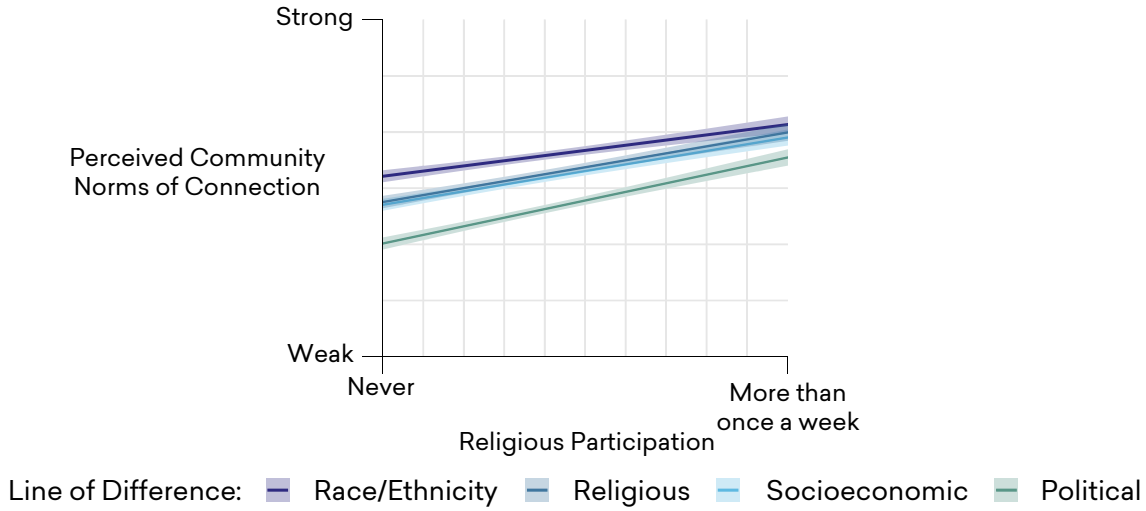
Exploratory Case Study: Religious Participation and Perceived Community Norms

The findings in **Figure 3.2** suggest that strengthening **perceived community norms**—that is, the extent to which people believe connecting across difference is common and valued in their community—is a powerful way to increase interest in connection across difference. This raises the question of what shapes individuals' perceptions of community norms in the first place.

To explore this, we conducted an exploratory analysis of the relationship between **religious participation** and interest in connection. We decided to investigate religious participation for two reasons: 1) participation in religious institutional life involves continuous, regular community activity, which research suggests can shape perceptions of social norms,[65] and 2) religious institutions often offer opportunities for members to participate in community building activities that transcend lines of difference (like volunteering for soup kitchens or refugee sponsorship).[66] Ideally, we would have also looked at other types of community activity, such as participation in sports leagues or cultural events, however our data could not support a full analysis of such topics.

We begin by investigating the association between religious participation and community norms of cross-group connection. As seen in **Figure 3.4**, we find that the higher people's religious participation, the stronger their local community norms of social connection across all four lines of difference.

Figure 3.4 **Correlation Between Religious Participation and Perceived Community Norms of Connection**



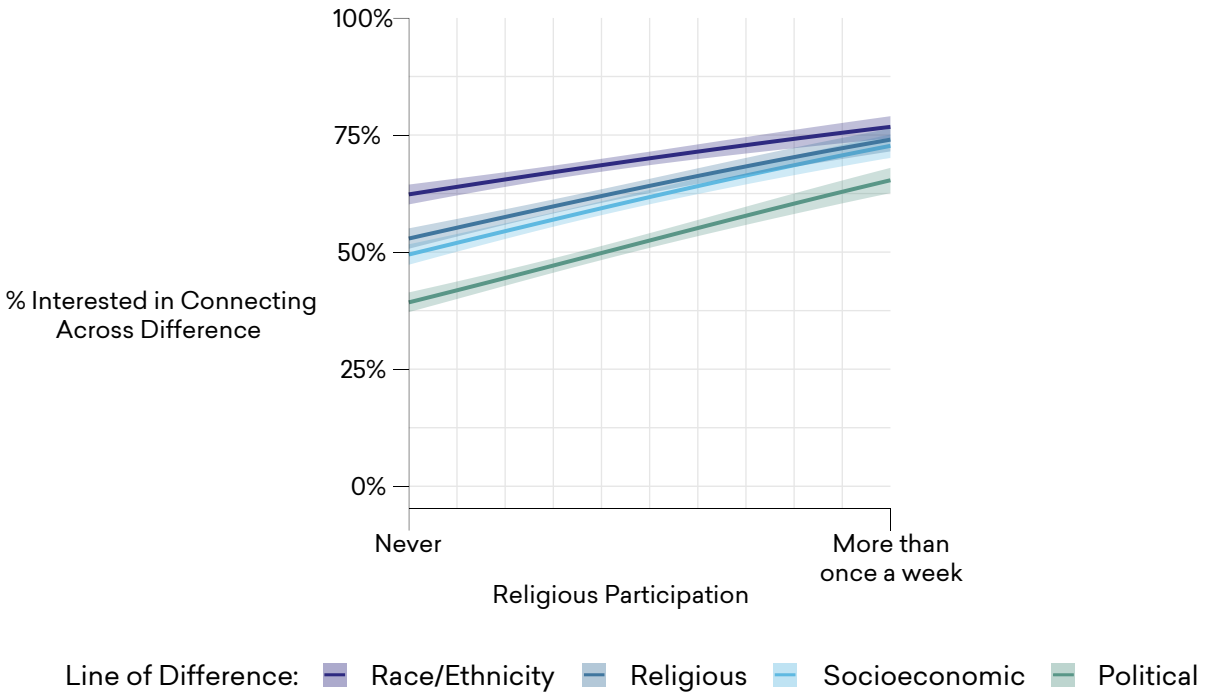
Religious Participation: "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?" (1 - Never; 6 - More than once a week). Perceived Community Norms of Connection: "People in my local community spend time with people who are from different [group]." (1 - Strongly disagree; 7 - Strongly agree). Shaded regions represent 95% confidence intervals. Results for religion and SES are nearly identical so the lines overlap.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

Next, we explore the relationship between religious attendance and interest in connecting across lines of difference. We find that the more frequently people attend religious services, the more interested they are in cross-group connection. This holds true for all four lines of difference, including religion. This is notable because it suggests that more religious participation is linked to more interest in connecting with people of different backgrounds—even with those of different faiths.[xv]

Figure 3.5

Correlation Between Religious Participation and Interest in Connecting Across Difference

Greater religious participation is associated with greater willingness to connect across all four lines of difference



Religious Participation: "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?" (1 - Never; 6 - More than once a week). Response Scale: 1 = Not at all interested, to 5 = Very Interested. Respondents who selected 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very, and 5 = Extremely interested were combined together to form "% Interested. Interest in Connecting Across Difference: Percentage of responses at or above 3 ("moderately interested") on the composite measure of interest in connection across difference. Shaded regions represent 95% confidence intervals.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

[xv] This effect may vary depending on certain qualities of the religious institutions themselves, such as community heterogeneity, which was not measured here.

These findings suggest that people who are involved in religious institutions tend to perceive stronger norms of cross-group connection, which is also associated with greater interest in connection across all lines of difference. This illustrates how participation in certain religious institutions may foster interest in connection across lines of difference not only by providing opportunities for people to connect, but also by increasing the perception that these behaviors are common and valued in one's community.

Religious Participation and Political Ideology

These findings present an apparent paradox. While religious participation predicts interest in connection across difference, it is also positively correlated with political conservatism,[xvi] which, our data suggests, is negatively correlated with interest in connection across difference (see **Figures 1.1 and 3.4**).

To better understand this apparent contradiction, we explored the relationship between political conservatism and interest in connecting across difference among people who do (vs. do not) frequently attend religious services (see **Figure 3.6**).

The findings provide additional insight into how religious participation may shape attitudes toward connection. In particular, they show how religious participation mitigates the negative correlation between conservatism and interest in connection across difference.

Consider the following: on average, people who identify as "conservative" are 12 percent less likely to be interested in connecting across difference than those who identify as "liberal" (50 percent vs. 62 percent).[xvii]

This effect is reversed, however, when we take into account religious participation: conservatives who frequently attend religious services are 12 percent *more* likely to be interested in connecting across difference than liberals who never do (58 percent vs. 46 percent).

This suggests that the negative relationship between conservatism and interest may be outweighed by the effects of religious attendance.

This analysis illustrates the degree to which political orientation interacts with other factors in shaping attitudes toward connecting across difference. It also offers one example of how strong community norms can be built through social institutions to positively impact connection across difference.

[xvi] When measuring political ideology, we asked respondents to self-report their identification with different political labels with a standard 5-point scale (ranging from "Very Liberal" to "Very Conservative"). This scale is commonly used by political and social scientists in the US. See the Appendix for the specific question wording.

[xvii] Interest in connecting across difference was determined by calculating the proportion of people who scored 3 ("moderately interested") or higher on the 5-point scale, averaged across all activities and all four lines of difference. See Appendix for more details.

Of course, the aforementioned analysis does not distinguish between *types* of religious affiliation or the effect different faith traditions may have on support for building connections across difference. Some faith traditions may be more supportive of fostering connection across difference than others.[xviii] However, in More in Common's *Promising Revelations* study,[67] we find encouraging evidence that the values that align with support for cross-group connection transcend faith differences: for example, Americans across the three major faith traditions in the US (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) selected "kindness and a respect for human dignity" as the most important value for their faith tradition.[68]

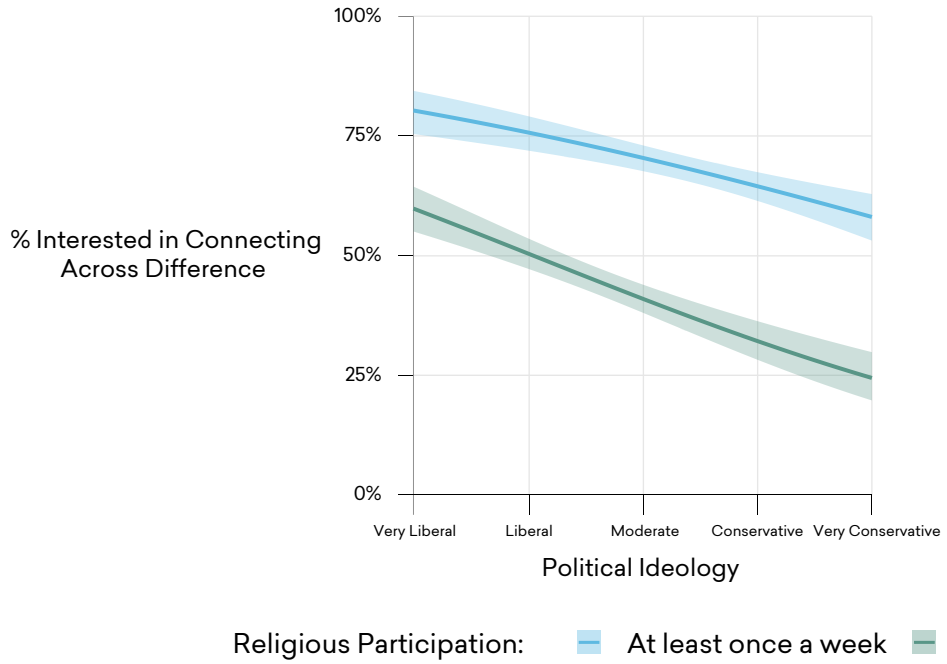
Overall, this analysis offers an example of how participation in one type of community—namely, a religious community—can be associated with positive attitudes toward connection across difference. Additional research may benefit from testing the particular features of religious institutions that have this effect to determine whether key elements can be replicated in secular contexts.

[xviii] To be sure, religion has also served as a vehicle for exclusion: for instance, some religious institutions exclude members of the LGBTQ+ community. Further analysis of how these exclusionary practices impact interest in cross-group connection or how engagement in specific religious communities impacts interest is important but beyond the scope of this report.

Figure 3.6

Religious Participation, Political Ideology, and Interest in Connection Across Difference

Conservatives who frequently attend religious services are more interested in connecting across all four lines of difference, on average, than liberals who never do



Religious Participation: "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?" (1 - Never; 6 - More than once a week). Response Scale: 1 = Not at all interested, to 5 = Very Interested. Respondents who selected 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very, and 5 = Extremely interested were combined together to form "% Interested. Shaded regions represent 95% confidence intervals.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 4,522 US adults.

Connection Cascades

The regression analysis presented at the outset of this chapter (**Figure 3.2)** showed that one factor that strongly predicts interest in connection is the frequency with which people are *currently* interacting across lines of difference.

This raises the question: are people connecting because they are interested, or are they interested because they are already connecting?

At first glance, the former seems more plausible: presumably, people who are interested in connecting are more likely to do it. But the opposite could also be true: certain experiences of connection might cause people to become more interested in doing so again in the future.

We tested this possibility using a longitudinal dataset that consisted of both the Main Survey and the Recontact Survey, conducted four months later (see the Methods in the Appendix for more information).[xix]

Our results show that some forms of connection do spark greater interest in connecting again in the future. For example, on average, the more people interact across lines of racial difference, the more interested they are in connecting across racial differences in the future. By contrast, connecting along lines of political difference does not predict greater interest in connecting across political lines in the future.

We also find that recent experiences of certain connection behaviors predict greater interest in future connection. For example, people who formed a friendship across lines of racial difference within the past year report continued interest in connecting across racial lines in the future. By contrast, merely discussing racially charged topics did not predict greater interest in future connections across racial lines of difference.

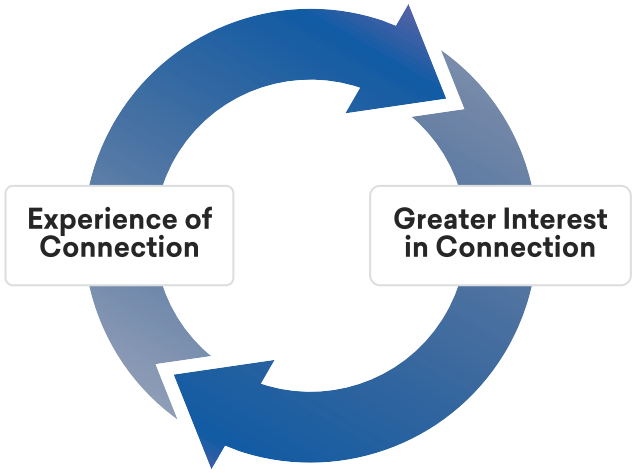
Overall, this analysis shows that certain experiences of connection are not just a *consequence* but also a potential *cause* of increased interest in connection. This suggests that experiences of and interest in connection may, under the right conditions, become self-reinforcing. We term this process a "connection cascade," and suggest it may be a powerful tool for practitioners seeking to build stronger cultures of connection. For additional implications of this concept, see Chapter 5.

[xix] The analysis in this section uses a "lagged regression model" to test whether the frequency with which people report interacting across difference in our Main Survey positively predicts their interest in further connection in the Recontact Survey. Respondents indicated their interest in connecting across difference in our Main Survey ("Time 1"), and then again in the Recontact Survey ("Time 2"); they were also asked the frequency with which they currently connect across difference in the Main Survey (Time 1). The model tests whether the frequency with which people are connecting across difference at Time 1 positively predicts their interest doing so again at Time 2, controlling for their interest in connecting across difference at Time 1 (as well as demographic variables). This approach ensures that any relationship that emerges is not the result of preexisting levels of interest. See our website for more information.

Figure 3.7

A "Connection Cascade"

In connection cascades, experiences of cross-group connection lead to greater interest in further connection



Source: More in Common (2025).

Conclusion

While many factors influence people's ability and willingness to connect across difference, this chapter shows that some of the most powerful determinants are features of people's psychology.

The good news is that many of these features are malleable. As noted above, some of the most powerful predictors of interest in connecting across difference—in particular, perceived community norms, connective responsibility, intergroup anxiety, and local community belonging—are social and relational factors, which may be subject to change through intervention.

To change community norms, communication campaigns could provide people with accurate information about the high proportion of people in their communities who are actively engaged in connection across difference and who value and support such activities. This could shift people's perceptions of norms in their communities and potentially shape their own willingness to interact.

Such communication may also help to alleviate intergroup anxiety. We found that intergroup anxiety was the strongest *negative* predictor of interest in cross-group connection: the more anxiety people reported about connecting across difference, the less interest they expressed. Often, intergroup anxiety stems not just from people's own negative attitudes toward others, but also from the perception that others don't want to interact with *them* (see Chapter

2). Dispelling such misperceptions may thus help to combat both the beliefs and emotions that may prevent people from connecting across difference.

Our results also underscore the importance of connective responsibility in cross-group interaction. This suggests that fostering a culture in which everyone sees cross-group connection as not just a personal value but also a civic virtue may help increase willingness for connection across difference.

Local community belonging may also be important for building a foundation for cross-group connection. While belonging is primarily studied in the context of mental health and inclusion, our data suggest that it also has implications for cultures of cross-group connection. In particular, they show that any effort to promote connection across lines of difference should also focus on ensuring that individuals feel safe and accepted within their own communities as well. As a number of psychological theories have shown, a strong "home base" can encourage people to take greater social risks, which in turn can encourage connecting across difference.[69]

Finally, our longitudinal analysis shows how virtuous cycles of connection, or "connection cascades," can form when positive experiences of connection increase people's interest in connecting again in the future. These connection cascades may be a crucial step toward building self-sustaining cultures of connection. Consider an organization seeking to build a stronger culture of connection in a community by hosting regular events. If that organization is able to spark a connection cascade, then attendees themselves may start creating opportunities to connect with one another on their own accord.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that fostering connection across lines of difference requires more than just providing opportunities or removing logistical barriers; it also requires addressing the psychological factors that underlie people's attitudes toward connection. These insights offer a roadmap for building stronger, more inclusive communities in which individuals feel both a sense of empowerment and responsibility to connect across difference.

Chapter Four

Regional Profiles

> **I think sports is a big binder in Pittsburgh...if you're a Steelers fan or a Pirates fan or a Penguins fan, it doesn't matter what side of the political spectrum you're on. You can put all those differences aside and bond together about your sports team. If you think about those types of connections, you realize we have more in common than we don't.**
>
> —Harry, a 67-year-old white liberal man from Pittsburgh, PA

> **There's a lot of people in Kansas City who really care about making sure that the community members in need are supported in a lot of different ways.**
>
> —Tammy, a conservative white woman from Kansas City, MO[xx]

> **When we do face hurricanes, it doesn't matter if you're a blue or a red or whatever your political affiliation. People come to help each other. And I think that's one thing that we do very well.**
>
> —Lyla, 57-year-old conservative biracial (Hispanic and white) woman from Houston, TX

Key Insights

People's ability and motivation to connect across difference is shaped by features of their local environments: both by social features, such as local norms and culture, and by physical ones, such as public transportation and residential infrastructure.[70] To better understand how social connection takes place locally, we conducted regional profiles of three major metropolitan

[xx] Tammy did not provide her exact age; her age range is 45-54 years.

statistical areas (MSAs): Houston, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh.[xxi] We selected these three MSAs because of their relative size, diversity, and recent demographic or economic changes (see the Appendix for more information).

Overall trends from the three metro areas show that:

Residents of Pittsburgh MSA have high levels of trust and feelings of safety in their communities; however, they tend to exhibit lower-than-average levels of interest in connecting across political differences, support for religious integration, and perceived community norms of connection (compared to the national average). This suggests that some Pittsburgh MSA residents may experience a tension between feelings of security within their communities and uncertainty about connecting with others who exist outside of them.[71]

Residents of Kansas City MSA report high levels of trust and frequent engagement across racial, religious, and political lines, exceeding national averages. However, engagement across socioeconomic lines is less common, and feelings of belonging, while comparable, remain slightly below the national average. Kansas City residents are largely energized about connecting across lines of difference, but opportunities to increase the reach and scale of connection could be further enhanced.

Residents of Houston MSA stand out by expressing a particularly positive outlook about connecting across difference, such that Houstonians show greater interest in connection across all lines of difference than US adults do, on average. They also have more positive attitudes toward community integration, and community norms surrounding cross-group connection are significantly higher than the national average as well. We posit that these positive attitudes towards connection are due, at least in part, to Houston's long-standing demographic diversity.

We explore these trends in further detail in the following regional "spotlights."

[xxi] Note that our primary aim in this section was not to compare the cities to each other but rather to better understand how connection across difference happens at the local level in several regions. Understanding the specific dynamics that affect social connection at the regional level is a complex process outside of the scope of this report. Here, we present a broad overview of each region in order to shine a light on key trends and hypothesize what might be driving them.

Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh MSA residents' attitudes toward social connection stand out in several key respects. First, they have remarkably strong feelings of local community trust: 75 percent agree that "most people in my local community can be trusted," relative to 62 percent nationally, and 71 percent believe that "most people in their community trust each other," compared to 59 percent nationally. Pittsburgh MSA residents are also 7 percentage points more likely to feel safe in their communities than US adults are, with 88 percent agreeing that the community in which they live is a relatively "safe, stable, and secure" place, compared to a US average of 81 percent.

This suggests that many Pittsburgh MSA residents live in close-knit communities with strong feelings of neighborhood connection.[72] Reflecting this sentiment, one focus group participant stated:

> **"There's a very good sense of community here. Pittsburgh gives a very small town city feel."**
>
> —Amanda, a 24-year-old politically unaffiliated white woman from Pittsburgh

Yet these high levels of social trust *within* Pittsburghers' local communities coincide with certain challenges they face connecting across difference. For example, Pittsburgh MSA residents report having more homogeneous friend groups than US adults on average. Specifically, they report having fewer friends from different racial backgrounds than do US adults on average (24 percent vs. 33 percent nationally) and fewer friends with different political views (33 percent vs. 39 percent nationally). And while they report similar levels of frequent interaction with people of different races as the national average (47 percent for Pittsburgh; 49 percent nationally), they are much less likely to engage in this behavior than residents of either of the other two cities we surveyed (Houston: 66 percent; Kansas City: 65 percent).

Pittsburgh MSA residents' relative lack of connection across difference is further reflected in their perceptions of social norms: they are less likely than US adults on average to say that the members of their community regularly interact across difference (48 percent vs. 56 percent nationally).

Finally, Pittsburghers display lower-than-average interest in connecting across some lines of difference. For example, Pittsburgh MSA residents are

less likely than US adults on average to be interested in connecting across lines of political difference (44 percent vs. 50 percent nationally), and they are also slightly less likely to favor community integration across religious lines than US adults on average (51 percent vs. 56 percent nationally).

One explanation for Pittsburghers' relative difficulties connecting across some lines of difference relates to opportunity: residents of this area are nearly 10 percentage points more likely than US adults on average to say that a significant barrier to connecting across racial difference is a "lack of opportunity" (38 percent vs. 28 percent nationally); in addition, they are also 8 percentage points more likely to say that people from different racial backgrounds "don't live in [my] community" (21 percent vs. 13 percent nationally). By contrast, negative feelings about connecting across racial lines of difference (for example, feelings that such interactions would be "awkward or uncomfortable") are similar to the US average (5 percent in Pittsburgh; 8 percent nationally). This suggests that geographic factors may be more likely to inhibit connections across difference than psychological factors like anxiety or resentment toward the other group.

Overall, the picture that emerges from these data is that Pittsburgh MSA is composed of relatively insulated communities with strong internal bonds, but which may have weak ties to each other. Pittsburgh's history and geography, in which racial and economic segregation was—and continues to be—a serious problem,[73] gives credence to this sentiment. Moreover, this sentiment was reflected in the words of some of our focus group participants.

> **"Pittsburgh is really a city of neighborhoods."**
>
> —Will, a 73-year-old white conservative man with from Pittsburgh

> **"Pittsburgh has historically not been a very diverse area."**
>
> —Amanda, a 24-year-old politically unaffiliated white woman from Pittsburgh

Over time, Pittsburgh has also come to be increasingly segregated politically, insofar as the center of the MSA region—namely, Allegheny County—has become increasingly liberal, while the surrounding areas have become more conservative.[74]

These challenges notwithstanding, a number of community events appear to be bringing people together and offering opportunities for greater connection across difference. One type of unifying activity often mentioned in our focus groups of Pittsburghers involved sporting events. Such events offer opportunities for Pittsburghers to create a unifying identity that transcends other lines of difference, thereby helping to bring people together across divides. For example, one person mentioned:

> **"What unites everybody around Pittsburgh is the sports. Sports unites a lot of people from all different areas around the city that meet up at that sports stadium."**
>
> —Charlie, a 64-year-old politically unaffiliated white woman from Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh also hosts community events that residents say offer opportunities to connect. One notable example is the charmingly off-beat event of Picklesburgh, an annual pickle celebration.[xxii] Residents claim events like these bring people from all backgrounds together:

> **"Events like Picklesburgh draw from all walks of life help form those connections, even if it's just casual connections."**
>
> —Heinrich a 67-year-old liberal white man from Pittsburgh

Our focus group conversations also revealed that, when Pittsburghers are able to connect, many find commonalities that can transcend differences.

> **"At the end of the day, I think we all want the same things. We want what's best for our families. We want what's best for each other, best for our children—a better future for those of us that have grandchildren or that soon will. So, I just find that more people have more things in common than we actually realize."**
>
> —Donna, a 53-year-old biracial (Hispanic and white) conservative woman from Pittsburgh

> **"When you don't know someone or you don't know a group, you are uncertain about [connecting] and you might be nervous about it…But then, I think, once you put that foot in and step forward…a lot of people [realize] *hey, they're a lot like me. Hey, we have the same likes*…You realize that even though you're from different backgrounds, you do have similarities among yourselves."**
>
> —Julia, a 28-year-old Black liberal woman from Pittsburgh

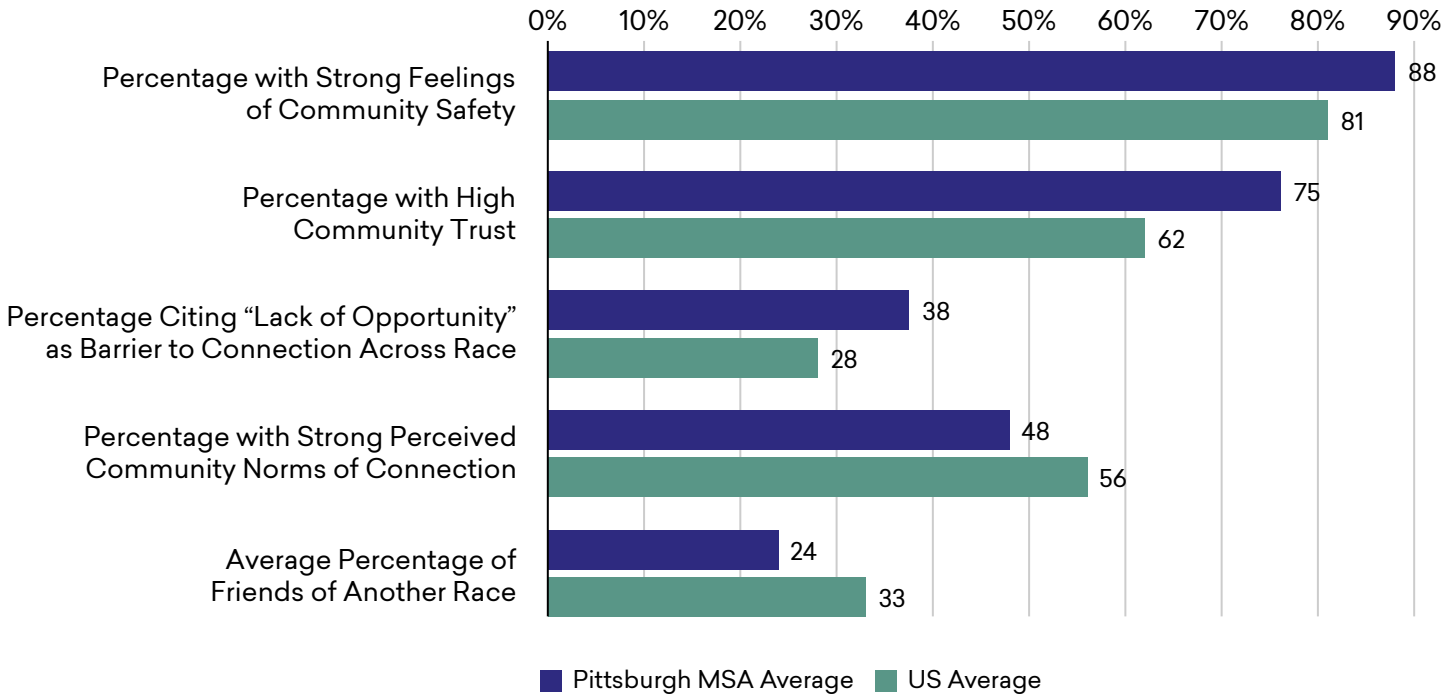
In sum, Pittsburgh exemplifies a common tension communities across the US face. On the one hand, local communities can experience greater feelings of trust and safety in relatively homogeneous neighborhoods (a phenomenon known as "bonding" connection), while also experiencing challenges associated with connecting across lines of difference ("bridging"). Yet, the positive experiences people report when they encounter those from different groups suggests providing Pittsburgh MSA residents with additional opportunities to interact would be welcome.

[xxii] The frequency of references to this event may partly be a result of the fact that the event had recently occurred at the time of the focus groups.

Figure 4.1

Spotlight on Pittsburgh MSA

Pittsburgh MSA residents have stronger feelings of community trust and security, but weaker descriptive community norms of connection and slightly more racially homogeneous friend groups.



Community Safety item: "The place I live in is basically a safe, stable, and secure place" [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree]. Responses from 5 to 7 were categorized as "Strong." Community Trust item: Agreement with "Most people in my local community can be trusted" [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly Agree]. Respondents from 5 to 7 were categorized as "High." Barriers to Connection item: "Which of the following statements reflects why you might not interact more with people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds than you?" Perceived Community Norms item: Average of descriptive norms questions across race, politics, SES, and religion. Responses from 5 to 7 on the 7-point scale were categorized as "Strong." Friends of Another Race item: "If you had to estimate, approximately what percent of your close friends have the same race or ethnicity as you? [0-100%, sliding scale response]. Responses were reversed to calculate the average percentage from "another race." MSA means Metropolitan Statistical Area. Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 750 adults in Pittsburgh MSA and 4,522 US adults.

Kansas City

The Kansas City MSA is a community on the rise. In recent years, Kansas City has seen significant increases in its population of color, with the Hispanic community increasing by 33 percent and the multiracial population nearly doubling.[75] Economically, the region also has momentum: it ranks among the nation's top 20 for real GDP growth and is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the Midwest.[76]As the local population grows, residents of the Kansas City MSA maintain a strong sense of identity and community engagement, leading them to stand out in several ways compared to national averages. For example, nearly 8 in 10 Kansas City residents (78 percent) have a strong sense of connective responsibility—believing that people have an obligation to engage with people who are different from them.[xxiii] This estimate exceeds the national average (70 percent), and it is notably higher than estimates of connective responsibility in Houston (71 percent) and Pittsburgh (73 percent).

Kansas City residents also report strong feelings of local community trust. A large majority of residents (71 percent) express high trust in their communities, which exceeds the national average (64 percent). These feelings of trust and connective responsibility may reflect a more general community-oriented mindset—one that sees local community as an important part of everyday life. This community-oriented theme was also captured in the words of local residents in our focus groups:

> **"There's a lot of people [in Kansas City] who really care about making sure that the community members in need are supported in a lot of different ways."**
>
> —Tammy, a conservative white woman from Kansas City[xxiv]

> **"There are already various events in Kansas City that foster community connections such as food festivals celebrating different ethnic backgrounds...these gatherings enhance social cohesion."**
>
> —Tonia, a 60-year-old liberal white woman from Kansas City

The Kansas City MSA also leads in other indicators of social cohesion. Compared to the national average (63 percent), a greater percentage of

[xxiii] See Chapter 1 and Glossary for more information on this measure.
[xxiv] Tammy did not provide her exact age; her age range is 45-54 years.

Kansas City MSA residents (68 percent) report positive attitudes toward integration and support efforts to bring diverse groups into their communities. This openness to bridging differences is also reflected in their reported behaviors: Kansas City MSA residents are more likely than the national average to interact frequently with people who are different from them along racial, religious, political, and socioeconomic lines: Two-thirds (65 percent) say they connect across racial lines "often" or "all the time" (vs. 49 percent nationally), 51 percent across political lines (vs. 38 percent nationally), 58 percent across religious lines (vs. 46 percent nationally), and 49 percent across socioeconomic lines (vs. 33 percent nationally). Socioeconomic status is the only type of cross-group contact in which fewer than half of Kansas City MSA residents frequently engage.

These frequent interactions across group lines may also serve to reinforce community norms related to bridging differences. Indeed, 65 percent of Kansas City MSA residents believe that members of their community value connecting across lines of difference, compared to the national average of 59 percent.[xxv] Again, these patterns were also reflected in the words of our focus group participants, who highlighted the ways in which local events foster a strong sense of connection in the Kansas City MSA:

> **"The first thing I did that was fun when I got to Kansas City was go to a music festival. I think it was either jazz or like a Caribbean festival, and it was full of all types of people...So I think music brings us together."**
> —Andres, 57-year-old conservative Latino man from Kansas City

> **"It just seems the whole community really rallies around their teams... kids are off school for parades; it's just unique fandom here."**
> —Eliza, 40-year-old conservative white woman man from Kansas City

> **"When you go out to the grocery stores, malls and all, you interact with different people every day, meet somebody new every day."**
> —Sara, a politically unaffiliated Black woman from Kansas City[xxvi]

While it is clear that Kansas City MSA residents value cross-group connection, there remains considerable room for growth in the region. Residents report frequent interactions across racial, religious, and political lines, but engagement across socioeconomic lines lags a bit farther behind. Further, only a slim majority of Kansas City MSA residents feel a strong sense of local

[xxv] This percentage reflects the proportion of people whose average norm rating was above "4" (indicating agreement) on the injunctive norm item, collapsed across lines of difference. See the Appendix for more details.
[xxvi] Sara did not provide her exact age; her age range is 45-54 years.

community belonging (53 percent vs. 56 percent nationally). Residents also express relatively lower interest in future cross-group connection compared to the value they see in it: more Kansas City residents endorse cross-group connection as a value (78 percent) than those who report interest in future connection (66 percent).

Nonetheless, the proportion of people in Kansas City reporting high interest in future cross-group connection is still larger than the national average (56 percent). This trend also emerges when comparing the proportion of Kansas City MSA residents expressing high interest in connection across racial lines (80 percent vs. 68 percent nationally) and across political lines (56 percent vs. 50 percent nationally)—which are differences often fraught with tension.

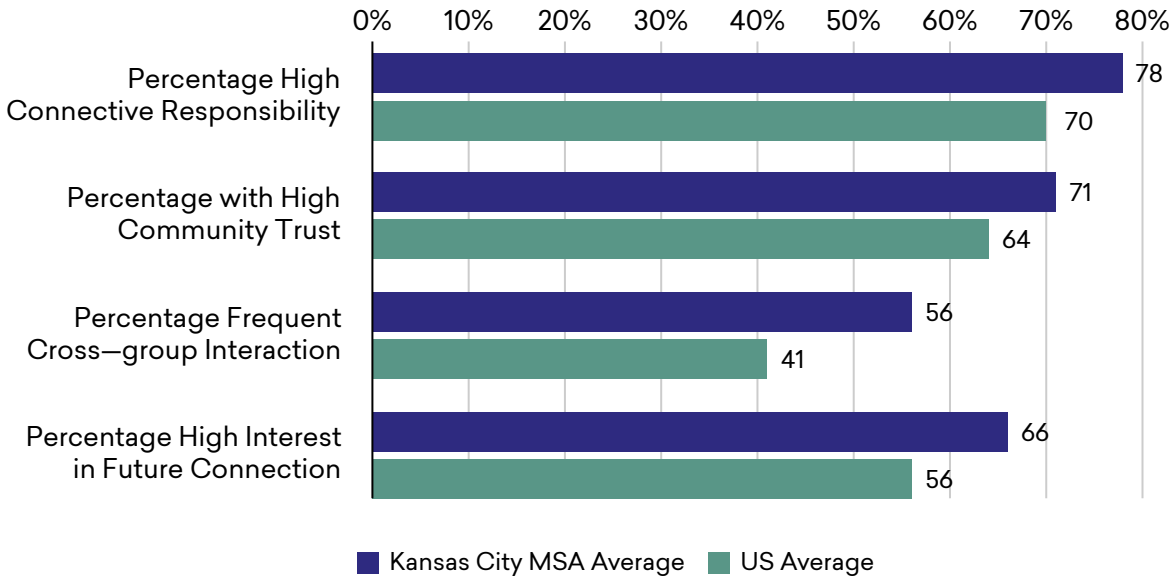
On the whole, Kansas City MSA exemplifies a community characterized by high levels of trust and a strong sense of responsibility for connecting across differences—particularly when it comes to connecting across racial and political lines. These features of the community are likely influenced by the region's shifting demographics. The evolving landscape of Kansas City presents new opportunities for connection and collaboration.

The Kansas City MSA stands out as an example of an area with more openness and energy for connection across lines of difference. Residents' feelings of community-based trust and commitment to connective responsibility, as well as their willingness to engage across lines of difference, are all clear strengths of the Kansas City MSA. Given these attitudes, there is even greater potential to cultivate more connection across lines of difference in this area.

Figure 4.2

Spotlight on Kansas City MSA

Kansas City MSA residents have stronger feelings of responsibility, community trust, cross-group interaction, and interest in future connection.



Connective Responsibility item: Agreement with "In a complex society, we all have a shared responsibility to engage with people whose backgrounds and viewpoints are different from our own." Responses from 5 to 7 on a 7-point scale were categorized as "High." Community Trust item: Agreement with "Most people in my local community can be trusted." Responses from 5 to 7 were on a 7-point scale categorized as "High." Frequent Cross-group Interaction item: Responses to "How often do you find yourself interacting with people who have different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds than you?" averaged across all lines of difference; respondents' ratings from 4 ("often") to 5 ("all the time") were categorized as "Frequent." Interest in Future Connection item: Percentage of responses at or above 3 ("moderately interested") on the composite measure of interest in connection across difference, collapsed across lines of difference. MSA means Metropolitan Statistical Area.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 532 adults in Kansas City MSA and 4,522 US adults.

Houston

Residents of the Houston MSA stand out by having a particularly positive outlook on connecting across differences. A greater percent of Houstonians report being interested in connecting across difference than US adults on average—and this trend is consistent across lines of difference related to race/ethnicity (78 percent vs. 68 percent nationally), religion (70 percent vs. 61 percent nationally), socioeconomic status (68 percent vs. 59 percent nationally), and political viewpoint (56 percent vs. 50 percent nationally).

Similar sentiments were often mentioned by Houston residents in our focus groups:

> **"I think Houston is so diverse and so accepting...It's not a problem that there's diversity in Houston."**
> —Adil, a 37-year-old liberal Asian man from Houston

Notably, on average, Houstonians in our survey also report higher levels of interaction with people from different backgrounds than do US adults nationally (50 percent vs. 41 percent nationally). Houstonians also report more positive attitudes toward community integration than US adults on average (71 percent vs. 63 percent nationally), and they believe their community supports cross-group connection more as well (66 percent vs. 59 percent nationally).

The fact that Houstonians both interact more often across lines of difference and report higher-than-average levels of support for connection across difference further bolsters the claims made in Chapters 1-3 about the link between frequent exposure to diversity and attitudes toward connecting across difference. Here, too, we find that the more people interact with people who are different from them, and the more they perceive that other community members do so as well, the more interested in and supportive they are about connecting across lines of difference.

Why do Houstonians report greater interaction with people from different backgrounds than the national average? One likely reason is because the Houston metro area is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse areas in the United States. Unlike most parts of the US, Houston has been

attracting people from different backgrounds for over a century, and it is often recognized as one of the first major US cities to have a "majority-minority" population, meaning that more than half of its residents are from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds.[77]

However, the mere fact that a region is racially and ethnically diverse does not automatically mean that people are interacting more across lines of difference, or that they want to.[78] There also needs to be infrastructure and programming that helps to facilitate interactions across difference, and a culture of connection that helps to bolster such efforts.

See Resources for Stakeholders for more information about the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo and its role in facilitating connections across lines of difference

Our interviews with Houston residents there pointed to a number of important local events that seem not only to facilitate connection but also to promote strong norms of community engagement across lines of difference as well. For example, residents often referenced the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, a massive annual gathering that attracts people from across the region, as a place of connection:

> **"At the rodeo, you just meet so many people. Everybody's working together. One common goal."**
>
> —Dan, 47-year-old liberal, Black man from Houston

People also talked about other community events, like sporting events and food festivals, that bring people together:

> **"Food brings together a lot of people. We have a lot of cultural events. Wherever there's food festivities, you have a variation of different types of people that come together."**
>
> —Katy, a 37-year-old politically unaffiliated Hispanic woman from Houston

> **"With sports, anybody who lives in Texas—small town, big town—during football Friday night lights, everybody comes together. Everybody's Friday nights, they support a team—children, family members, friends, everybody."**
>
> —Maureen, a 55-year-old conservative Hispanic woman from Houston

Others talked about larger, regional features of the climate and economy. For example, a number of residents discussed Houston's community resilience in the face of frequent natural disasters, and how, over the years, Houstonians have developed a culture in which people look out for their neighbors, regardless of background:

> **“When we do face hurricanes—and in the recent years we've had freezes and we've had different weather patterns come through— it doesn't matter if you're a blue or a red or whatever your political affiliation. People come to help each other. And I think that's one thing that we do very well.”**
>
> —Lyla, a 57-year-old conservative biracial (Hispanic/white) woman from Houston

Others mentioned the economic opportunities in Houston. For example, Edward discussed how this—in combination with the ethnic diversity and cultural events in the city—made him feel a sense of belonging:

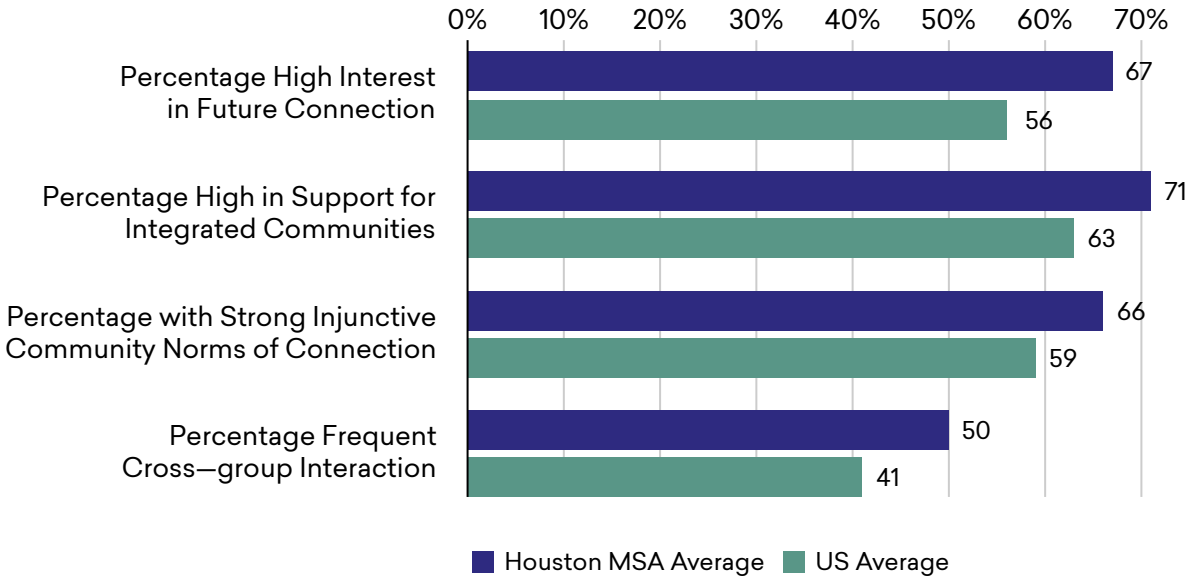
> **“For me, [belonging] is the economic opportunity. And... not only there's a Mexican population, but there's another Latino population. The sports. We're a great hub for sports and also entertainment. I guess just the mix of culture. You're able to see so many nice things from Southern American food to Latino. Even Asian cuisine is making a big impact here in Houston as well. So yeah, I think that's why I think I see myself staying here.”**
>
> —Edward, 32-year-old politically unaffiliated Hispanic man from Houston

Taken together, Houston’s long-standing demographic diversity and strong economy, in addition to public events and culture, seems to its residents to provide a solid foundation for building connections across difference. By investing in infrastructure and programs that bring people together, Houston sets an example of how diverse communities can work toward greater inclusion, mutual understanding, and shared purpose.

Figure 4.3

Spotlight on Houston MSA

Houston MSA residents have more interest in connection, greater support for integrated communities, stronger perceived injunctive community norms, and more frequent cross-group interaction.



Interest in Future Connection item: Responses at or above 3 ("Moderately Interested") on the composite measure of interest in connection across difference, collapsed across lines of difference. Support for Integrated Communities item: Responses at or above 5 ("Somewhat Agree") on the composite measure of support for integrated communities, collapsed across lines of difference. Perceived Injunctive Community Norms item: Average of injunctive norms across race, politics, SES, and religion. Responses from 5 to 7 on a 7-point scale were categorized as "Strong." Frequent Cross-group Interaction item: Responses to "How often do you find yourself interacting with people who have different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds than you?" averaged across all lines of difference; responses from 4 ("often") to 5 ("all the time") were categorized as "Frequent." MSA means Metropolitan Statistical Area.
Source: More in Common (2025). Survey of 1,000 adults in Houston MSA and 4,522 US adults.

Conclusion

Our regional profiles show how much connection across difference can be shaped by features of people's local environment. Regional culture, history, economy, norms, events, and infrastructure can all shape not only people's willingness to connect across lines of difference, but also their ability to do so. Understanding how each of these factors contribute to shaping the landscape of connection is crucial for leaders seeking to foster greater connection at the local level.

Of course, some of these factors are easier to change than others. Current urban geographies have been shaped over long periods of time, and informed by the prevailing norms and attitudes of their time. As such, it could take decades for local areas to achieve broad-scale changes in residential patterns, economic opportunities, physical infrastructures, and transportation systems that would be built to facilitate greater connection across lines of difference. At the same time, our findings suggest that many present-day decisions made by both local leaders and community residents can have an important impact on cultivating a region's culture of connection.

In Houston, for example, large events such as the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo offer residents of a highly diverse metropolitan area the opportunity to come together to celebrate a common local culture. This, in turn, may shift attitudes in several ways, fostering positive experiences of connection and heightening perceived community norms. Events such as these may also trigger "connection cascades"—positive experiences of connection that increase people's willingness to engage in *future* connection activities as well (as discussed in Chapter 3). It is thus advisable for local community leaders seeking to encourage connection across difference to explore ways of sparking such virtuous cycles of connection.

Of course, understanding the dynamics that affect social connection at the regional level is a complex process that requires more nuance than can be captured in this report. However, we hope that this brief overview helps readers understand how attitudes towards connecting with others can vary based on the local context. For a full overview of our data and findings in these areas, see our regional companion decks on our website.

Chapter Five

Seven Levers of Change: Strategies to Foster Connection Across Difference

Thus far, this report has focused on exploring Americans' experiences of connecting across difference. We turn now to recommendations: specifically, seven levers of change for individuals and organizations that our research suggests can help foster greater connection.

1: Provide more opportunities for people to connect across difference. Our research identifies a "lack of opportunity" as the most frequently cited barrier to building these connections. One clear strategy for resolving this is also the most straightforward: create more opportunities for people to make connections across difference in their daily lives. This can be done in two main ways: 1) provide more opportunities for meaningful connection in spaces where people are already coming together, and 2) design environments where new connections can happen naturally.

For the former, local organizations and stakeholders can add opportunities for meaningful cross-group connection into their existing programming. For instance, schools can provide programming that allows families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to get to know one another. Faith institutions can plan volunteering events alongside members of other religious communities. These opportunities can also take the form of community events, such as block parties or festivals, where people have the chance to engage with old and new neighbors. Importantly, these opportunities do not need to be framed or promoted as activities that are specifically intended to bring people together across difference; rather, they can be focused on the goals of the event or program itself, like celebrating a local sports team, cleaning up a beach, etc. In this way, connection can emerge organically.

Regarding the latter, spaces and activities can be intentionally designed to encourage more cross-group encounters. Without deliberate design, many residents—even in the most racially and economically diverse cities—will unintentionally self-segregate.[79] Examples of these spaces include well-connected and resourced public community hubs (like public parks or libraries) and residential mixed-income housing.

Additionally, creating more spaces in which people can easily come together to solve community problems—what More in Common refers to as "collective settings"—is also essential.[80] These settings not only allow people to build trust and relationships with others in their community, but they also help develop the "muscles for democracy"—skills necessary for working through differences and solving public problems. (See the Resources for Stakeholders section for more information.)

2: Increase the perception that connecting across difference is the "community norm." Perceived community norms that support connection across difference are the strongest predictor of interest in connecting across all four lines of difference we explored. This suggests that strengthening these norms of connection can be a powerful lever for change.

Research emphasizes that social norms originate from three key sources: the media, one's immediate social and physical environments, and institutional policies.[81] In line with this work, it is helpful to consider how each of these forces can be used to strengthen norms of connecting across difference. For example, local voices can champion stories of successful cross-group collaborations in their communities. Individuals can influence their social networks by modeling positive bridging behavior, and local government leaders can support policies or lead initiatives that signal their communities are welcoming to all. By doing so, everyday individuals and community leaders alike can help foster a culture that values and supports connection across difference.

Given the current political climate in the US, strengthening norms of cross-partisan connection will likely be very difficult. Yet, this does not mean the challenge is insurmountable. Community leaders can play an important role in modeling and reinforcing the value of collaborating across political lines to address shared community goals. For example, as part of the 2023-2024 National Governors Association's Disagree Better initiative,[82] a bipartisan mix of governors and mayors recorded videos that emphasized their commitment to civil discourse and working together. According to researchers at Stanford University, participants who watched these videos showed increased engagement in bipartisan behaviors and provided reputational benefits to the elected leaders featured in the videos.[83]

3: Foster local community belonging. Our data show that the more people feel like they belong in their local community, the more they express interest in connecting across lines of difference. Therefore, fostering a sense of community belonging is likely an important aspect of supporting people's willingness to bridge differences.

To increase belonging at the community level, community leaders can create spaces that highlight a shared identity across many segments of the local community—such as at annual community events, or during interactions at meetings of local neighborhood associations. It is also important to ensure

that, in these spaces, community members from varied backgrounds feel like they are valued, that their rights and opinions are respected, and that they have the agency to contribute to community goals.

To help cultivate such feelings, local leaders should not only allow, but also encourage, community members to create community projects and work toward them in collaboration with others. (See the Resources for Stakeholders section for more information.)

4: Focus on commonalities, like shared interests and goals, to broaden the appeal of bridging activities. As highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2, many Americans report that they would be more interested in connecting across lines of difference if the interactions focused on common goals and shared interests. As such, creating opportunities that emphasize shared community goals and activities may draw in more community members.[84] In contrast, programs that invite people to come together to talk about potential sources of tension or conflict—which is frequently the focus of some traditional bridge-building efforts—may inadvertently "preach to the choir" and only entice those who already feel comfortable addressing group differences.[xxvii]

5: Reduce intergroup anxiety. We found that another important predictor of interest in connection across all lines of difference was low feelings of intergroup anxiety. The less anxious—or more comfortable—people think they will feel while interacting across lines of difference, the more interested they are in doing it. This finding is also corroborated by academic literature on this subject.[85]

While there are many ways to reduce intergroup anxiety, our study points to two important pathways for practical intervention. The first involves correcting misperceptions that Americans have about connecting across difference. Our research found that some Americans feel hesitant about connecting with people who are different from them because they think that the "other side" doesn't want to interact with them. However, we also found that most Americans value and express interest in connection across difference.[86] This is an important misperception, and correcting it may help reduce anxiety about the interaction and, therefore, promote greater socialization between different groups of people.[87]

Another way to work toward reducing intergroup anxiety is to increase people's confidence in their ability to engage across differences.[88] Organizations that convene diverse groups could teach skills to help improve an individual's ability to navigate tensions between groups. For example,

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[xxvii] There are times, however, when it is important and necessary for people to be able to constructively address—even lean into—the differences that may be causing tension or preventing a positive connection from forming. For example, having community leaders with different beliefs come together to address a challenge in a community will likely require skilled facilitation focused specifically on helping stakeholders constructively navigate tensions that are getting in the way of accomplishing a mutual goal. Deciding on whether to focus on differences vs. commonalities should depend ultimately on the program's intended goals.

businesses could host active or "deep" listening trainings in the workplace, or schools could teach constructive dialogue classes. Furthermore, bridging organizations might consider framing cross-group discussions as learning opportunities to build skills to effectively communicate and lead in diverse environments. This way, people who don't feel as confident about their ability to engage with people with different viewpoints or backgrounds might be more encouraged to join.

6: Emphasize the importance of "connective responsibility." A majority of Americans across race, political party, and geography agree that we have a responsibility to connect across lines of difference. Connective responsibility is more than merely thinking that one's community values connection—it reflects the degree to which people themselves consider it a moral or ethical obligation. The more people feel this responsibility for connection, the more interest they express in all types of activities that connect people across lines of difference. Thus, strengthening a sense of collective responsibility may be a powerful way to increase people's willingness to connect across difference. To do this, community leaders can highlight in public messages and communication how collaboration across differences has been essential to major advancements in the US, such as expanding civil rights, strengthening democratic institutions, and fostering economic innovation.

7: Seek opportunities to create "connection cascades". Our research finds that positive experiences of connection with one group may catalyze interest in connecting across many groups. This suggests that experiences of and interest in connection may build on themselves in a self-reinforcing cycle. To take advantage of such cascading interest, organizations need to create sustained opportunities for engagement and bridging.

To be sure, not all types of experiences appear capable of generating connection cascades. For example, we find that discussing group tensions is not as predictive of increased interest in connection—likely because some people find such experiences stressful or unpleasant. This shows that experiences of connection must be of the appropriate nature and take place under the right conditions. Nevertheless, if people have experiences of connection they want to have again, they may not only seek out these experiences, but also start creating them for others. When members of a community start building their own opportunities for connection, this can have lasting consequences on that community's norms and culture, highlighting a pathway to self-sustaining change.

Conclusion

As we are reminded by *e pluribus unum*—"out of many, one"— the United States has long sought to forge a shared identity among a population with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and creeds.

Today, Americans' sense of shared identity and purpose is being tested in new ways. Social media algorithms and outrage-driven media models amplify extreme voices, fueling partisan hostility and deepening social divides. Rising hate crime, hostility toward religious minorities, and severe economic inequality further erode Americans' trust in one another and pull communities apart. This is happening at a time when we are spending less time with one another and other demands are crowding out time for public life and community activities. Such fracturing poses an existential threat to the long-term health of our democracy.[89]

Yet, there is reason for hope. As we have discussed in this report, Americans are not only interested in connecting with others who hold different backgrounds and beliefs, but also see how these connections benefit society as a whole. This recognition of the value of difference shows that the potential remains to foster a stronger culture of connection.

Yet Americans' willingness to connect often far exceeds the frequency with which they do so. The most commonly cited barrier to connecting across difference is a lack of opportunity—signaling that increasing the supply of these opportunities can help increase our ability to connect with one another. Imagination and creativity are needed to create more opportunities that Americans not only want to engage in but can also fit within the demands of daily lives.

Overcoming these challenges will require a collective recommitment to building a culture of connection in the US—one where our differences do not become barriers to connection but, instead, opportunities for enrichment. We all have a role to play in fostering a culture of connection, and there are countless ways to create the opportunities we seek. Whether it's two strangers making small talk in a checkout line, local governments investing in public spaces, philanthropists prioritizing relationships over mere outputs, or the media amplifying stories of neighbors helping neighbors—each action contributes to building a more connected society. Only through these efforts can we simultaneously activate Americans' latent desire to connect across difference *and* provide them the means by which to achieve these desires.

In a poll conducted in January 2025, More in Common found that 82 percent of Americans believe that "our success as a nation depends on our ability to work together across differences." Asked what qualities they most want to characterize their nation, Americans' most common response is "united."[90]

Many Americans are yearning to break out of our bubbles and experience a stronger culture of connection. But they are constrained by busy lives, a lack of clear opportunities, and fears of things going wrong. While Americans feel that we are in very divided times, our hope for this report is to spark ideas, initiatives and momentum towards seizing the opportunities for connection that surround us every day of our lives.

Resources for Stakeholders

Further Recommendations and Helpful Links

All of us can play a role in building connections between people of different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences. This section provides further recommendations and specific resources, based on the seven levers of change, for various stakeholder groups.

This list is meant to serve as a starting point for those interested in building meaningful connections across differences in their communities; it is by no means exhaustive.

Stakeholders

- Community Leaders & Civil Society (non-profits, cultural centers, faith institutions, etc.)
- Government
- Philanthropy
- Individuals

What Community Leaders and Civil Society Can Do

- Organize events, programs, or gatherings where community members can interact and build relationships across difference.

  Resources: Welcoming America developed a guide and case studies to help organizations design programming between groups. Interfaith America has a suite of resources to foster interfaith bridging.

- Make connection part of the culture. Elevate stories and examples of people coming together across difference in your communications, or emphasize that building connections with others is common in your community.

  Resources: To learn more about the theory behind norms and social change, read this comprehensive overview of the academic

literature. You can also explore these resources, "Changing Culture by Changing Norms" and "Norms Shifting on Social Media".

- Cultivate a sense of belonging within your community. This can include intentional thinking about how to design physical spaces as well as including elements in your programming and communications that ensure participants feel included and part of your mission.

  Resources: Learn how to better design spaces and programs for belonging here.

- Emphasize the importance of "connective responsibility" by fortifying civic culture.

  Resources: "Habits of Heart and Mind" provides "ingredients" that community leaders can incorporate into building healthy civic culture.

  Get inspired by Trust for Civic Life's investments into local efforts that help people connect and create their community's future together, ultimately reshaping civic life and building a stronger democracy.

- Invest in skill-building for you and your teams to improve constructive dialogue and problem solving across lines of difference.

  Resources: There are several organizations that provide trainings in these skills. Some include: Constructive Dialogue Institute, Interfaith America, Convergence, and Resetting the Table.

What Government Can Do

- Implement policies that help foster cross-group connection locally.

  Resources: "Connective Tissue Regenerating Connection within Communities, Reimagining the Role of Policy" provides an organized framework to help inspire connection-focused policy making.

- Invest in building and maintaining "third spaces" where people in your community can connect with one another, such as parks, libraries, museums, and walking districts.

  Resources: "The Common Ground Framework" from Trust for Public Land emphasizes the pivotal role that parks can play as catalysts for community-building, social connectedness, and civic action. Of particular note is the story of how the park system in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana fostered cross-group collaboration despite a complex history of racial divides by engaging a diverse community advisory council.

- Foster community belonging for all.

  Resources: The "Belonging Barometer" provides a framework for understanding how to measure belonging at the local community level.

What Philanthropy Can Do

- Fund organizations, projects, and research that serves to increase cross-group connections and foster community belonging at the local level. Support your grantees to have the capacity, resources, and skills to build diverse stakeholder coalitions committed to solving your priority community challenges.

  Resources: The Council on Foundation's report "Coming Together, Not Apart: How Philanthropy Supports Connection in a Time of Dangerous Division" provides examples and strategies for funders to support connection.

- Invest in building "collective settings," spaces where people come together locally across difference to solve problems.

  Resources: Searching for A New Paradigm: Collective Settings makes the case for investing in civic infrastructure and provides recommendations for philanthropists on how to engage in these efforts.

What Individuals Can Do

- Build skills and confidence to engage positively and meaningfully with people from different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences.

  Resources: Take a deep listening course, or sign up to participate in a One Small Step conversation. For an online experience, check out the global peacebuilding organization Soliya, which creates opportunities for people from around the world to form friendships and talk about current events.

- "Show up" in your community. Be intentional about going to events and programs in your community—building connection across difference isn't possible without you!

  Resources: Check out volunteer opportunities in your community such as on Points of Light, Idealist, or your local United Way.

- Start a club or gathering that fosters connection. If you feel like you lack opportunities to connect, think about the role you can play in bringing people together. Whether it is hosting a dinner party, starting a book club, or organizing a pick-up soccer game, our ability to connect depends on people taking the initiative to make it happen.

  Resources: The initiative "Belonging Begins with Us" lists several ways you can help foster belonging in your community in small ways every day. The private sector is also supporting this kind of work: for example, Hinge is funding in-person Gen Z group gatherings.

- Check your misperceptions of others. Across many studies, More in Common has found that Americans tend to hold misperceptions of different groups. These misperceptions can foment intergroup anxiety

and contribute to social distancing. Understanding where these "perception gaps" may be and what misperceptions you may hold of others can improve your ability to better understand people of different backgrounds and experiences.

Resources: Learn more about perception gaps from More in Common's past reports: Perception Gap, Defusing the History Wars, and Promising Revelations.

Resources for Stakeholders

Connecting Across Difference in Action

Throughout this project, we were inspired by organizations from around the country that are driving meaningful impact in their communities while also building connections across lines of difference. Below is an overview of seven of those organizations—five from our regions of focus and two with a national scope. Their missions vary—from feeding those in need to restoring blighted homes—but they share an understanding that fostering connection is essential to achieving their goals and ultimately making their communities better places to live.

We hope these examples, written in collaboration with the organizations' leaders, inspire othersleaders to put a "lens" of social connection onto their work and think creatively about how to pursue their missions while also bridging differences.

Houston

The Houston Food Bank

The Houston Food Bank's "Dining with Purpose" program engages an intentionally diverse group of Houston residents to explore the challenges and solutions to reducing food insecurity over a series of engaging dinners.

Serving Houston and southeast Texas since 1982, the Houston Food Bank (HFB) is one of the nation's largest food banks, providing access to 120 million nutritious meals in 18 counties. Achieving HFB's vision of "a world that doesn't need food banks" involves much of what may be expected of a community food bank—distributing food to those in need and connecting residents to government benefits and supportive services. Yet, HFB recognizes that ultimately ending food insecurity will involve engaging

diverse coalitions of stakeholders committed to driving advocacy and policy change. That is how the Dining with Purpose program was born.

Piloted in 2024, Dining with Purpose brings together an intentionally diverse group, from community leaders and donors to neighbors directly affected by food insecurity. Through a series of shared meals, Dining with Purpose participants build trusted relationships with one another while exploring what is driving underlying food insecurity in their communities. Through conversation and activities that foster trust, build empathy, and establish new relationships, participants build a united commitment to identifying and carrying out sustainable solutions..

Over six shared meals, 24 Houstonians came together to discuss root causes of poverty, celebrate common ground, and build bridges across racial, political, religious, and class differences.

Photo Credit: The Houston Food Bank/David A Brown

Dining with Purpose has led to valuable relationships and collaborations that support HFB's mission. Participants report leaving the dinners with a renewed commitment to work collectively toward solutions. One participant observed how “people of diverse backgrounds came together, fostering a sense of community” and another shared that the dinners “built a sense of community and shared purpose.” During the pilot stage, the Houston Food Bank has engaged 45 participants through 12 dinners. Remarkably, 90% of participants reported feeling a stronger sense of connection to their community, a greater commitment to combating food insecurity, and an increased sense of belonging. As the third pilot unfolds, HFB is focused on refining the program to determine how best to expand and scale the concept to engage more participants. Additionally, the organization is developing advocacy pathways to empower current participants and foster a new, inclusive community that bridges divides across race, class, religion, and political perspectives.

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is one of the city's most iconic events, uniting thousands of volunteers to create a three-week experience that draws millions of visitors to celebrate Houston and rodeo culture.

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo stands as the world's largest livestock show and rodeo, attracting over 2.5 million visitors annually. What started in 1932 has become a 3-week affair, full not just of rodeo events, but concerts featuring top musicians from all genres, carnival rides, food experiences, and livestock and horse show competitions drawing more than 35,000 entries.

At its core, the Rodeo embodies Houston's spirit of being a place where people of all backgrounds feel like they belong. Through special days like Go Tejano Day and Black Heritage Day, the organization celebrates the rich cultural tapestry that makes Houston unique. The event's success relies heavily on its remarkable volunteer force—35,000 individuals, who serve across 109 committees throughout the year. These dedicated volunteers of various races, ages, religions, and backgrounds, show up year after year to engage meaningfully in their community.

> **"I volunteer because being part of the Rodeo is being part of the fabric of our community."**
>
> —Alan Steinberg, a 17-year Rodeo volunteer veteran

> **"If you're thinking about volunteering, there's little to hold you back. The Rodeo is not just something you give to—it gives back to you because we are a family."**
>
> —Dick Hudgins, Former Rodeo vice president, current board director, and lifetime vice president

Each year, more than 35,000 volunteers make the Houston Rodeo possible, contributing over 2 million hours of service.
Photo Credit: The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

Its impact extends far beyond the arena. Operating year-round, the Rodeo has become a cornerstone of Texas culture and education, having committed more than $600 million to youth and educational initiatives since its inception. The organization has provided scholarships to over 2,300 students across 80 Texas colleges and universities, fundamentally changing the trajectory of young lives—not to mention the broader economic impact of the event itself. In 2024, the event generated $326 million in economic impact and $597 million in total economic activity for the Greater Houston area, cementing its position as a vital component of the city's economic ecosystem.

What truly sets the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo apart is its ability to create lasting, meaningful connections among all those who experience the

As part of the 3-week experience, the Houston Rodeo hosts days like Go Tejano Day and Black Heritage Day, with special performances and activities for all ages, to celebrate Houston's rich cultural community.

Photo Credit: The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

event. Veterans and newcomers alike find themselves drawn to the event's authentic charm and meaningful mission. Through its scholarship programs, cultural celebrations, and economic contributions, the Rodeo exemplifies how a community event can evolve into a transformative force for people to come together for positive change. Year after year, it continues to prove that its greatest achievement lies not just in the spectacle it creates, but in the lives it touches and the communities it strengthens.

Pittsburgh

Hello Neighbor

Hello Neighbor strengthens Pittsburgh's social fabric by helping refugee families resettle and build relationships with welcoming local residents who support their transition into their new community.

Hello Neighbor, founded in 2017, is a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting refugee and immigrant families as they rebuild their lives in the United States. Since its inception, Hello Neighbor has assisted over 3,500 individuals from more than 58 countries, helping them thrive in their new communities.

Hello Neighbor volunteer (right) visiting a member of one of Hello Neighbor's families from Eritrea (left).
Photo Credit: Hello Neighbor

The organization's flagship program connects newly arrived families with local Pittsburghers to foster meaningful relationships and mutual understanding. This mentorship model bridges cultural divides, creating lasting bonds and a web of social support. One refugee family noted, "When we get together, it is the best of times because we are like one family." A 2019 Hello Neighbor study revealed that after being involved with Hello Neighbor or one of their peer organizations around the country, 97% of volunteers advocated for refugee issues, 79% shared positive experiences with their networks, and participants built more diverse social connections. These efforts have reduced polarization in their communities (according to 93% of volunteers) and made 100% of refugees feel more welcome.

Grounded in the value of belonging, Hello Neighbor provides a wide range of services tailored to the needs of new arrivals, including housing assistance, employment support, health and stabilization services, and cultural orientation. From greeting families at the Pittsburgh airport to offering mentorship, tutoring, and community services, the organization ensures continuous support throughout and beyond the critical first 90 days of resettlement. Hello Neighbor also leads a national network of organizations supporting refugee and immigrant communities

across the United States.

Through its work, Hello Neighbor fosters belonging, dignity, and respect, empowering new neighbors to navigate their environment while strengthening Pittsburgh's social fabric. Hello Neighbor's program infrastructure and support is vital to cultivating these meaningful relationships between Pittsburghers and newcomers. By promoting understanding and collaboration, Hello Neighbor contributes to a more inclusive and interconnected world.

The City of Pittsburgh Office of Neighborhood Services

After Pittsburgh's Office of Neighborhood Services redesigned their public meetings, they found more constructive conversations, greater diversity of voices represented, and stronger connections between Pittsburgh residents and government services.

Ammon Meeting (Top)

Hill District community members gather with City of Pittsburgh staff to share input on the future redesign and development of Ammon Park.

Homewood Mobility (Bottom)

Community members gather with City of Pittsburgh staff at the inaugural "Mobility Open House" engagement. The City piloted this engagement series, focused on mobility and infrastructure projects, to connect with residents on multiple city projects in one meeting and reduce silos between neighborhoods and projects.

Photo Credit: Rebekkah Ranallo

The City of Pittsburgh Office of Neighborhood Services ("Neighborhood Services") is a division of the Mayor's Office that leads community engagement, constituent services, and customer service on behalf of all city departments. The department engages city staff and residents through its 311 Response Center, organizing public meetings, conducting digital engagement, attending monthly neighborhood association meetings, and engaging residents in city-led volunteer initiatives.

The team grounds its work in equitable engagement best practices to ensure the City's decision making is guided not by a vocal minority but by diverse perspectives. For their team, this involves rethinking the traditional public meeting format to create spaces where people from many different walks of life can learn from each other, feel a sense of belonging in their community, and build social capital while sharing input on a project. As a result, the Neighborhood Services team flipped everything in their public meeting formats, from where guests and city staff sit in relation to each other to how the agenda is structured. For example,

- Instead of theatre-style seating where people sit with the person they came with, Neighborhood Services intentionally mixes groups of stakeholders to sit in small groups with people they don't already know. Better outcomes have included increased learning and relationship-building between the many types of stakeholders that often attend public meetings: residents, business owners, commuters, city staff, and elected officials.
- To move away from the "us vs. them" approach often applied in public meetings, city staff and elected officials no longer sit at the front of the room facing the audience, but side by side with residents in small groups. This helps shift power dynamics and sends the message that city staff are also city residents and taxpayers who want to connect with their neighbors and share pride in projects that offer public benefit for everyone.
- Instead of an open microphone that is often monopolized by the most confident people in the room during public comment portions of a meeting, Neighborhood Services gives each small group a set of questions to discuss during breakout sessions. Each small group chooses a representative to share their group's final consensus during share-out time. This structure has been successful in ensuring those who don't have the confidence to speak in front of a large crowd on a microphone are still sharing input and are being heard. Many attendees have spoken about how their perspective on a project shifted after this portion of the meeting because of hearing a new perspective in their group that they had not previously been aware of.

Through these programming design changes, Neighborhood Services ensures meetings allow space for all voices to be heard and considered. They have seen increased engagement by city residents in public processes while also fostering a stronger sense of belonging for residents.

"One of the most exciting results of this work was seeing increased engagement by high-and extreme-need communities in areas like public meeting attendance and the number of service requests placed through our 311 Service Request Center," said Rebekkah Ranallo, Senior Manager of Neighborhood Services. "Previously, meetings and service requests were often dominated by more affluent communities and well-connected people—effectively, many people in historically underserved communities had lost hope in government systems and had stopped requesting services as a result. By applying equitable engagement practices, we were able to begin to reverse this trend, drive higher turnout in meetings, and draw increased service request calls from neighborhoods where government services were most critically needed."

Kansas City

The Lykins Neighborhood Association

The Lykins Neighborhood Association made engaging diverse community members in the decision making process a central component of efforts to revitalize blighted properties—an effort that ultimately has led to reduced crime, increased civic engagement, and dozens of affordable housing units.

House Before (Left) House After (Right)
Pictures of 3321 E. 9th Street—a house rehabbed as part of the Lykins Focused Community Development Project.
Photo Credit: Gregg Lombardi

The Lykins Neighborhood is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Kansas City. A major refugee resettlement neighborhood, it is roughly 50% Latino; 20% Black; 20% white; and 10% Asian and other racial backgrounds.[91] It is also one of the lowest-income communities in Kansas City, and, until recently, it was not uncommon to see abandoned and blighted homes scattered throughout the neighborhood.[92]

In 2018, Neighborhood Legal Support of Kansas City (NLS), in partnership with the Lykins Neighborhood Association, launched the Lykins Focused Community Development Project to transform abandoned and blighted houses into quality homes. A key component of the project was to ensure that the neighborhood's residents made the decisions about which homes should be rehabbed and how.

NLS hired neighborhood liaisons that represented Lykin's diversity and had close ties to different cross-sections of the community. Their role was to encourage neighbors to attend meetings and take part in decision-making. Thanks to their efforts, meeting attendance grew from 5-6 white property owners to an active 30-40 residents representing the full diversity of the neighborhood.

To create an inclusive meeting environment, NLS established simple rules of engagement that are read at the start of each meeting and enforced by the meeting's lead staff member. Meeting attendees are also provided headphones for live interpretation, enabling speakers of different languages to sit side by side and participate equally.

The meetings are lively, and there are often multiple widely disparate perspectives given on any issue. Although strong and heartfelt disagreements occasionally arise, the trust and relationships residents have built through this collaboration almost always ensure that conflicts are resolved amicably and without hard feelings.

In the last six years, the project has generated 43 units of affordable housing and is on track to add 34 more units in 2025. According to Lykins Neighborhood Association, the project has also been one of several factors that have substantially reduced violent crime in the neighborhood. Seeing these positive results from the work in the neighborhood keeps residents attending the meetings and building bonds that span racial, political, religious, and language divides.

National

Urban Rural Action

Urban Rural Action brings together divided communities to develop the skills and relationships needed to address local challenges constructively—ultimately creating enduring bonds that strengthen community resilience and promote shared values.

Urban Rural Action (URA) brings Americans together across political, racial, religious, generational, geographic, and other divides to solve problems collaboratively. They work in highly polarized communities across the country, forming diverse cohorts of people who, although they are neighbors, might not otherwise meet each other. They call participants in their Uniting for Action programs *Uniters* and encourage them to embrace that shared identity.

Cohorts meet frequently over many months to not just to get to know one another, but to build deep relationships, develop collaboration skills, and form teams that design and implement interventions to address common concerns. Each team works with a community partner organization to ensure that their intervention is aligned with community needs and resources and is sustained after the end of the program. They stay in the communities they work in for years, iterating the process with new cohorts, often with program alumni in leadership roles. That investment in developing deep, sustained relationships that grow over time gives URA's programs continuity, and builds credibility in the community.

URA's approach is based on the understanding that healthy relationships are a necessary foundation for healthy communities. In politically polarized Tillamook County Oregon, *Uniters* in URA's "Uniting for Action on the Oregon Economy" program introduced financial literacy classes into local schools

Coloring on Ground (Top)
UR Action programs actively engage participants in fun activities to build strong relationships.

Poster Board Presentation (Middle)
Participants use Problem Tree Analysis to identify ways they can address urgent issues in their communities.

Yard Signs Together (Bottom)
Anti-political violence yard signs share lawn space with Republican and Democratic candidates' signs.

Photo Credit: Urban Rural Action

through their community partners. Just as important, the team built enduring relationships across many significant lines of difference. One *Uniter* noted, "I plan to stay connected with everyone in my cohort. Of the 8 of us, 6 are very different than me, and I can honestly say I appreciate their perspective and differences and genuinely want to stay connected with them."

In deeply divided south-central Pennsylvania, *Uniters* in URA's "Uniting to Prevent Political Violence" program created and distributed yard signs with messages against violence that were displayed alongside both Harris and Trump signs. In doing so, they sent a powerful message about common values and helped shape a community norm that political violence would not be tolerated by any side. The strength of that norm was evident in their Declaration Against Political Violence, which was signed by over 250 people—elected officials on both sides of the aisle and community leaders across the political spectrum.

The interventions Uniting for Action teams implement are wonderful additions to their communities. The real intervention, though, is the relationships that are developed, and the strength they give the community as a whole.

StoryCorps

StoryCorps' One Small Step initiative encourages conversations between strangers with differing political beliefs, focusing on shared humanity rather than differences, to build meaningful connections. By highlighting commonalities, these conversations foster understanding, sometimes even lasting friendships, and inspire others to engage across divides.

An example of one of the PSA billboard ads for StoryCorps' One Small Step campaign.
Photo Credit: StoryCorps/IDW

Founded in 2003, StoryCorps is a national nonprofit that records and preserves the stories of everyday people. To date nearly 700,000 conversations have been with StoryCorps and its archives at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress are the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered.

Launched in 2021, StoryCorps' One Small Step initiative pairs strangers with differing political beliefs for a 50-minute conversation—not to debate politics, but to get to know each other as people, and in the process discover our shared humanity. One Small Step is currently working intensively in three Model Communities across the country, and in July 2024, the effort launched nationally with a PSA campaign.

The campaign, which has garnered over 1.4 billion impressions from July-December 2024, includes radio, TV, print, and out-of-home advertising, with compelling messages that encourage people to engage in conversations across political divides. One Small Step conversations are often a very positive experience for participants, with some even forming lasting friendships.

> **"One Small Step is allowing people to have those conversations—to talk about our similarities instead of our differences. As far as our relationship is concerned, I feel as though I've known you forever and you're a dear, dear friend and I can't imagine you not being in my life..."**
> —Richmond OSS participant Jerome in conversation with Warren

More in Common's partnership with StoryCorps found that just listening to a One Small Step conversation can increase the number of Americans interested in taking part in similar conversations by almost 50 percent. This shows that social connection is not only about connecting individuals, but also showing and telling the stories of those connections, to help people overcome their hesitancy in talking to someone that they may disagree with.
With nearly 6,000 participants to date, One Small Step aims to help combat political polarization and remind Americans that we are more alike than we are different.

As evident by these examples, one of the promising aspects of fostering social connection across difference is it can happen in countless ways—and by virtually anyone. What unites these efforts is their intentional creation of structured spaces or programs that make it easier for people to engage and form meaningful relationships. In a time when societal forces push us toward disconnection, these opportunities are more important than ever. Communities cannot thrive without strong social bonds. Putting on a "lens" of social connection to mission-driven work offers a powerful approach to creating meaningful change.

Appendix A

Methods

From 2023-2024, More in Common conducted a series of national surveys, regional surveys, and focus groups, asking respondents a variety of questions regarding their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward connection across lines of differences in the US.

Quantitative Research

More in Common partnered with international polling company YouGov to conduct online survey interviews for this study. For the Pilot, Main and Recontact surveys, the data were weighted to be representative of the US adult general population using propensity scores, with score functions including gender, age, race, education, and region. The weights were then post-stratified on 2020 Presidential vote choice, as well as post-stratification related to gender, age, race, education, and religion. The Regional Survey data had a separate weighting process (see below).

Pilot Survey: Online survey interviews were conducted from August 4 to August 15, 2023 with N = 1,000 US adults. The results from the pilot survey were used to inform the creation of the Main Survey, and, as such, are not included directly in this report.

Main Survey: Online survey interviews were conducted from December 21, 2023 to January 18, 2024 with N = 4,522 US adults (inclusive of oversamples of 286 Jewish and 254 Muslim respondents). The margin of error (adjusted for weighting) is +/- 1.45% for the US average and higher for subgroups.

Recontact Survey: Online survey interviews were conducted from May 23 to June 11, 2024 with around half (N = 2,009) of the adults from the Main Survey. The margin of error (adjusted for weighting) is +/- 2.18% for the US average and higher for subgroups.

Regional Survey: Online survey interviews were conducted from April 30 to May 16, 2024 with N = 2,493 respondents from across three different metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs): Houston MSA, Kansas City MSA, and Pittsburgh MSA. This dataset was then split into 1161 respondents for Houston, 800 for Pittsburgh, and 532 for Kansas City. The datasets for the Houston and Pittsburgh areas were then matched down to samples of 1000 and 750 respectively (the Kansas City area dataset was not matched). The respondents in datasets that went through matching were matched to their own sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The sampling frames were constructed by stratified sampling from metropolitan-area-specific subsets of the 2021 Current Population Survey (CPS), with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file). The matched cases for all three datasets (unmatched for Kansas City) were then weighted to their own sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score functions all included age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years of education. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. After that, the weights for all datasets were then post-stratified on 2020 presidential vote choice, as well as a four-way stratification

of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories). Then, the Pittsburgh dataset alone went through an additional two-way stratification between gender and age (4-categories). From there, all 3 weights were completed, and the 3 sets of observations were combined in order to produce the final dataset.

The margin of error for the Houston MSA sample is: +/- 3.09 percent for the average and higher for subgroups. The margin of error for Kansas City MSA is: +/- 4.24 percent for the average and higher for subgroups. The margin of error for Pittsburgh MSA is: +/- 3.56 percent for the average and higher for subgroups.

Qualitative Research

Focus Groups: More in Common conducted five focus groups each in Houston, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh in partnership with the qualitative research recruiting firm ROI Rocket. Participants were selected based on feelings of community belonging and political party affiliation. Each group comprised 8-10 residents and was hosted online. Focus groups were conducted from August to September of 2024.

All focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to capture the attitudes, beliefs, and values of Americans in their own words. Quotes from focus groups and interviews are included throughout the report. Where provided, names have been changed to protect the privacy of the respondent. Quote attributions are based on participants' self-reported identification of their race/ethnicity, gender, and political ideology. Grammar and punctuation have been lightly edited for clarity.

Americans in Conversation: In addition to the focus groups, More in Common formed and hosted an online research community roughly representative of the US general population and engaged them in qualitative research activities on social connection from September 2023 to August 2024. A total of 204 US adults completed the survey activities. Quotes from participants on this panel are included in this report. Where provided, names have been changed to protect their privacy. Quote attributions are based on participants' own self-reported identification of their race/ethnicity, gender, and political ideology. Grammar and punctuation have been lightly edited for clarity.

Appendix B

Strengths and Limitations of the Data

This report attempts to answer questions about individual behavior and attitudes via online surveys and in-depth interviews. In order to ensure that the data we collected was of high quality, we performed the following procedures:

First, we conducted a pilot study of N = 1,000 US adults to test hypotheses, refine and select survey items through exploratory factor analysis, and conduct exploratory analyses with the data. We also wanted to see if results from the pilot study would replicate with a larger sample. Indeed, all of our primary results replicated. Specifically, in this report, the survey questions for Figures 1.3, 1.5, and 2.1 were all tested in the pilot study, refined, and the major trends identified were replicated. Many of the variables in Figures 3.2 and 3.3 were also tested and refined via the pilot study. Separately, we also piloted the survey question for Figure 2.2 with a sample of N = 204 US adults from our Americans in Conversation platform before inserting it into the Recontact Survey.

We also tested the language we used to ask about each line of difference to ensure that it was clear and understandable for survey participants. We were particularly focused on confirming that people understood the term "socioeconomic status." In our pilot testing, we found that the term “socioeconomic status” was well understood by the overwhelming majority of respondents.

In our surveys, we asked sensitive questions relating to people’s interest in connecting across lines of difference. We know that survey respondents are prone to social desirability bias, or the tendency to give answers that people think will make them look good, rather than what they truly believe or do. To account for this, at the end of the Main Survey (N = 4,522 US adults), we asked respondents if they agree (or not) with the following statement: “I felt pressure to respond in a particular way to the questions on this survey. [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree].” Only 9 percent of the sample was “high” in social desirability (scoring a 6 or 7 on the scale). We also confirmed that removing the participants who were high in social desirability did not change the results: excluding people high in social desirability led to no change in the direction and only minor changes to the magnitude of our primary results for the Main Survey. However, since social desirability survey questions cannot fully account for social desirability bias in self-report data, we acknowledge that some bias might have influenced our results. This underscores the need for future research to explore these questions using behavioral measures, which may better capture certain differences.

We hope these findings will serve as a foundation for further research on social connection in the US. Our results suggest several factors—from the psychological, like perceived community norms, to the practical, like lacking the opportunity to connect—affect interest in cross-group connection. Future work should investigate which interventions are most effective in increasing desire to connect, overcoming barriers, and promoting meaningful connection across the four lines of difference examined here. There are also other lines of difference beyond the scope of this report that may pose unique challenges and opportunities for fostering cross-group connection. Future research should explore how these additional social divides shape opportunities for

connection and identify ways to bridge them across varied social dimensions.

If you have any remaining questions about the data collected in this study or about the results of this study, please contact the researchers at us@moreincommon.com

Appendix C

Region Selection Criteria

For this project, we prioritized regions that would allow us to study critical variables present across the country with respect to social connection across lines of difference. This included looking at regions undergoing rapid change. We also prioritized regions that would have relevance as case studies for institutional partners and actors located in other areas. We also selected regions that were large enough to conduct rigorous quantitative research. Many regions met this criteria, but we decided on the three below for this study.

Houston, Texas is one of the largest and most diverse cities in the country. It has undergone significant change over the past several decades, with large shifts in its demographics and economy. From 2000 to 2020, Harris County (the county in which Houston sits) grew from 3.4 million to 4.7 million residents[93] and continued to diversify along race and ethnic lines: the Anglo (non-Hispanic white) population dropped from 42 percent of the population to 28 percent; the Hispanic population grew from 33 percent to 43 percent, the Asian population grew from 7 percept to 10 percent, and the Black population stayed more or less flat, going from 18 percent to 19 percent.[94] During this same time period, Houston's economy has also continued a long-term shift away from resource-intensive industries towards knowledge-based jobs (though energy-related employment is still a major source of jobs and drives a significant portion of the city's GDP).[95] Finally, there has also been a significant shift in ideological patterns within the city, especially relative to those in the broader state of Texas.[96]

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania mirrors some of Houston's dynamics, especially a regional economy shifting away from natural resource industries towards high-tech and knowledge-economy jobs. In the past four decades, Pittsburgh transformed from an industrial city reliant on the steel industry, struggling with massive unemployment to a more vibrant research, technology, and advanced manufacturing economy.[97] Demographically, the city is changing, though the overall population remains relatively stagnant.[98] From 2010 to 2020, the city saw the Asian-identifying population rise by 47 percent) and the Hispanic population rose by 67 percent.[99] During the same period, the non-Hispanic white population dropped roughly 2 percent, though the city remains 63% white (the city is predominantly white).[100] Pittsburgh also features substantial levels of inequality across race, with Black residents much more likely to experience poverty or homelessness,[101] and much less likely to have access to the internet at home[102] or to a conveniently-located public library. Finally, the greater Pittsburgh area has undergone ideological shifts, with Allegheny County voting more liberal[103] whereas the surrounding region has shifted to vote more conservative.[104]

Kansas City, Missouri grew by over 7 percent between the 2010 and 2020 Censuses,[105] with the surrounding area (suburbs) growing even faster.[106] This is significantly greater than the state overall, with Missouri growing by only approximately 3 percent in the same time period.[107] As of 2020, the city remains majority non-Hispanic white (at approximately 53 percent),[108] though residents of color were the fastest growing populations over roughly the past decade, with the Hispanic population growing

by approximately 33 percent and those who identify as being multiple races nearly doubling in population size.[109] As a city that straddles two states, Kansas City also presented a compelling opportunity to consider rural-urban dynamics, along with a range of market conditions salient to middle America.

Appendix D

Survey Question Wording

Please note: Survey questions that include the word "group" in brackets indicate that that question was asked four times, once for each line of difference (race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, political viewpoint).

For race/ethnicity, the specific wording we inserted was "different racial or ethnic background." For political viewpoint, the specific wording was "different political views." For religion, the specific wording was "different religion."

For socioeconomic status, we first asked participants to self-report if they were high or low in community status using the 10-point community status ladder scale (see below). People who said they were a 6 or above were asked about "people from a lower socioeconomic status." People who said they were 5 or lower were asked about "people from a higher socioeconomic status."

If you have any questions about the survey question wording, please contact the researchers at us@moreincommon.com*.*

Barriers to Cross-Group Connection

Which of the following statements reflects why you might not interact *more* with people of a different [group] than you? (Please select all that apply)

- I don't have enough regular opportunities to interact
- People like this don't live in my local community
- I don't have enough time
- I don't have the energy
- Interacting more isn't important to me
- Interacting would make me concerned for my personal safety
- I don't think other people in my life would approve
- I don't think that they want to interact with me
- To be honest, I don't really like [group] people
- I think it would be awkward or uncomfortable
- I don't think they would really understand me
- I'm afraid to say or do something that would offend them

Community Belonging[110]

Think about your relationship to your local community (specifically, your town or city). Please indicate your agreement/disagreement with the following statements. [1- Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- People in my community welcome and include me in activities.
- People in my community value me and my contributions.
- My relationships with others in my community are as satisfying as I want them to be.
- I feel like an "insider" who understands how my community works.
- I am comfortable expressing my opinions in my community.
- When interacting with people in my community, I feel like I truly belong.

Note: To binarize this measure into high/low we use scores of greater than or equal to 5 to indicate high, and below 5 to indicate low.

Community Safety
Please indicate your agreement/disagreement with the following statement. [1- Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- The place I live in is basically a safe, stable, and secure place

Community Status Ladder Scale
Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in their communities.

At the top of the ladder (step 10) are the people who have the highest socioeconomic standing in their community. At the bottom of the ladder (step 1) are people who have the lowest socioeconomic standing in their community. Please click on where you would place yourself on this ladder. [10 - Highest standing to 1- Lowest standing]

Concern for Division
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [1 - Strongly disagree to 5 - Strongly agree]

- I'm concerned about divisions between [group] in my local community.
- I'm concerned about divisions between different [group] in the United States as a whole.

Conditions for Connection
What would make you more likely to socialize with someone new who is from a different [group] background than you? (Choose up to 5)

- If I were confident that we had something in common (like if we shared similar interests or characteristics)
- If we had a common goal that we were working towards
- If I were confident that the interaction would go well
- If focusing on our differences weren't the main reason for why we connected
- If I were paid
- If we met online
- If I knew we shared the same political beliefs
- If it happened in spaces or activities I am already involved with
- If I knew they had respect for me
- If a mutual contact introduced us
- If I knew we would be talking about our different [group] backgrounds
- If I knew we would not be talking about our different [group] backgrounds
- Other (please describe)

Connective Responsibility
Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- In a complex society, we all have a shared responsibility to engage with people whose backgrounds and viewpoints are different from our own.

Note: To binarize this measure into high/low, we use scores of greater than or equal to 5 to indicate high, and below 5 to indicate low.

Empathic Concern[111]

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- I am often concerned that people with different [group] than mine are treated unfairly
- I feel moved when I hear about the life experiences of people with different [GROUP] than me
- I am troubled by the ways in which people with different [group] than mine are treated in this country

Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. I see myself as... [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- Extraverted, enthusiastic.
- Critical, quarrelsome.
- Open to new experiences, complex.
- Reserved, quiet.
- Sympathetic, warm.
- Conventional, uncreative.

Feeling of (Local) Community Trust

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- In general, it feels like most people in my local community can be trusted.
- Overall, it feels like people in my local community trust each other.

Frequency of Cross-Group Interaction

In your day-to-day life, how often do you find yourself interacting with people who have different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds than you? [1 - Never, 2 - Rarely, 3 - Sometimes, 4 - Often, 5 - All the time, 6 - I don't know].

Note: Respondents who selected "I don't know" were excluded from analyses using this item.

Intellectual Humility[112]

Please indicate how well each of the following statements describes you. [1 - Not at all like me to 5 - Very much like me]

- I question my own opinions, positions, and viewpoints because they could be wrong.
- I reconsider my opinions when presented with new evidence.
- I recognize the value in opinions that are different from my own.

Interest in Bridging Activities/ Connecting Across Difference

Thinking about the near future, please indicate how interested you are in doing each of the following: [1 - Not at all interested, 2 - Slightly interested, 3 - Moderately interested, 4 - Very interested, 5 - Extremely interested]

- Engaging in an extended conversation with someone who has [group] views / background that are different from yours
- Talking about [group] tensions with someone who has [group] views /background that are different from yours

- Forming a close friendship with someone who has [group] views /background that are different from yours
- Inviting into your home as a guest someone who has a [group] viewpoint / background that is different from yours
- Working in the same work group with someone who has a [group] viewpoint / background that is different than yours
- Going to a function or social event also attended by people who have [group] views/background that are different from yours
- Working to achieve a mutual goal that improves your community with someone who has a [group] viewpoint/background that is different from yours

Note: To binarize this measure into high/low we use scores of greater than or equal to 3 to indicate high, and below 3 to indicate low.

Intergroup Anxiety[113]

When you think about being around people who have a different [group] viewpoint/ background than you, how much do you feel uncomfortable or comfortable around them? [0 - Very comfortable to 10 - Very uncomfortable]

Intergroup Self-Efficacy[114]

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- I am confident that I can successfully manage discussions of [group] issues with people who have [group] viewpoints different from my own.
- I feel confident in my ability to address [group] issues as they arise in conversation with people who have different [group] viewpoints.
- I am confident that I have the ability to develop positive relationships with people with [group] viewpoints different from my own
- I feel sure about how to act and what to say when I am interacting with people with [group] viewpoints different from my own.

Learning Orientation[115]

Please indicate how well each of the following statements describes you. [1 - Not at all like me to 5 - Very much like me]

- I feel like I can learn a lot from interacting with people whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from my own.
- I want to understand how people from other backgrounds and with different viewpoints see the world.

Number of Close Out-Group Friends

If you had to estimate, approximately what percent of your close friends have the same [group] viewpoints/backgrounds as you? [Numeric slider, 0 to 100. Answers are reverse coded.]

Note: This was also the item we used to calculate "Average Percentage of Friends of Another [group]" in Chapter 4.

Perceived Community Norms[116]

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- People in my local community often spend time with people who have different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds than them.
- In general, people in my local community would approve of my spending time with people who have different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds than me.
- If given the choice, people should spend time with people who have different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds than them because it is the right thing to do.

Note: To binarize this measure into high/low we use scores of greater than or equal to 5 to indicate high, and below 5 to indicate low. Item 1 is the descriptive norm. Item 2 is a community norm. Item 3 is the injunctive norm.

Recent Experiences of Different Bridging Activities

In the last year, have you experienced any of the following? Select all that apply.

- Engaged in an extended conversation with someone who has [group] views / background that are different from yours
- Talked about politics or [group] tensions with someone who has [group] views / background that are different from yours
- Formed a close friendship with someone who has [group] views /background that are different from yours
- Invited into your home as a guest someone who has a [group] viewpoint / background that is different from yours
- Worked in the same work group with someone who has a [group] viewpoint / background that is different than yours
- Went to a function or social event also attended by people who have [group] views/ background that are different from yours
- Worked to achieve a mutual goal that improves your community with someone who has a [group] viewpoint/background that is different from yours

Religious Importance

How important is religion in your life? [1 - Very important to 4 - Not at all important].
Note: This item was reverse coded for analyses.

Religious Participation

Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? [1 - Never to 6 - More than once a week; and, 7 - Don't know]
Note: Respondents who selected "Don't know" were excluded from analyses using this item.

Political Ideology

In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint? [1 - Very Liberal, 2 - Liberal, 3 - Moderate, 4 - Conservative, 5 - Very Conservative, 6 - Not sure].
Note: Respondents who selected "Not sure" were excluded from analyses using this item.

Proximity to Urban Areas

Would you say you live in an urban, suburban, or rural community?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

Social Curiosity

Please indicate how well each of the following statements describes you. [1 - Not at all

like me to 5 - Very much like me]

- I ask people a lot of questions to figure out what interests them.
- When talking to someone, I try to discover interesting details about them.
- I like finding out why people behave the way they do.

Social Dominance Orientation[117]

There are many ways we can categorize ourselves into different "groups"—by gender, ethnicity, religion, politics, etc. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about consideration of different groups in general. You can work quickly; your first feeling is generally best. [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]

- In setting priorities, we must consider all groups.
- We should not push for group equality.
- Group equality should be our ideal.
- Superior groups should dominate inferior groups.

Support for Community Integration[118]

- Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: [1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree]
- I feel confident that, in the future, relations between people who have different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds will be better than they are today.
- Greater integration of people with different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds would make my community a better place to live.
- I would like to live in a community where there is greater mixing and interaction among people with different [group] viewpoints/backgrounds than what exists where I live today.

Note: To binarize this measure into high/low we use scores of greater than or equal to 5 to indicate high, and below 5 to indicate low.

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