

Social Connection Across Difference in the US

Pilot Study, November 2023

**More in
Common**



About



The report was conducted by More in Common US, a nonpartisan research nonprofit that works to understand the forces driving us apart, find common ground, and bring people together to address shared challenges.

We work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, and government organizations, to help connect people across lines of division. Learn more at www.moreincommon.com/us.

We would like to thank Linda R. Tropp, Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, for her insights, contributions, and feedback on this project.

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Introduction

The United States is facing a [crisis](#) in social connection, a critical driver of both individual and community health. At the same time, the US is both increasingly [segregated](#) and [polarized](#), making it even more challenging for fellow Americans to engage with one another, especially across lines of difference.

To help identify actionable solutions to this crisis, More in Common wants to know: *Who is interested in connecting across difference in the US and why?*

By understanding the characteristics, beliefs, and behaviors of people based on their interest in connecting across difference, we can help communities develop strategies to strengthen social cohesion at the local level. Our insights will also contribute to the creation of effective communication strategies that can reach and engage new audiences in bridging and connection work.

The findings in this publication are from a national pilot study (N=1,000 US adults), conducted in August 2023, that was launched to aid in the development of a larger national survey. That survey (projected to launch late 2023/early 2024) will build off these findings and provide further insight into our research questions.

Additionally, in 2024, we will conduct regional surveys as well as focus groups in Pittsburgh, Kansas City, and Houston to understand dynamics of intergroup contact and connection across difference at the local level.

We will share new insights as our research progresses over the coming year. In the meantime, we hope these initial findings spark ideas for how to create new opportunities for connection across difference and inspire confidence that improving intergroup relations is possible.



Research Question & Methodology

Research Question

Who is interested in connecting across difference in the US and why?

Four types of "connection":

1. Going to a function or social event attended mostly by people from _____ backgrounds that are different from yours
2. Engaging in an extended conversation with someone from a _____ background that is different from yours
3. Talking about _____ tensions with someone from a _____ background that is different from yours
4. Forming close friendships with people from _____ backgrounds that are different from yours

Four "lines of difference":

1. Racial or ethnic
2. Political*
3. Socioeconomic
4. Religious

*Political questions are phrased as "...people/someone who have/has political views that are different from yours"

Method: US adult Survey

Results are shown as "US Average."

More in Common partnered with international polling company YouGov to conduct online survey interviews with N=1,000 US adults from August 4-15th, 2023. The data was weighted to be representative of the US adult 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, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (6-category), race (5-category), and education (4-category). The margin of error (adjusted for weighting) is +/- 3.099% for the US average and higher for subgroups.



Top Findings

1. A majority of Americans (72%) agree that we have a responsibility to connect with people who are different from us.
2. Many Americans express interest in engaging in activities across lines of difference, though levels of interest vary somewhat by outgroup and type of connection.
3. The more people think others in their community are connecting across lines of difference (the more “normative” this behavior seems), the more interested they are to connect as well. This relationship is stronger for groups that are less inclined to engage, like the Politically Disengaged.
4. The number one reason cited by Americans who do not actively interact across racial, religious, or socioeconomic differences is lack of opportunity. Exhaustion is the top reason for lack of interaction across political divides.



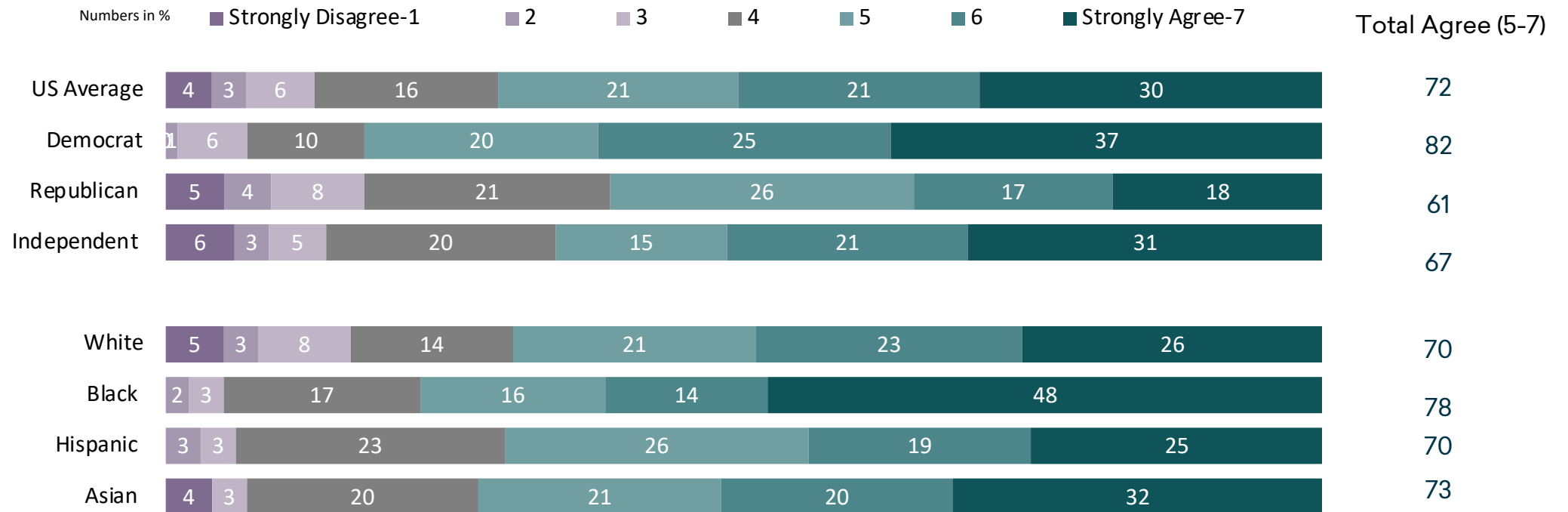
Attitudes on Connecting Across Difference

Most Americans are interested in connecting across difference, though levels of interest vary by outgroup and type of connection.



7 out of 10 Americans agree that we have a shared responsibility to connect across lines of difference.

In a complex society, I believe we all have a shared responsibility to engage with people who are different from us.



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

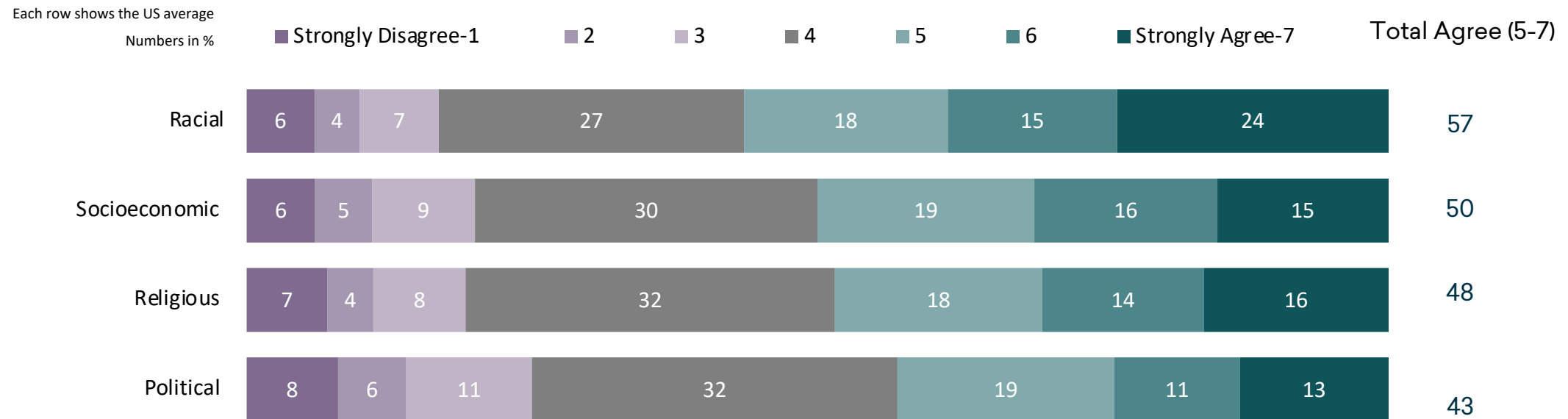
Source: More in Common

Note: Numbers in data visualizations are rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures may total to larger or smaller than one-hundred percent due to rounding, and column totals may not match with individual data points in graphics due to rounding.



Many Americans agree that greater integration of people with different backgrounds would make their communities better places to live. No more than a quarter of Americans disagree.

Greater integration of people from a different _____ background than me would make my community a better place to live.



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

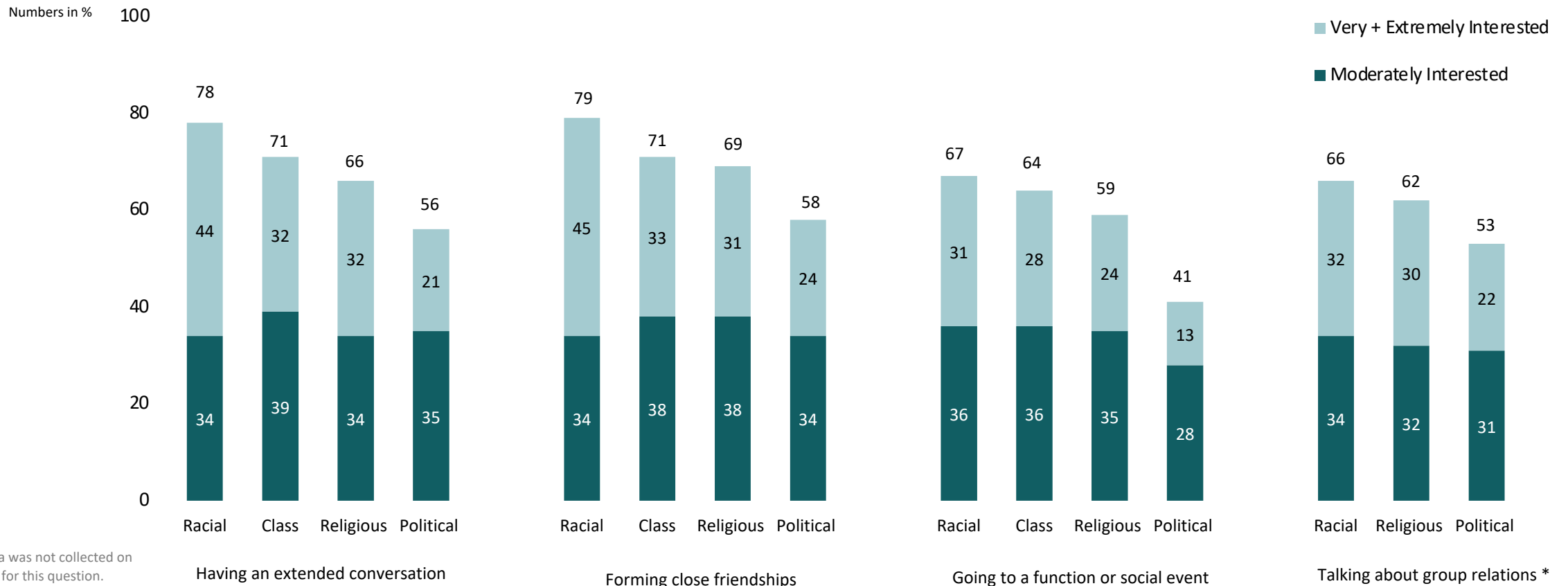
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Many Americans express interest in engaging in activities across lines of difference.



Thinking about the near future, please indicate how interested you are in doing the following with people from a different ____ background than you:



*Data was not collected on class for this question.



Many Americans express support and interest in engaging with people from different backgrounds.

“It is very important to respect others. Being able to interact with people from different cultures makes us richer.”

– Susan, Millennial, White Female, Traditional Conservative, Florida

“My best, loyal, and longtime friends are of different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds, even since my childhood. As a military veteran, all types and lifestyles were not an issue.”

– David, Silent Generation, White Male, Devoted Conservative, Florida

“...People should not be afraid to learn about other cultures and religions, because this diversity is what makes our country great.”

– Aaron, Millennial, White Male, Traditional Conservative, California

“I live in a dominant Black neighborhood. I would love for White, or Hispanic people to move to my neighborhood. I’m not prejudice or racist. I love everybody. And love diversity.”

– Barbara, Baby Boomer, Black Female, Passive Liberal, Ohio

Question: We invite you to describe, in 100 words or less, what might make it challenging for you to interact with people from a different [racial, political, religious, or socioeconomic outgroup] than you?

Source: More in Common

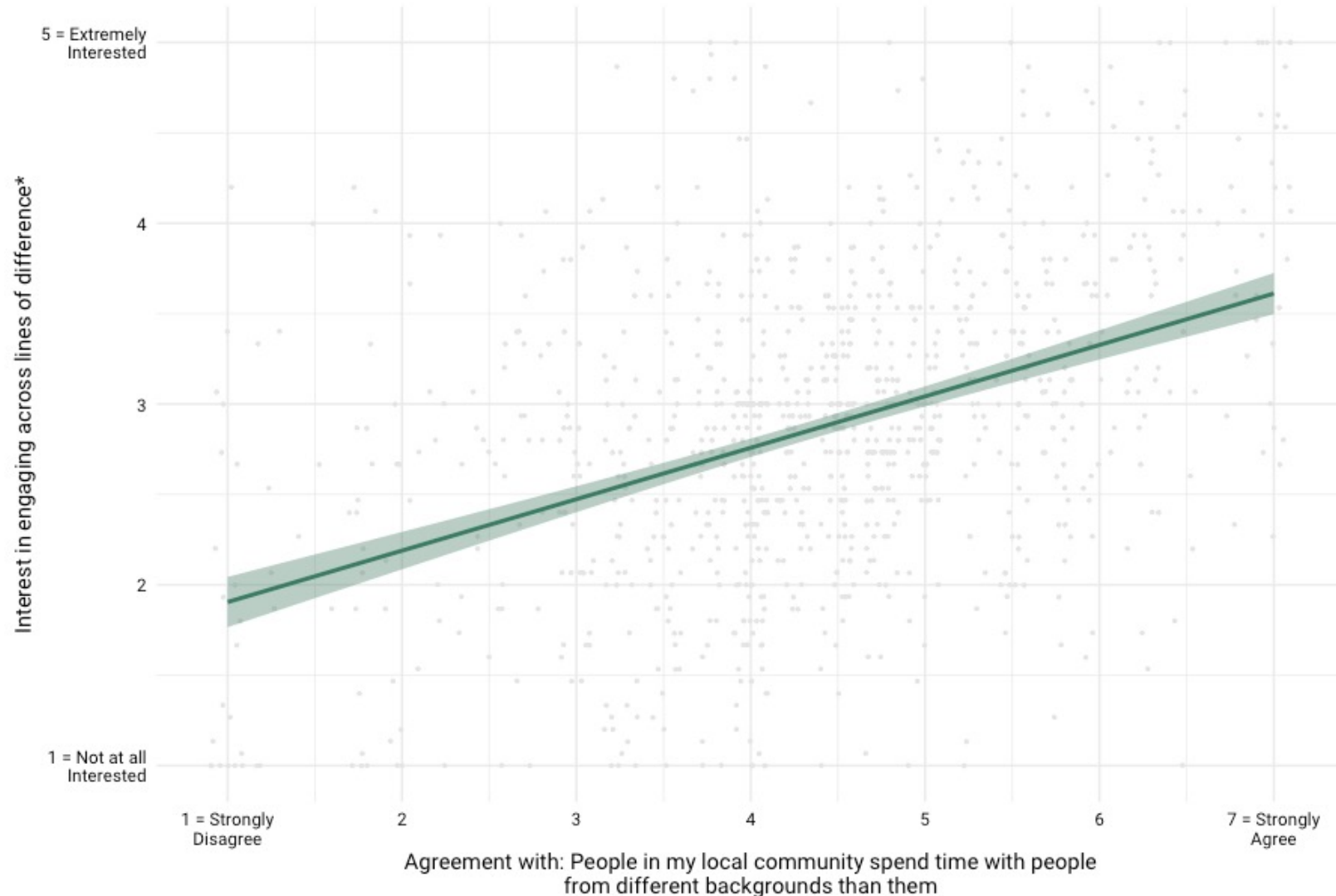


Social Norms and Willingness to Connect

The more people think others in their community are connecting across lines of difference (the more “normative” or common this behavior seems), the more interested they are to connect as well.



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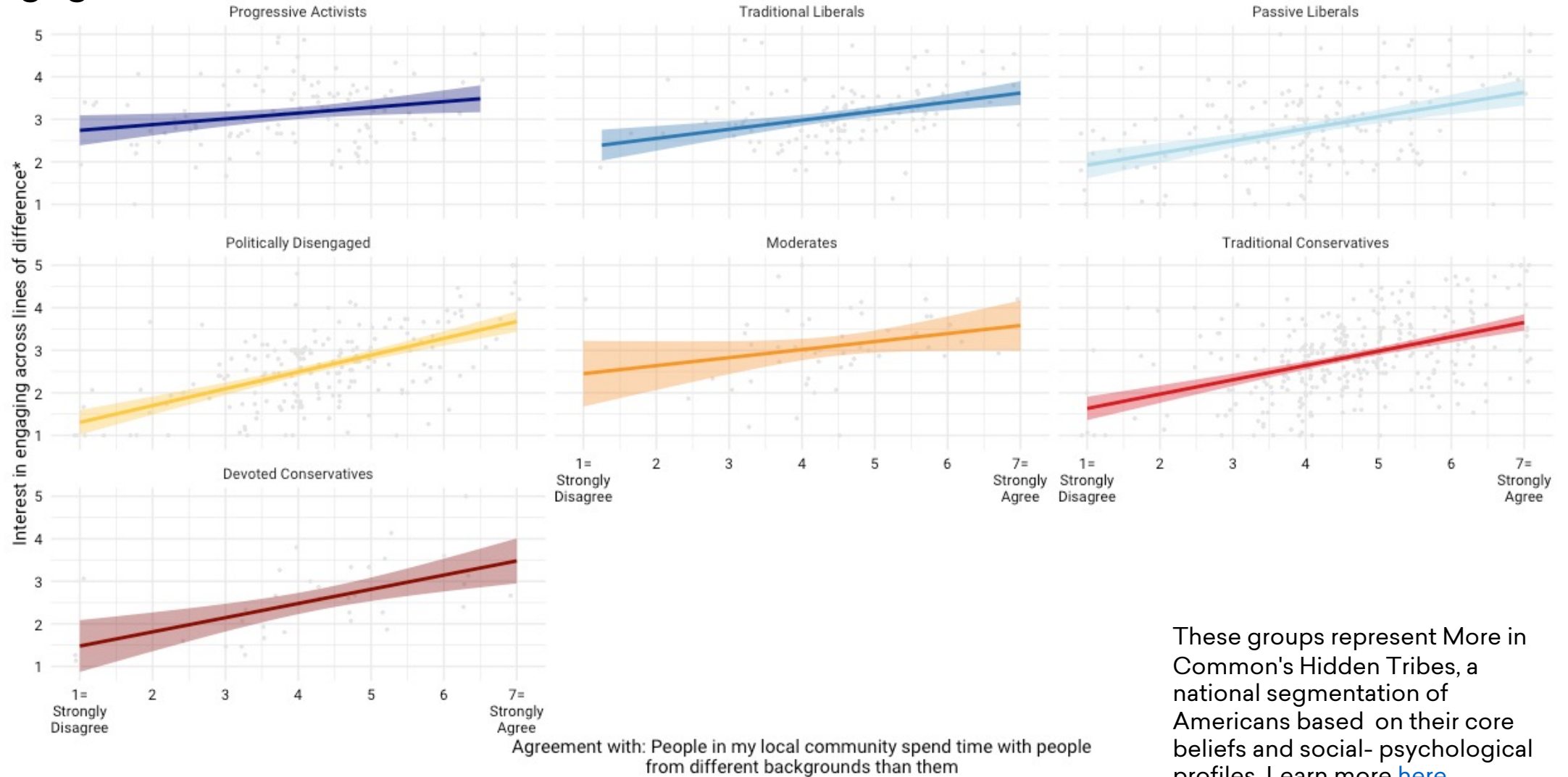


Social norms- informal standards that describe typical or desirable behavior- have a **powerful influence** over how people behave in a society.

*Note:
The measure on the y-axis is a composite

Source: More in Common

The link between social norms of connection and interest in connection is stronger for groups that are less inclined to engage, like the Politically Disengaged.

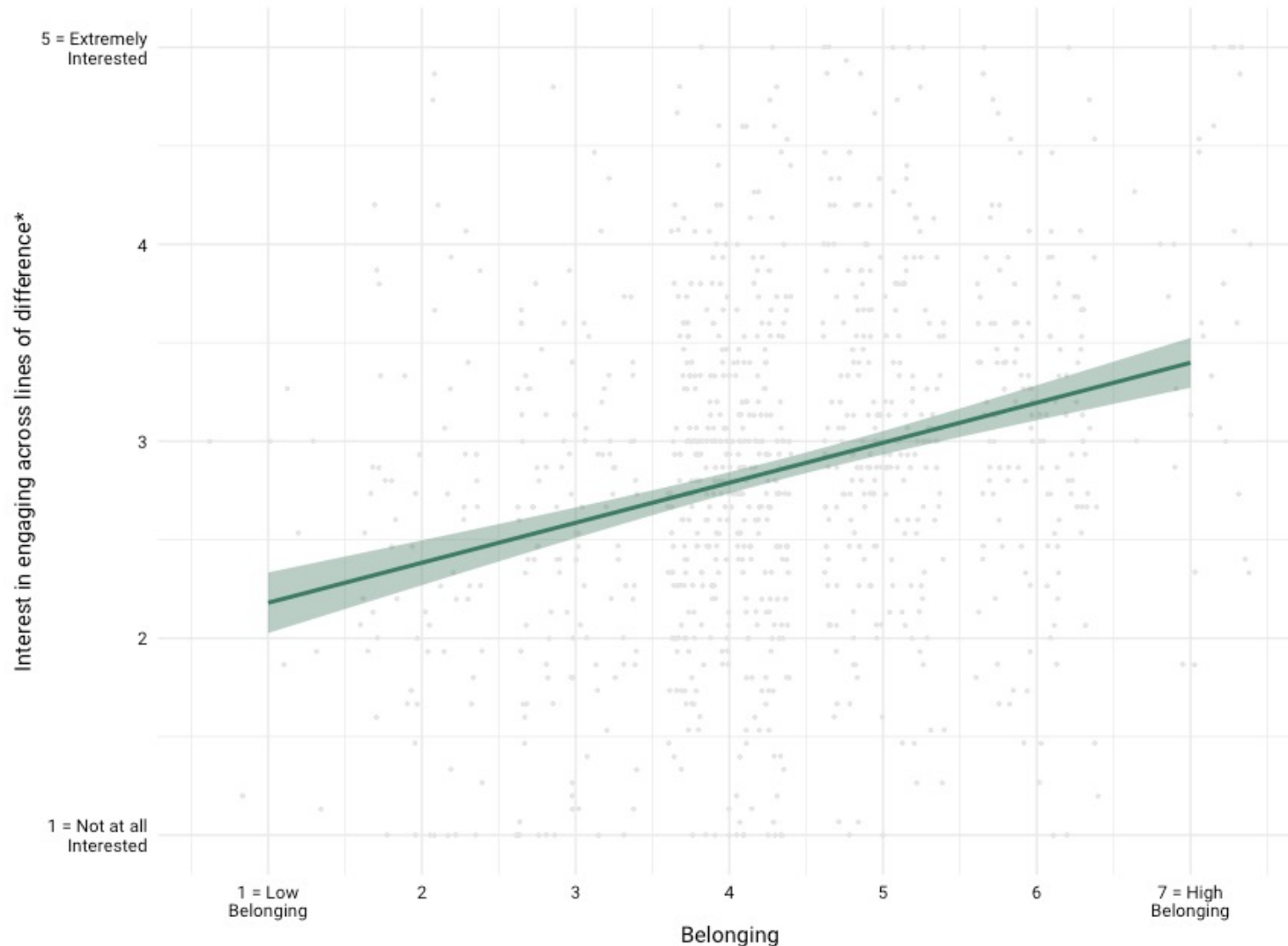


*Note:
The measure on the y-axis is a composite
1= Not at all interested
5=Extremely interested

Source: More in Common

These groups represent More in Common's Hidden Tribes, a national segmentation of Americans based on their core beliefs and social- psychological profiles. Learn more [here](#).

The more belonging people feel at the local community level, the more interested they are to engage across lines of difference.



Belonging is a feeling or state in which one experiences connection, psychological safety, and a sense of agency within a group.

*Note:
The measure on the y-axis is a composite

Source: More in Common



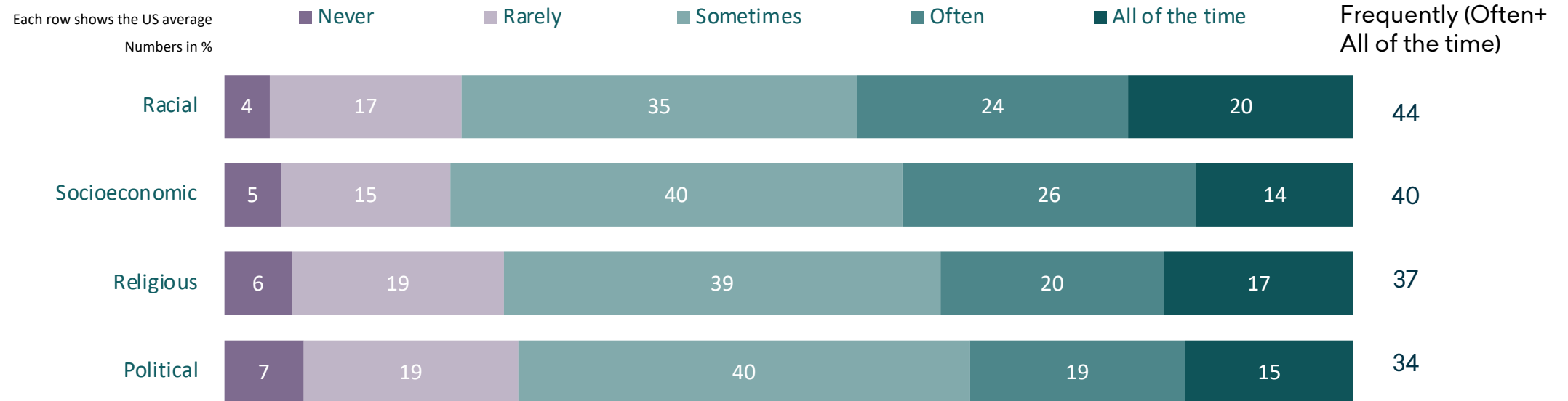
What prevents Americans from connecting?

Most Americans who are not interacting often across lines of difference say they lack the opportunity to do so.



About only 4 in 10 Americans say that they frequently interact across lines of difference.

In your day-to-day life, how often do you find yourself interacting with people from a different _____ background than you?



Question: In your day-to-day life, how often do you find yourself interacting with people from a different [GROUP] than you?

Source: More in Common

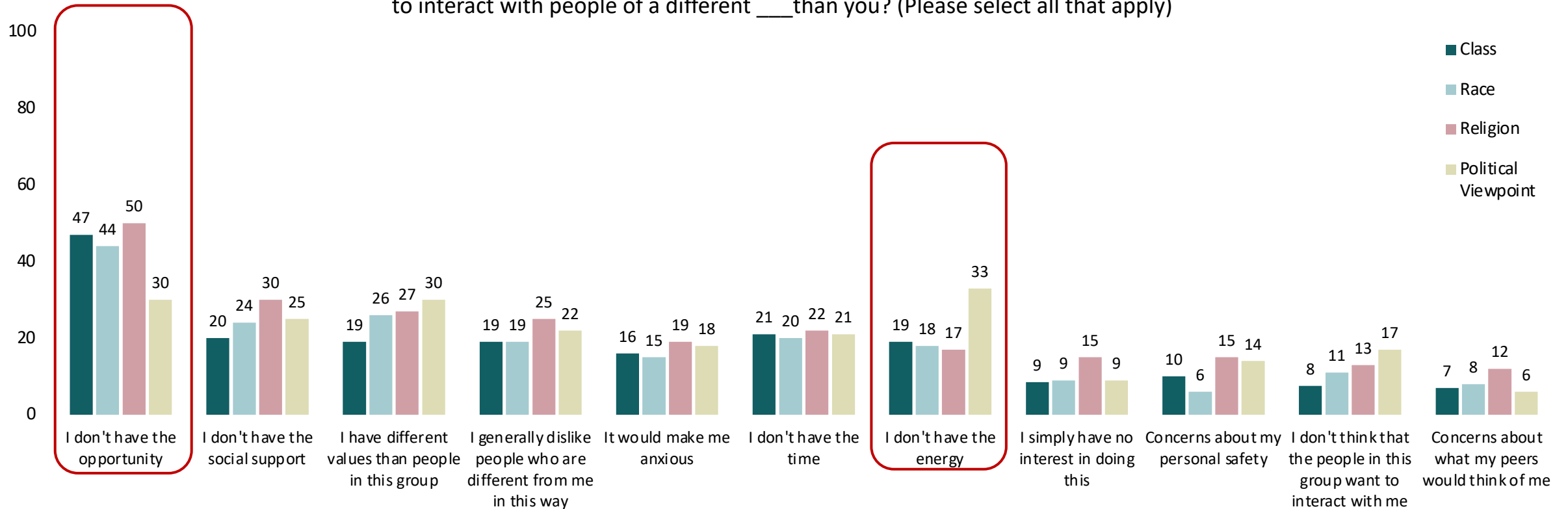
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For Americans who do not interact often across lines of difference, a "lack of opportunity" is the most cited reason. "Lacking energy" is the top reason cited for political difference.

Numbers in %

Which of the following factors best reflects what might make it challenging for you to interact with people of a different ___ than you? (Please select all that apply)



Note: This question was given to respondents who stated that they currently interact "sometimes," "rarely," or "never" across lines of difference.



Some respondents express that the locations where they spend time limited their ability to engage across difference.

"There are very few natural / organic opportunities to [connect]. 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.**"

– Pauline, Gen Z, White Female, Traditional Liberal, Indiana

"I live in a very rural area, without a lot of any type of diversity."

– Marie, Millennial, White Female, Progressive Activist, Pennsylvania

"I feel like 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.**"

– Zack, Gen Z, Asian and "Other" Male, Progressive Activist, Massachusetts

Question: We invite you to describe, in 100 words or less, what might make it challenging for you to interact with people from a different [racial, political, religious, or socioeconomic outgroup] than you?

Source: More in Common



Others express concern that the interaction would be difficult—especially when engaging with people who have different political beliefs.

"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."

– Mike, Baby Boomer, White Male, Passive Liberal, Texas

"It might become difficult because some people who have differing political viewpoints like to start yelling and arguing with people who believe differently than them."

-Lucas, Gen X, Hispanic Male, Moderate, California

"It might be challenging to interact with people from certain religious backgrounds because they might try to push you to believe that theirs is the only right religion."

– Ruth, Silent Generation, White Female, Moderate, Arizona

"I have often encountered people who not only express different political views, but who threatened or acted violently against me or others who hold different political views."

- Johnny, Gen X, White Male, Progressive Activist, California



Some share concern that they would not feel understood by others....

“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.”

– Caroline, Gen X, White Female, Traditional Conservative, New York

“...Not understanding the feeling of being a minority.”

– Leon, Millennial, Asian Male, Traditional Liberal, Michigan

“I do not have religion, and I feel that people who are religious may not understand me.”

– Danielle, Gen X, Asian Female, Passive Liberal, California

Question: We invite you to describe, in 100 words or less, what might make it challenging for you to interact with people from a different [racial, political, religious, or socioeconomic outgroup] than you?

Source: More in Common



...while others share a fear of making others uncomfortable.

“If there is a language barrier. I have trouble understanding people with accents. I do not want to offend them by asking them to repeat themselves. I don't want to say or do the wrong thing. I don't want to make them feel awkward.”

– Linda, Baby Boomer, Hispanic Female, Passive Liberal, 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.”

– Jackie, Baby Boomer, White Female, Progressive Activist, Rhode Island

What's next?

These insights just touch the surface of what we can learn about Americans' interest in connecting across lines of difference. We hope they have sparked interest in how to think about increasing these connections. For example, how can community leaders leverage the power of norms to increase willingness to engage? If many Americans are interested in connecting but lack the opportunity to do so, how can community leaders create more spaces for these types of connections to occur?

In the coming months, we are going to be digging further into these ideas as well as our leading question: *Who is interested in connecting across difference and why?*, via more quantitative and qualitative data collection at the national level and in Houston, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh.

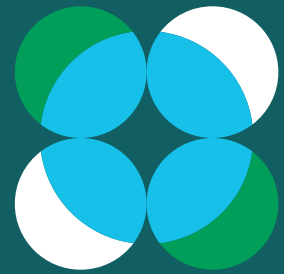
Additional questions we hope to answer include:

- What other types of cross-group activities draw public interest?
- What do Americans mean when they say that they "lack the opportunity" to connect?
- Outside of home and work, where are people connecting across lines of difference?
- And more!

If you want to stay up to date about future insights and/or have connections in Houston, Kansas City, or Pittsburg that might be interested in our work, we'd love to connect! **Reach out here.**

Learn more on our website and sign up for our newsletter at www.moreincommon.com/us

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