Moving Forward Together:

Partisans' Motivations for Seeking Out Cross-partisan Contact

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Abstract

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Affective polarization in American politics is having a detrimental effect on our ability to function as a society, but intergroup contact between people with different political views has the potential to reduce some of the prejudice the two sides have for each other. Unfortunately, many people avoid intergroup contact and not much is known about what motivates someone to seek it out. This dissertation explored what types of people engage in cross-partisan contact and what factors are important to their interest in reaching across the political aisle. Focusing on the population of people who are involved in an organization that fosters cross-partisan contact, I conducted a survey with 362 respondents, which I compared to a nationally representative sample who had answered the same questions. Then I interviewed 27 of those survey respondents about how they became interested in the organization. Overall, I found that MADA participants are more politically active and have stronger negative feelings about the other party than the national population, but they also believe in the necessity of compromise and have some positive views about people on the other side (often stemming from positive views of humanity as a whole). Also, they generally had experienced positive interactions and even friendships with people who were different from themselves, politically or otherwise.

Keywords: Intergroup contact, polarization, communication, motivation, American politics

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Chapter One

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, scholars and political leaders have warned that differences in America between Democrats and Republicans are widening, leading to problems ranging from the political to the personal. This pattern occurs in both a growing gulf in ideological beliefs and increasing levels of dislike members of each party hold for the other (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). While some amount of polarization can give voters meaningful choices and motivate active involvement in politics (Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006), research has shown that increasing polarization at both the elite and public level has contributed to gridlock in Congress, decreased public trust in government, severed social connections, and missed economic opportunities, since research shows that people would rather work for and buy products from people with their same political ideology (even if it means making less money or paying more) (Barber & McCarty, 2015; Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015; Poteat, Mareish, Liu, & Nam, 2011; Grevet, Terveen, & Gilbert, 2014; McConnel, Margalit, Malhotra, & Levendusky, 2018). While it is easy to look at ideological differences as the source of polarization, the greatest polarization is seen not in how partisans feel about policy but in how partisans feel about one another, also known as affective polarization—In 1994, only around 16% of each party said they had a "very unfavorable" view of the other party, but by 2017, that number had grown to around 44% (Pew Research, 2017b). People on different sides of the aisle like each other less and see each other as more different than they did several decades ago (Dimock et al., 2014), and although there are real differences in both the policy preferences and the cultural identity of liberals and conservatives, partisans increasingly exaggerate these differences and see each other

as more different than they actually are (Graham, Nosek, & Haidt, 2012). These facts illustrate that polarization is really an issue of emotion and identity.

Research has shown that the way people communicate about politics influences this phenomenon of affective polarization. Much of the blame for polarization has been placed on the way politicians and the news media talk about issues and campaigns, and research confirms that divisive rhetoric in mass media can have a polarizing effect. For example, Han & Federico (2018) found that news coverage tends to frame political issues in terms of partisan conflict, focusing on the disagreement between the parties in their coverage, a practice which leads viewers to be more polarized on the issue. Politicians likewise contribute to polarization through their campaigns, which often use us-versus-them rhetoric because it effectively mobilizes voters to be more involved (Miller & Conover, 2015). Unfortunately, it also leads to greater animosity towards the other political party, as evidenced by the fact that in more competitive districts and districts where more negative campaign ads are shown, voters express greater levels of distrust and dislike of people on the other side of the aisle (Sood & Iyengar, 2016; Iyengar et al., 2012). The media and politicians aren't solely to blame, however; the way individuals communicate about politics in interpersonal conversations can also exacerbate polarization. Specifically, when people talk about politics in groups of like-minded others, they tend to end the conversation with more extreme views than they started with (Sunstein, 2002). Because partisans have sorted into different geographic regions and different media networks, and because those with minority opinions are less likely to speak up, homogenous political conversations are increasingly the norm (Bishop & Cushing, 2008; Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Stroud, 2011). When we rarely interact with individuals of different political persuasions, it's easier for us to see opposing partisans as

part of a competing outgroup, which activates our tendency to show bias in favor of our social group and against the opposing group.

Although the way we typically communicate about politics is contributing to polarization, discussing politics differently—specifically discussing politics in ideologically diverse groups—is potentially one of the best ways to reduce affective polarization. When people talk about politics in groups where multiple perspectives are represented, the group ends up with less extreme views than it started with (Sunstein, 2002). Additionally, those who have more friends on the other side of the political spectrum are less likely to see the other party unfavorably (Pew Research, 2017b), and developing cross-group friendships has been shown to reduce prejudice because it allows people to see their group identities as overlapping rather than only competing (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008). This is consistent with intergroup contact theory, which shows that, given the right conditions, intergroup prejudice can be reduced through positive contact between members of competing social groups, such as Republicans and Democrats (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). This is especially true when these interactions focus on fostering empathy and perspective-taking between members of the conflicting social groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Wang et al., 2014). While much of this research has been done with conflicting racial or ethnic groups, some research suggests that encouraging cross-partisan conversations can also reduce feelings of animosity towards members of the opposite political party (Manbeck et al., 2018). However, while hundreds of studies show the potential positive effects of intergroup contact, people engage in such contact far less than we would expect, despite increasing diversity in many nations. Additionally, when confronted with political differences, many stay silent rather than voice their views, which limits the potential positive effects (Noelle-Neumann, 1993; Dunn et al., 2019). In fact, Pew Research found that only 48%

of Americans would share their views about President Donald Trump at a friend's dinner party where the others at the table held the opposite view about the president (Dunn et al., 2019). Research suggests people often avoid intergroup contact because of anxiety about the outgroup (Paolini, Harris, & Griffin, 2016), but far less is known about what actually drives someone to seek out this contact. In order to increase the amount of intergroup contact that actually happens, and thus reduce hostility and foster empathy across party lines, we need to better understand what types of people engage in such contact and why they do so.

An ideal way to learn about what drives someone to voluntarily interact with a rival social group is by studying nonprofits that try to reduce affective partisanship through events that bringing conservatives and liberals together. For example, Better Angels hosts Red-Blue workshops that help you, "better understand the experiences and beliefs of those on the other side of the political divide" (*Better Angels,* n.d.). The Village Square also hosts conversation events that "build community in our hometowns across ideological divisions" (*Village Square,* n.d.). Other organizations, like The People's Supper and Make America Dinner Again (MADA) host these conversations in the form of dinners that promise to be an "avenue to listen" rather than an avenue to fight or protest (*Make America Dinner…,* n.d.), and some (like MADA and Allsides) try to use digital formats to foster cross-partisan conversations. Most of these nonprofits encourage participants to discuss their values and tell stories about their backgrounds, with the hope that partisans will focus on their shared humanity and goodness even while acknowledging their different perspectives on politics. Although most of these groups are fairly new and haven't done much to validate their process, one group—The Village Square—found that liberals were more likely to agree with the statement "Conservatives are good people" after the event than before it (Iyer, 2016), and the abundant contact theory literature also suggests that

their approach can be effective. But what is perhaps most remarkable about these nonprofits is that they get their participants from voluntary sign-ups. Organizations spread awareness about their events through various media channels and then those who are interested have to sign up online and show up to an event. The events won't come to them and no one is going to make them sign up, so participants have to be highly invested in having this interaction with partisans on the other side. While 48% of Americans would be willing share their views on Trump if they happened to meet people with opposite views at a dinner party (Dunn et al., 2019), participants in these groups take it a step further by seeking out people who disagree with them in order to have such conversations. This makes these nonprofits an ideal place to learn about what drives someone to seek out intergroup contact, especially between conservatives and liberals in the United States.

This dissertation outlines the project I undertook to add to the body of research about predictors and motivators of intergroup contact between people with conservative and liberal ideologies. The project focused on one nonprofit in particular, Make America Dinner Again, also known as MADA. I chose to focus on MADA, out of the many nonprofits, for three main reasons. First, with chapters in 14 major cities across the country (from Tri-Cities in Eastern Washington to Dallas, Texas, to Boston, Massachusetts) it is one of the largest organizations putting on cross-partisan events. Second, it has an active Facebook discussion group (with daily discussion prompts and over 500 members) in addition to regular events, which allows them to include even those who don't live near a major city, where most events take place. And third, I am involved in the nonprofit, and my connections with the founder allowed me to access the population of interest and provide feedback directly to the program organizers so that my research might be useful to them in improving and expanding their future efforts. Additionally,

although MADA is only one of several organizations that foster cross-partisan contact, it is similar to other nonprofits in its recruitment methods and formatting, which enabled me to draw conclusions about what drives someone to sign up that can be applied to other organizations as well.

This dissertation proceeds in several sections: in the first part of chapter one, the conceptual argument, I explain the driving forces behind our current state of polarization, discussing (1) how value differences contribute to our sense of identity among conservatives and liberals, (2) how our evolved sense of social identity encourages us to behave in a biased way to favor our group, and (3) how recent developments in politics and media has activated our sense of identity and increased affective polarization. Next, in the second part of the conceptual argument, I discuss contact theory and, specifically, what motivates someone to seek or avoid intergroup contact. In chapter three, I explain two methods—a survey and in-depth interviews—that I undertook to understand (1) who MADA participants are and whether they differ from the general population of adults in the United States; and (2) what attitudes, life experiences, and contextual factors might influence their decision to be part of MADA. Chapter four reports the results of the survey, and chapter five reports the results of the interviews. Finally, in chapter six, I explain the implications of these findings and how they add to existing literature about what motivates people to engage in intergroup contact.

The survey was conducted among all MADA participants to create a profile of the people who voluntarily participate in these discussions and compare them to the general population. The survey consisted of questions about demographics, affective polarization, and attitudes about government, which were drawn from various surveys by Pew Research, as well as the "feeling thermometer question" from the American National Election Study. This allowed me to compare

MADA participants to the general population of adults in the United States. Many of these questions involve attitudes that may influence whether someone is interested in intergroup contact, which shed light on whether differences from the general population might have helped them to be more open to participating in MADA. Altogether, the survey provides insights into what type of people seek out intergroup contact. The interviews involved talking to twenty-seven people who took the survey to explore the backstory of what made them interested in MADA. The interviews were analyzed to identify themes about what factors participants associate with their interest and involvement with MADA. These methods together contribute to our knowledge of what leads people to intergroup contact, and, in turn, help future researchers and practitioners develop strategies to encourage interaction across party lines.

Chapter Two

Conceptual Argument

Conflict between social groups is an old and difficult problem because our loyalty to certain groups is rooted in our nature as social creatures. Human survival has long depended on our ability to cooperate with our tribe, often while also competing with other tribes. This caused humans to develop certain group-favoring abilities because groups whose members were more cohesive and loyal to each other (and fought more intensely with the enemy) were more likely to survive (see Haidt, 2012). These social abilities lead to some of life's most beautiful experiences—the love between family members, the feeling of togetherness we get during shared events like concerts or sporting events—but they have also contributed to some of history's biggest tragedies, when loyalty to one group and hatred of another have driven people to war and genocide. This is because groups have boundaries—they include some and exclude others—and the boundaries themselves are important to group members' sense of who they are and what the group means.

One of the main ways people develop a sense of group identity is through shared values—values which are instilled by a person's family and community from a very young age. Schwartz (1999) defines values as conceptions of the desirable that guide the way social actors select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations. When these conceptions are not just about what is desirable but what is ethically right, we call them morals, and when communities share a sense of what is right and what is important, it helps enforce norms and creates a sense of shared purpose that binds the community together (Haidt, 2007). Although values and morals often transcend politics, Boninger and colleagues (1995) found that our values have a separate effect on our attitudes that goes beyond social identification, and they

are a key part of how political parties define themselves to voters. In fact, Miles and Vaisey (2015) found that someone's moral values predict their political party identity more strongly than demographic variables like ethnicity, illustrating the importance of moral fit in a person's decision to align with a certain political party. Values are clearly an important part of social identity.

Several researchers have developed theories to explain what these values are. According to Moral Foundations Theory, liberals value caring for others and being fair, thinking about fairness in terms of equality of both opportunity and outcome. Conservatives, on the other hand, also value caring for others, but it has less of an impact on their political perspective, and they care about fairness, but think of it in terms of proportionality—making sure the consequences match the action (Graham et al, 2011). Conservatives also care about three additional values that liberals generally don't care about: loyalty to an ingroup, respect for authority, and protection of the pure or sacred (Graham et al., 2009). Lakoff's (1996) theory touches on similar ideas, but articulates it differently; he claims that we think of the nation as our family, and conservatives value a strict-father type of governing while liberals value a more nurturing, individualistic parenting style. A third theory from Hunter (1991) claims that most cultural division, including partisan conflict, comes from different ideas of moral authority: conservatives claim an orthodox view where morality is unchanging and comes from an authoritative source, and liberals claim a progressive view where morality develops over time and is flexible to new circumstances. All three of these perspectives have merit, though Miles and Vaisey (2015) found that the most consistently differentiating value difference is that conservatives value order and liberals value being other-focused. These value differences help explain how deeply held beliefs lead to deeply held group identities, and research has shown that people are aware of these value differences:

Graham, Nosek, & Haidt (2012) found that when asked to fill out a quiz about morals as if they were a member of a particular political party, respondents guessed moral priorities correctly but exaggerated the differences. Moral values are clearly a major way parties define and differentiate themselves.

The moral identities of liberals and conservatives provide useful insight into the tribal identities of parties, but they also signal why these differences can lead to animosity between parties. Generally, when people are focused on their group identity, they tend to exhibit biased behavior. This was established in foundational research by Tajfel and Turner known as Social Identity Theory (SIT), which shows that when our membership in a group is salient, people act in a way that elevates their group—the ingroup—and brings down the other group—the outgroup (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worschel, 1979). They recorded this behavior in numerous studies, where they assigned participants to a group and asked them to assign points or money to individuals whose group membership was known; participants consistently rewarded those in their group more points than those in the other group, even when the groups had no explicit connection or meaning. In some studies, participants even seemed to care more about maximizing the difference between groups than about maximizing their own group's gain, which maybe explains why we tend to exaggerate the moral differences we see in political parties (Tajfel, Turner, Austin & Worschel, 1979). This group bias has been shown in other ways as well. For example, Chen & Li (2009) found that when group identity is salient (stands out in importance compared to other concerns), people tend to show more charity and less envy towards members of their ingroup, leading to more cooperation within the ingroup, but, as Brewer (2010) points out, ingroup cooperation and outgroup competition are two sides of the same phenomenon. Altogether, our natural behavior when we are strongly aligned with groups is

to fight for our side and against the other. This is only exacerbated by the fact that political ideologies and moral values are so closely aligned because, historically, groups have used the idea that the other group was morally inferior as justification for oppressing or mistreating them (the philosophy of the "White man's burden" associated with imperialism is just one example). Additionally, research suggests that moral judgements are largely intuitive (Haidt, 2012), and it can be especially hard to get someone to understand another person's point of view if they don't have the same gut reactions. Overall, the biased behavior humans exhibit with all kinds of social identity has the potential to be magnified when it comes to partisan groups because of their roots in moral differences.

Current State of Political Polarization

Ingroup bias and differences in moral values have been around for a long time, of course, while the current trend towards polarization really took hold in the 1990s[1]. As scholars like Levendusky (2009) and Bishop and Cushing (2008) have explained, additional contextual changes were necessary to activate the strong group-based bias that has led to current levels of polarization. Value differences make division between partisan or ideological identities probable, but people also need to identify strongly with one party or the other if those values are going to lead to affective polarization. Although it seems surprising now, the parties were not always as distinct as they are now—in the 1950s, political scientists were actually calling for politicians to be more partisan so that voters would have clearer choices between parties (Bishop & Cushing, 2008). In the 1970s, politicians began aligning more along ideological lines so that Republicans were more consistently conservatives and Democrats more consistently liberal, and as people

[1] This isn't to imply the U.S. has never been polarized before this point—the mid-1800s Civil War period was arguably the country's most polarized period. Rather, in data that goes back to the mid 1900s (when polls like the American National Election Study were beginning), the polarization trend becomes clear in the 90s.

sorted into the party that better fit their beliefs, the parties began to grow further apart on their issue positions. So, what looks like ideological polarization was actually just people sorting into the more appropriate party. Then, politicians did start to move towards the ideological extremes, driven, in part, by a decentralized primary process where, instead of party leaders choosing nominees, the most activist and extreme party members (those who vote in primaries) got to vote for their party's nominee (Levendusky, 2009). By the 1990s, the media began discussing polarization (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008), though at the time, the evidence of polarization was mostly still ideological and mostly still at the elite level.

However, ideological polarization at the elite level became one contributing factor that influenced both ideological and affective polarization among the general population. One reason is that elite polarization made the contrast between the parties seem more stark, which led people to be more loyal to their own party and have a stronger party identity. Green (2004) found that people who self-identified as stronger partisans had stronger dislike for the other party and higher levels of affective identification with a group (most registered independents even had a partisan group identity, though it was usually weaker). As more people have developed strong partisan identities, more people have expressed dislike for the other side, to the point that affective polarization is even stronger than ideological polarization (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). In fact, people now generally look to their party to inform their position preferences, not the other way around (Huddy, 2015). Affective polarization is also more concerning than ideological polarization because, while ideological differences give voters clear choices and encourage civic engagement (Levendusky, 2010; Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006), affective polarization can lead to politically motivated violence, which has been increasing since 2015 (Jilani & Smith, 2018). Even when it doesn't lead to actual violence, it can divide apart families

and communities and makes it extremely difficult for people from different political persuasions to work together. Although ideological and affective polarization are often correlated, plenty of examples in Congress and beyond show that people can have deep ideological differences without hating each other (U.S. Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsberg were good friends, despite their different perspectives). Therefore, it is the trend towards affective polarization that is most concerning and the focus of this project.

But ideological elite polarization didn't create affective polarization on its own—affective polarization was also encouraged by other contextual changes in the U.S. media system and U.S. population. As Americans became more polarized, campaigning increasingly became about activating loyal voters, rather than appealing to those in the middle. Appealing to more polarized voters means focusing on what separates us, and research has shown that framing issues in terms of partisan conflict keeps our partisan identity salient and makes people more polarized (Han & Federico, 2018). Another major polarizing shift has been the explosion of partisan media. Television news was fairly moderate until the mid 90s when Fox News and MSNBC started targeting their news to conservative and liberal audiences, respectively. Around the same time, the media choices were also vastly expanding with the emergence of online based platforms and blogs, which meant that people could choose media that fit their beliefs, making it easier to see their side as unequivocally right and the other side as unequivocally wrong (Stroud, 2011). At the same time, people were also sorting into different geographical areas based on political beliefs. As Bishop and Cushing (2008) explains, since the 1970s, when people have moved, they have become more likely to choose areas where the majority of people seemed like them, which, thanks to the overlaps between cultural and political identity, means more people now live in places where one party or the other has a supermajority. When we live amongst our

own and listen to news targeted to people like us, the main result is that our political conversations are with people who agree with us. As Sunstein (2002) reveals, these types of conversations lead to more extreme attitudes, both in what we think about politics and what we think about the people on the other side. When we never or rarely interact with the partisan "other," it's a lot easier to think of them as evil or immoral. This, I believe, is the heart of the problem, which is why groups like Make America Dinner Again (MADA), which try to combat the problem by fostering interactions between political opposites, have the potential to be an important part of reversing affective polarization.

MADA Participants vis-à-vis the Polarized Population

It's also important to realize that although polarization has happened at both the elite and individual level, this doesn't mean that polarization has happened equally across the whole population. Most Americans still believe politicians on their side should cooperate with and sometimes compromise with the other side (Gramlich, 2019), and while there are many more people who are consistently liberal or consistently conservative now compared to 1994, the majority of Americans still hold a mix of conservative and liberal views (Pew Research, 2017b). Research has shown that polarization has increased the most among Americans over 65-years-old (Boxell, Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2017), and we also know that those who are most interested in and active in politics tend to be the most polarized, though it's unclear whether being more polarized or extreme drives political interest or vice versa (Dimock et al., 2014). Being politically active is also correlated with other demographic factors—Americans who are older, more educated, and more affluent are generally more politically active, especially in traditional measures of political activity like voting and donating to campaigns (Pew Research, 2006; Pew Research, 2018a). This has interesting implications for groups like MADA because those who

are aware of MADA and sign up to have political conversations with strangers are probably more politically active than the general population (and by extension, probably older, more educated, and more affluent than the national average), yet it seems possible that the most polarized people would actually avoid such organizations, and those that participate may be surprisingly moderate. It's unclear how the connection between political interest and polarization would play out in such a group. Additionally, in order for MADA to successfully help bridge partisan divides and create cross-partisan understanding, they need to attract participants who have a range of political perspectives and life experiences, including those who are on the ideological extremes. Therefore, my first area of interest is understanding who is involved in MADA and how they compare to the general population in these areas that are often correlated with polarization.

RQ1: How do MADA participants compare to the general population in their political affiliations?

RQ2: How do MADA participants compare to the general population on demographic factors: age, race or ethnicity, gender, education level, religion, and income?

RQ3: How do MADA participants compare to the general population on level of political activity: specifically voting, following the news, and attending a political rally or event?

Contact Theory

Because the lack of contact between liberals and conservatives is one major part of the problem of polarization, more positive contact between the two sides is also potentially a major part of the solution. Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis claims that contact between conflicting social groups can lead to reduced intergroup prejudice when certain conditions—institutional support, shared goals, cooperative interaction, and equal status between groups—are met. Since

then, many studies have shown that these are, indeed, ideal conditions, but even without these ideal conditions, intergroup contact usually still has a positive effect (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Some early studies suggested that intergroup contact actually led to negative outcomes like increased anxiety and avoidance (Cook, 1985), but scholars have since concluded that while these negative outcomes can sometimes happen in naturalistic settings (which vary widely in their "formality, structure, and intimacy building potential"—Paolini et al., 2018, p. 2), positive intergroup contact is far more common than negative contact (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014). In a review of over 500 articles that explored a variety of different outgroup scenarios, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that, on average, intergroup contact reduces prejudice against the outgroup. When contact results in cross-group friendship, the most effective type of intergroup contact, the effect is even larger (Page-Gould et al., 2008). These positive changes seem to happen because intergroup contact with an outgroup member reduces anxiety on subsequent interactions with that group (Page-Gould, et al., 2008), as well as increasing knowledge about the other group and increasing perspective taking and empathy for the other group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

The success of some intergroup contact efforts gives credence to efforts like MADA, which seek to encourage empathy by directing participants to tell stories about their background and the values that underlie their political beliefs. They also incorporate some of Allport's conditions as well: they provide institutional support for the interaction by hosting discussions, there is equal status between groups because of the casual dinner setting, and the shared goal of learning from each other is clear. Additionally, people engage in MADA voluntarily, making it less likely to elicit the kind of negative emotions that are sometimes associated with negative contact experiences (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Similarly, MADA participants often have opportunities to engage with the outgroup for an extended period or multiple times, which

scholars have found is sometimes necessary to reach a threshold where anxiety dissipates and bias-reducing effects can begin (MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015). However, partisan groups do present a unique challenge because political views are voluntary (at least compared to other identities like race or sexual orientation) and that political parties compete for a finite amount of political positions, making intergroup relations between parties fraught with blame and competition (see Wojcieszak & Warner, forthcoming). However, the few studies that test intergroup contact between partisans do provide some evidence of success, at least temporarily (see Manbeck et al., 2018) and when the contact includes cross group friendships or imagined scenarios where partisans have to cooperate to complete a task (Wojcieszak & Warner, forthcoming). Given that MADA's structure seems to create ideal conditions for fostering empathy and maybe friendship, their efforts are likely to be successful in reducing partisan animosity, especially if they are attracting a diverse group who have somewhere to grow in terms of their current levels of affective polarization.

Since there has been plenty of research on the likely positive effect of efforts like MADA, I will not seek to establish this effect in this project. Instead, I will be studying the MADA organization in order to delve into a topic that is less well understood—what motivates someone to seek out this kind of intergroup contact? Paolini and her colleagues (2018) pointed out that, despite the large amount or research suggesting that intergroup contact should be promoted to reduce prejudice, society "does not yet enjoy the full prejudice-reducing benefits of intergroup contact because opportunities for contact are often not taken up, and segregation persists in the face of diversity" (p. 1). There is a fair amount of research establishing some of the main reasons people avoid intergroup contact. One is that people tend to feel anxious about such interactions, and this causes them to avoid intergroup contact (Plant & Butz, 2006; Page-

Gould et al., 2008). Even though most intergroup interactions are positive, negative experiences with intergroup contact have a greater effect than positive experiences, which exacerbates the anxiety people feel about interacting with outgroups (Barlow et al, 2012). Additionally, individuals come with varying levels of prejudice and intolerance, and those that are high on measures like Social Dominance Orientation[2] or Right Wing Authoritarianism[3] are more likely to avoid contact with other groups (Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009). However, as Paolini and colleagues (2018) point out in their review, research about what motivates someone to seek out intergroup contact is only beginning, so they call for more research that addresses the question of "What personal, situational, and wider social factors move individuals towards or away from engaging in intergroup contact?" (p. 1). This dissertation seeks to respond to this call by investigating—through qualitative and quantitative methods—what personal attitudes, life experiences, and contextual factors are associated with seeking out intergroup contact through MADA.

Motivations for Intergroup Contact

Attitudes about partisan group identities

Research has shown that successful intergroup interactions can decrease prejudice, but prejudice can also predict whether someone engages in intergroup contact. Contact has been shown to improves attitudes about the other group (e.g. beliefs about the possibility for variability among the outgroup or whether the outgroup possesses certain positive traits—Stathi & Crisp, 2008), as well as changing intentions and behavior (increases in the amount of intergroup contact they have and their intentions to have such contact—Christ et al., 2010). Even imagined contact has had similar positive outcomes like increased outgroup trust (Pagotto et al.,

[2] A measure of an individual's preference for hierarchy and interest in domination over lower-status social groups.
[3] A measure of an individual's willingness to submit to authorities they perceive as legitimate and attitudes towards people that don't adhere to societal norms or submit to the same authorities.

2012) and a decrease in negative stereotypes about the outgroup (Brambilla et al., 2012). Unfortunately, research has also shown that those who are more prejudiced, and thus need intergroup contact the most, have the lowest levels of interest in such contact (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012). This puts groups like MADA in a tricky situation—since reducing partisan animosity and prejudice is one of the hoped-for outcomes of MADA, it would need to involve people who are at least somewhat affectively polarized to begin with, so they have room to grow. However, it's possible that MADA participants are interested in MADA because they already have relatively low levels of affective polarization. Therefore, my first question about motivating attitudes involves learning how affectively polarized participants are.

RQ4: How do MADA participants compare to the general population on measures of affective polarization, specifically:

4a: How warmly do they feel towards the other party, compared to their own

4b: How does each party makes them feel (options include angry, hopeful, etc.)?

4c: How would they feel if a family member were to marry someone of the other party?

Other specific attitudes about their own and the other group's identities have been shown to be potential predictors of intergroup contact. For example, since anxiety about the outgroup can lead people to avoid intergroup contact, perceiving the outgroup as a threat is one of the most influential attitudes—those who believe their group identity is threatened or see the other group as a threat to their well-being avoid intergroup contact (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Blascovich et al., 2001), while those lower in these threat appraisals are more likely to seek out contact. On the other hand, those that value diversity (Tropp & Bianchi, 2006) and those that believe they and the outgroup have a shared future and need to work together to achieve it are more likely to seek

out intergroup contact (Dunne, 2013). In the political context, this can be seen in a support for compromise or a belief that both sides should get at least some of what they want. Finally, research has shown that those who have at least some positive associations with the outgroup will be more interested in engaging with them (Turner et al., 2013). In this context, one indication of having positive attitudes about the outgroup is believing they have at least some good ideas. To test whether any of these previously studied factors might be part of why MADA participants are drawn to intergroup contact, I will test the following hypotheses:

H1: MADA participants are less likely to say they believe the other party is a threat to the nation than the general population.

H2: MADA participants are more likely to say they believe the other party has "a lot" or "some" good ideas than the general population.

H3: MADA participants desire a greater degree of compromise between parties compared to the general population.

Finally, believing that you and the other social group have some things in common is one of the most powerful beliefs that might make someone more comfortable with intergroup contact. Recognizing common ground is often part of the process of intergroup contact interventions, whether it is seen as an outcome (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Pruitt & Kaufer, 2002) or it is part of the intervention to help participants reach other goals (Hartz-Karp, 2005; LeBaron & Carstarphen, 1997). Interventions that are more successful in encouraging a sense of shared values also lead participants to be more willing to engage in intergroup contact again (Glasford & Dovidio, 2011). Therefore, we might assume that believing that the outgroup shares some of your values might motivate partisans to seek out contact with those across the aisle,

even though past research hasn't looked at belief in shared values as a motivating factor, specifically. With this in mind, I include the following hypothesis:

> H4: MADA participants are more likely to say they believe the other party shares their values than the general population.

Life experiences

In addition to attitudes about the outgroup, a person's life experiences also almost certainly influence how likely they are to seek out intergroup contact. A person's past experiences influence their group attitudes, and group attitudes can dictate how they perceive their experiences, but experiences take the level of analysis from what someone thinks to how someone interacts with the world around them. One crucial aspect of life experiences that motivates intergroup contact is whether or not someone has many intergroup friendships. Studies have found cross-group friendship to be the most successful type of intergroup contact (Page-Gould et al., 2008; Manevska et al., 2018), and even extended contact—when a person is friends with someone who is friends with an outgroup member—can contribute to reducing prejudice (Christ et al., 2010). Additionally, having cross-group friends is associated with being interested in additional contact (Al Ramiah et al., 2015), and even extended contact can increase intentions for intergroup interaction, especially among people who have little opportunity to interact with outgroup members themselves (Christ et al., 2010). Although someone's number of cross-group friendships is indicative of their unique perspective and the opportunities that exist in their communities, it is still an aspect of their life experience that is particularly important in understanding their interest in intergroup contact. Therefore, our next research question is as follows:

RQ5: How many friends of other political ideologies do new MADA participants have, compared to the general population of adults in the United States?

In addition, past experiences with intergroup contact influence someone's interest in future contact. Uncertainty about how to communicate with outgroup members and low levels of intergroup self-efficacy can make intergroup contact a stressful experience (Plant & Devine, 2003; Mazziotta et al., 2011). Even though negative experiences with contact are relatively rare (Graf et al., 2014), those negative contact experiences can have a disproportionate effect and lead people to avoid future contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Within the context of politics, many people have had at least some negative experiences talking about politics with people who have different opinions, but those who seek out further contact probably have had fewer negative experiences and more positive experiences than the average population. Therefore, the next hypothesis is this:

H5. When they talk to people with different political views, MADA participants are more likely to say they find those conversations "interesting and informative" (as opposed to "stressful and frustrating") than the general population.

Contextual factors

Even if someone has attitudes and life experiences that might lead them to seek out contact, contextual factors can still make a difference. One major contextual factor is the overall diversity of a society. In order to engage in intergroup contact, a person needs to have opportunities to do so, and because neighborhoods are increasingly homogeneous when it comes to political views (Bishop & Cushing, 2008), this isn't necessarily the case anymore. Although it doesn't make as large of a difference as one might think, research has found that people who live in more diverse areas do engage in intergroup contact more frequently (Pettigrew, Wagner, &

Christ, 2010), and the more someone engages, the less resistance they have to further intergroup contact (Paolini, Harris, & Griffin, 2016). This might suggest that MADA participants come from areas that are less politically homogeneous than average, making them less anxious and more willing to engage. However, it's also possible that the organization attracts those who generally don't have opportunities for cross-group contact but want to because of other personal factors. One way to understand whether MADA participants come from more politically homogenous geographic environments more frequently is to consider how many of them come from landslide counties, where one presidential candidate won more than 60% of the vote (see Wasserman, 2017). Therefore, the next research question asks:

> RQ6: What percentage of MADA participants live in areas where Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump won at least 60% of the vote, compared to the percentage of the general population in landslide districts?

Exploring additional factors

In addition to looking for these specific factors that other research has suggested might be predictors of seeking out intergroup contact, I also want to understand possible additional motivators that apply to MADA participants. Most research about Contact Theory and its motivators quantitatively seeks to understand whether a pre-determined personal or structural factor is influencing someone's decision to engage in intergroup contact. While this approach can lead to clear information about those specific factors, it doesn't allow for the introduction of additional factors that the researcher might not have considered. Therefore, I also interviewed participants in order to delve deeper into what factors influenced them to join MADA. Specifically, I wanted to know what parts of their lives they see as significant in their decision to join MADA, whether that led them to discuss experiences, beliefs, or contextual factors. To

encourage a detailed and robust discussion of the range of factors that were relevant to their decision to join, I encouraged interviewees to tell me their story of how they became interested in and involved in MADA. I wanted the participants to focus on telling me their story because research has shown that asking people to talk about experiences they've had helps them more effectively talk about their beliefs and attitudes, as opposed to simply asking them about their beliefs (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Therefore, my seventh research question is this:

RQ7: What are the important themes in participants' stories about how they became interested in MADA?

In the next chapter, I elaborate the methods I utilized to examine these questions and hypotheses.

Chapter Three

Methods

This study employs two methods to explore what leads people to engage in intergroup contact across political party lines. I overview these methods in this chapter. First, I explain how I conducted a survey of Make America Dinner Again (MADA) participants and compared those participants to representative samples of adults in the United States by drawing upon publicly available survey data. Second, I explain how, after conducting the survey, I conducted interviews with a selection of those who responded to the survey. Because only a few of the motivations driving people towards intergroup contact have been explored, this topic calls for a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. The first approach provided a more high-level view of those who participate in MADA, giving an overarching sense of the population of MADA participants and how they compare to the general population. The second approach provided a deeper examination of specific reasons people are interested in having these cross-partisan conversations, allowing exploration of the range of motivations, rather than just looking at the prevalence of particular reasons that researchers might expect. Together, the survey and interviews provide both breadth and depth in the exploration of who seeks out intergroup contact through cross-partisan conversations and why they do so.

Population of Interest: MADA Participants

MADA participants are an ideal group for examining motivations for intergroup contact because they voluntarily sign up and go out of their way to engage with those of a differing political party. In this research, my population of interest is anyone who has signed up for a dinner or joined the MADA Facebook group. MADA was founded by Tria Chang and Justine Lee in San Francisco after the 2016 presidential election. When Donald Trump won the

presidential election, they struggled to understand this outcome because they believed they didn't know any Trump supporters. This compelled them to organize a dinner in which people from differing political persuasions came together and shared their perspectives over a meal. Their expressed goal, they said, was to "build understanding and move forward together." On the MADA website, they claim "there are many avenues to protest, to donate, to fight, to be heard. Make America Dinner Again is an avenue to listen." After a few dinners in the Bay Area in early 2017, their group began attracting media attention, and it took off from there, growing to include chapters in 14 cities along with a closed Facebook discussion group— meaning one has to get approval from an administrator to join—where members can engage in conversation.

The main idea behind MADA is to get people talking to people with different political perspectives. Organizers have a variety of ways of inviting participants: some chapters invite everyone on their mailing list and allow whomever responds first to fill the spots (often keeping an equal number of spots for conservative and liberal perspectives), while others carefully select people from their mailing list to provide the best mix of people, based on the information the website asks for on the sign-up. Within the group's gatherings, which always include a meal, the discussion usually contains three parts: (1) questions that dive into what people value and what has informed their political perspectives, (2) a discussion of political issues, and (3) a time of reflection in which people talk about what they learned from the discussion. Beyond that, there can be a lot of variability—the discussion can center around a topic or be more general, the moderator might try a range of tactics to encourage discussion, and the dinner context can vary widely from a potluck in someone's backyard to dinner at a nice restaurant. Within the online discussion group, members submit discussion posts, which moderators then approve (or disapprove if it violates their rules), and members comment on the original post. The discussion

posts are usually about a political issue (e.g. “What are your thoughts on public investment in space exploration?”), but people also post “icebreaker” questions about non-political topics to get to know other members and see what they have in common beyond politics (e.g. “Share a picture of your pets and tell us why you love them!”). Moderators step in and remind participants about rules as needed, which usually means reminding commenters to be respectful or to limit their frequency of commenting to once per hour. Whether online or in-person, all of MADA’s efforts seek to create opportunities for people to share their perspectives and to hear what others have to say in an environment where the group norms and goals discourage incivility and encourage empathy and understanding.

In October 2019, I conducted a survey of MADA participants. At that time, there were 2256 people who had signed up for an email listserv about being part of dinners, and, on average, six new people were signing up daily (J. Lee, personal communication, May 23, 2019). A majority of those who were signed up in October 2019 had not yet attended dinners for a variety of reasons, such as there were not enough sign-ups in their town, they weren’t able to attend the one they were invited to, or there was so much interest in their town that they’ve had to wait for an invite (since dinners are generally small); because I was interested in why they signed up, I did not consider whether they had attended dinners as a confounding factor and reached out to everyone on the sign-up list, not just the attendees. As of the same time (October 4, 2019 officially), the Facebook discussion group had 627 members, and additional members were joining the group regularly. Some members of the Facebook group had been involved in dinners, but for some, the Facebook group was their main method of involvement, sometimes because there wasn’t an active MADA chapter in their area. Because MADA doesn’t keep track of the amount of overlap between the email list and Facebook group, the exact number of MADA

participants at the initiation of my research was unknown, but altogether, there were between 2300 and 2800 people involved in MADA at the time. These people covered most states—only Wyoming, Maine, New Mexico, Nebraska, Alabama, and South Carolina did not have any email dinner signups (J. Lee, personal communication, May 23, 2019). Many locations had held single dinner events, but 14 cities had chapters with regularly occurring dinners: Austin, TX; Bellevue, WA; Berkeley, CA; Boston, MA; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Brooklyn, NY; Houston, TX; Milwaukee, WI; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Tri-Cities, WA; Washington, DC; and Wichita, KS. These are notably all fairly large urban centers, but they attracted participants from the surrounding areas as well as within city limits. Prior to this research, little was known about the demographic make-up of MADA participants beyond their location, but the locations indicated there was at least representation from the Census-defined four major regions within the U.S. of West, Midwest, South, and Northeast. Additionally, based on what the organization is, we might reasonably have surmised that MADA participants are adults; this isn't a requirement, so there could potentially be politically active teenagers as well, but probably not too many. And we might reasonably expect them to be aware of or interested in American politics. With my survey, we gained much more concrete data on all of these dimensions and others.

I wish to note that I am involved in MADA. This positionality had potential to influence the reactions of participants (see Luff, 1999). I am an active member of the Bellevue chapter of MADA, where I had attended several events and moderated one of them prior to my research. I am also a member of the Facebook group, but do not post frequently on it, though I do have several friends within the Facebook group. Because of my standing, I avoided interviewing members of the chapter in Bellevue, WA, or anyone I personally know from the Facebook group, as our personal relationship could make it difficult for them to be honest with me or for me to

effectively assess what they might say. Outside of that issue, I believe my involvement in the organization was beneficial to the research. When initially recruiting participants for the survey, I made it known that I was a member of the MADA community (See Appendix A for the full text of the recruiting messages), and I believe my personal investment in MADA helped establish a rapport with the community, increasing members' willingness to participate. Additionally, when I introduced myself at the beginning of interviews, I explained how I got involved in MADA; being a member of MADA and a moderator signaled to interviewees that I was interested in hearing from people with many political perspectives, which may have put them at greater ease than they would have been if they were talking to an unknown, detached researcher. In addition to being involved in the local MADA chapter, I am also personally acquainted with the MADA founder, Justine Lee, so I was able to talk with her and gain her input along the way. When initially suggesting that we work together on this research, I offered to create a MADA-focused report that I would share with the whole MADA community. She could see the potential benefits of such a partnership and was happy to give me access to the email list and help me promote the study. This partnership ensured that the study might not only answer important scholarly questions, but also could provide MADA leaders important information about their organization and how they might improve it or help it grow.

Method 1: Survey

Participants

The first method I employed to answer my research questions was a survey of MADA participants. The overarching goal of the survey was to understand who participates in MADA and how they compare to the general population of Americans on demographic measures and various measures related to affective polarization. I used a nationally representative dataset from

Pew Research to assess general population characteristics, and my survey collected information from MADA participants. This process of collecting a new sample of a particular population and comparing them to the national population who answered the same questions is common throughout the social sciences (see Krueger, 2008; Siedler & Sonnenberg, 2010). All adult MADA participants were eligible for inclusion in my survey. Because the population was relatively small, I sought responses from every member (as opposed to a sample) to have the best chance of the survey being sufficiently powered. The comparative samples from Pew research are fairly large—at least 2000 people in every relevant dataset—which allowed me to achieve sufficient power with a more moderate dataset from MADA. In order to determine a statistically significant difference that Cohen (1988) would describe as a small effect, I needed at least 300 responses from MADA participants[4], and the final total of survey responses was 362. This amounted to a response rate of 13-16% of the overall population of 2300 to 2800 people, depending on how much overlap there is between the Facebook group and dinner signups.

Procedures

Because the MADA population lives all over the country and some of them only engage with MADA online through Facebook, I chose to conduct an online survey utilizing the survey software Qualtrics. The survey instrument was distributed as an anonymous link both by an email (for those who had signed up for a dinner online) and through a Facebook post on the group (for those in the Facebook group). The recruitment emails were sent from the MADA email and MADA chapter heads (to their individual chapters) in order to establish the credibility of the project and motivate participation. The initial Facebook post came from the MADA

[4] I ran power analyses for a number of comparisons I planned to conduct, using the known proportions from Pew and the comparable proportion from MADA that would amount to a small effect. The desired sample size varied depending on the measure, but it was generally between 200 and 300, and 300 participants provided the opportunity to detect a small effect across all of my intended comparisons.

Facebook profile, and follow up Facebook posts came from my personal Facebook profile (See Appendix A for the Facebook posts and emails). In addition to making the most of my partnership with the MADA organization, I incentivized participation by offering to donate $5 to a nonprofit (MADA by default or another organization they could select) for each person that completed the survey. Keeping Social Exchange Theory in mind, I chose to do a donation rather than an individual reward because I thought MADA participants would find the chance to help an organization more meaningful than personally receiving $5 (see Dillman, 2016). I used funding from the University of Washington Department of Communication to pay for these incentives. Responses were collected over a two-week period in the first half of October 2019.

I took measures to protect participants and their data. In keeping with ethical standards of informed consent, the first page of the survey informed about the study and asked to acknowledge their agreement before proceeding. The risks in this study were minimal because the survey was anonymous and I did not work with vulnerable populations (anyone who indicated they were under 18 was excluded from my final data) or ask about any particularly sensitive information. Still, some people might be uncomfortable if their answers to the survey were made publicly known, and there's always a risk that some participants may be identifiable based on their demographic information, even when the survey is anonymous. To minimize this risk, I do not plan to publicly publish this data widely and will only share it, in its entirety, with other researchers and the MADA founders. Additionally, when sharing with other researchers, I will exclude data about location where the participants live, since some states have low numbers of participants, so those participants might be identifiable. The data are stored on Qualtrics as well as on my UW OneDrive account—a password protected cloud service. The main risk of which I informed participants was that, while Qualtrics (and the OneDrive cloud service) takes

many steps to protect the data it collects, there is always some risk of data loss through hacking. Because the risk was minimal, I obtained exempt status for this project through my institution's IRB office.

Measures

The survey consisted mostly of questions that were adopted directly from surveys by public opinion organizations. Specifically, demographic and affective polarization questions on the MADA survey came from surveys done by Pew Research or the American National Election Study, who test their survey items through pilot tests or focus groups to make sure they are comprehensible and measure the concepts they are interested in. Most of my research questions in this dissertation relate to their answers to those items, but I also added a question in which I asked respondents to check their three most important reasons from a list of reasons for joining MADA. The possible responses to this question were compiled by consulting with the MADA leadership regarding what they ask as part of the sign-up process for MADA: "Why are you interested in joining a dinner?" or "What do you hope to get out of dinner?" I read through these responses and categorized the primary reasons people noted. In the survey I also included some questions that did not relate to this dissertation but that the MADA organization was interested in. For these new questions, I followed best practices for survey design: for example, I asked about the recent past rather than averaging questions, randomized the order of some sets of questions to reduce question order effects, and more (see Dillman et al., 2016) and conducted conceptual interviews with both conservative and liberal individuals to eliminate possible issues with bias or survey comprehension. These additional questions, to reiterate, are not included in this dissertation but were deemed valuable by MADA leadership. They were included after the

questions for the dissertation to ensure the responses to the questions for the dissertation were not influenced by their answers to MADA-specific questions.

The survey questions that answer my hypotheses and research questions fit into two main categories: who participates in MADA, and what attitudes and experiences are associated with their desire to be part of MADA. The first category is primarily demographic information that aligns with the manner in which Pew Research asks about demographics and personal orientations. I included these variables: political party (including whether they lean left or right and whether they identify strongly with their party), gender, age, level of education, race, religion and income (see Appendix B for how these questions were asked). I also included political engagement (particularly how often they vote, follow politics, or attend political events) in this category because this information is part of our understanding of who MADA participants are. The second category, their attitudes and experiences about their group and the opposing group, also followed Pew Research's question wording. First, there were general questions that measure affective polarization: a feeling thermometer (how warmly they feel towards each political party), how each party makes them feel (with a list of emotion words), and how they would feel about a family member marrying someone from the opposing political party. Then, I examined four attitudes that might be associated with interest or avoidance in intergroup political contact: whether a person feels the other political party is a threat to the nation, whether they think the other party has any good ideas, how much compromise they want there to be between the two parties, and whether they think members of the other party share their values and goals. Then, there were questions related to people's past experiences with intergroup political contact: the number of friends they have across the political aisle and what their past experiences discussing politics have been like, specifically when discussing with people who feel differently

than them. And finally, I asked about their reasons for joining MADA in order to understand some of the major motivations, which the interviews further illuminated (see Appendix B for exact wording of all questions).

Analysis

For most of my hypotheses, I was interested in comparing the proportion of people who answered a certain way in the MADA sample with the proportion of people who answered a certain way in the general Pew sample. These comparisons required chi-squared tests for equality of proportions for non-directional research questions, or z-tests of proportions for directional hypotheses. For example, I compared the proportion of the two samples that said they believe the other party is a threat to the nation, and the proportion of the two samples that said they believed the other side shares many of their values. The feeling thermometer and desired level of compromise were continuous variables, so I compared MADA to the general population using a T-tests on those measures. The following table summarizes how I analyzed each research question or hypothesis that is related to the survey.

RQ or Hypothesis	**Statistical Test**
RQ1: Compared MADA and general population (GP) on ideological polarization, in terms of their self-described strength of their political affiliation.	Used survey Q1 and Q2 to create variable of strong Democrat, Democrat, independent leans Dem., independent leans Rep., Republican, Strong Republican. Compared MADA and GP on proportion in each category, using chi-squared test.
RQ2: Compared MADA and GP on demographic and orientational factors: age, race or ethnicity, gender, education level, religion, and income	Compared MADA and GP on proportion in each category for each variable except age (Q3-Q7), using chi-squared test. Age is a continuous variable, so I employed a T-test to compare the average age of the groups.
RQ3: Compared MADA and GP on level of political activity, particularly voting, following the news, and attending a political rally or event.	1. Compared proportion of each group that answered “always’ or “nearly always” to voting using a χ_2 test 2. Compared proportion of each group that answered “most of the time” to following news using a χ_2 test

	3. Compared proportion of each group that said they had attended a rally using a χ_2 test
RQ4: Compared MADA and GP on affective polarization: a: how warmly they feel towards the other party, compared to their own b: how each party makes them feel (options include angry, hopeful, etc.) c: how they would feel if a family member were to marry someone of the other party	1. Created difference score for each person on how they rate their own vs. the other party. Compared difference scores using a T-test 2. Compared proportion of each group that said the other party makes them feel each emotion (χ_2 test) 3. Compared proportion of each group that answered "unhappy" (χ_2 test)
H1: MADA participants are less likely to say they believe the other party is a threat to the nation than the general population.	Compared proportion of each group that answers "yes" to other party is a threat using a one-directional two proportion z-test.
H2: MADA participants are more likely to say they believe the parties should compromise than the general population.	Created a "desire for their party to win" value from their responses to a question about how much each party should get. Higher values meant wanting less compromise. Compared the groups using a T-test.
H3: MADA participants are more likely to say they believe the other party has good ideas than the general population.	Compared proportion of each group that answered the other party has "a lot of good ideas" or "some good ideas" using a one-directional two proportion z-test.
H4: MADA participants are more likely to say they believe the other party shares their goals and values than the general population.	Compared proportion of each group that answered the other party shares many of my values using a one-directional two proportion z-test.
RQ5: Compared MADA to GP on how many friends of other political ideologies they have.	Compared proportion of each group that answered they have at least "a few" friends from the other party (as opposed to none) using a χ_2 test
H5. When they talk to people with different political views, MADA participants are less likely to say they find those conversations stressful and frustrating, and are more likely to say they find those conversations interesting and informative than the general population.	Compared proportion of each group that said they find these conversations interesting and informative vs stressful and frustrating using a one-directional two proportion z-test.
RQ6: What percentage of MADA participants live in counties where Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump won at least 60% of the vote, compared to the percentage of the general population?	Created a yes/no variable for whether MADA participants live in a landslide county using data from FiveThirtyEight. Compared the proportion of MADA participants to the general population proportion.

Method 2: Interviews

After gathering survey responses, I conducted semi-structured interviews to delve deeper into what appears to drive people to seek out cross-partisan conversations. While the survey was able to shed light on whether and how MADA participants identify with previously considered motivating factors, in-depth interviews enabled me to explore what types of stories people tell about what led them to be interested in MADA. By letting participants tell their own story about reaching across the aisle, I was able to uncover what factors the interviewees themselves considered part of their motivation, rather than relying on previously theorized possibilities. As Dunbar and colleagues (2003) put it, people are more than just the boxes they check on a survey, they are "replete with a full complement of historical, biographical, and social sensibilities" (p. 297). To explore these deeper sensibilities, I conducted narrative interviews with 27 participants.

Participants

Recruitment. My first step to recruiting participants was to include a question at the end of the survey that asked whether the respondent would be willing to be interviewed about what led them to join MADA. If they said yes, the survey linked them to another survey to collect their contact information, as well as their party leaning, city/state of residence, and type of involvement in MADA[5]. This contact information data was recorded on a separate spreadsheet from the main survey, so there was no identifying information linked to the survey. There were 153 survey respondents who expressed willingness to be interviewed, so I used the info from the survey to select interviewees with a variety of ideologies, locations, and types of involvement in MADA. Anyone who volunteered on the survey was eligible to be interviewed except for members of the Bellevue, WA chapter or members from the Facebook group that I personally

[5] Whether they were part of the Facebook group, had attended an event, or had signed up for an event but not yet attended.

know. Initially, I selected people randomly form specific groups—e.g. Independents who lean republican who had attended an event—, and then I handpicked additional participants who represented areas of the country that weren't represented in those that I had chosen randomly. Ultimately, I reached out to 60 volunteers, leading to 27 successfully completed interviews. To incentivize participation, I compensated interviewees for their time by paying them $20 (in the form of a Tango gift card) for the 1-hour interview.

Demographics. Informed, by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) finding that 12 interviews of a homogenous group is sufficient to generally reach saturation in responses, I set out to interview at least (a) 12 people whose survey responses indicated they were conservatives or conservative leaners, and (b) 12 people whose survey responses indicated they were liberals or liberal leaners. Ultimately, I interviewed 11 people on the conservative side of the spectrum—4 Republicans, 6 independents who lean Republican, and 1 libertarian—, 3 people who consider themselves centrists, and 13 liberal leaning people—6 Democrats and 7 independents who lean Democrat. While conducting the interviews, I found that conservative and liberal participants often had fairly similar stories about their interest in MADA, so I actually reached saturation by interview #19. I completed the other 8 scheduled interviews to validate the data and ensure that I had actually reached saturation.

In addition to ideology, I also collected information about gender, state, and type of involvement in MADA. Altogether, I interviewed 16 men, 10 women, and 1 non-binary individual. Five participants had participated in MADA through the Facebook group, 6 had attended in-person events, 6 had both participated on Facebook and through events, and 10 had signed up to participate but had not yet been able to attend an event. Regarding location, most MADA participants are clustered around the cities that have active chapters putting on in-person

events, so most of the interviewees came from these areas—7 from Colorado, 4 from California, 3 from Washington, and 5 in the DC area (4 in Virginia and 1 in Washington, DC). The remaining 8 were from 8 states throughout the rest of the country—New Jersey, Alaska, Utah, Michigan, Tennessee, Kansas, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Interview Procedures

After recruiting and scheduling interviews with participants, I conducted the interviews using Zoom, a video conferencing application. I chose to conduct these interviews virtually because I wanted to get perspectives from MADA participants across the country, not just in my local area. I used a narrative interviewing (Langellier, 1989) method, one of the least structured type of interviews because I primarily asked one question—"tell me the backstory of how you got interested in MADA"—and then asked follow up questions about the different elements they mentioned in the first question. I chose to structure the interviews this way because I wanted to allow the interviewees to decide what parts of their lives or beliefs were most important in shaping their decision to be part of MADA, rather than asking them about specific elements of their background that I suspected might be important. This approach lends itself easily to learning about the impact of past experiences, and research has shown that people talk about their beliefs and attitudes when discussing their experience, sometimes with more clarity than if you simply ask about their beliefs (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). By using a narrative structure, I was able to learn about experiences, beliefs, and contextual factors that the participants found important, without directly asking about these elements or assuming that all participants would attribute their interest in MADA to any particular experience.

Before introducing this question, I encouraged the interviewees to get in a story-telling mindset by asking them to think of themselves as authors writing a novel with many chapters

(see Scharp, Thomas, & Paxman, 2015; Holmberg et al., 2004). I told them that I wanted to understand more than just the specific context how they heard about and signed up for MADA—rather I wanted to explore the different aspects of their lives that led them to be open to an opportunity like MADA when it came their way. Then, after asking them to "tell me the backstory of how they got interested in MADA," I took careful notes on their answer, and asked follow-up questions about each element they had mentioned in their initial answer. For example, if they told me they have a firm belief that in the importance of reaching across the aisle, I would ask them to tell me more about that belief and where it comes from. If they mentioned having bad experiences talking about politics in other settings (such as social media), I would ask them to tell me more about those experiences. I encouraged participants to be as specific as they could by asking for more details and asking additional follow-up questions when needed. Although I had a list of potential follow up questions, which questions they were asked depended entirely on how they answered the initial question, so outside of the first question, every interview was different. After delving into the details of their backstory, I asked a few additional questions if the questions hadn't come up naturally—specifically (1) what they thought MADA would provide for them that they weren't already getting in other ways in their lives, and (2) what their experience with MADA has been like (for those who have been involved). These questions were asked in order to help MADA, in particular, get an understanding of what has been successful or unsuccessful about their efforts so far. Although the answer to these final questions will largely be used in a secondary report for the MADA leadership, sometimes people also talked about their motivations and backstory in answering these questions as well. Therefore, I still considered how this final part of the interview answered my research question about the themes that emerged in the stories people told about how they became interested in MADA. Altogether,

this line of questioning provided valuable insights into the contextual and personal factors that motivated these individuals' initial interest in MADA (see Appendix C for the full interview guide).

The interviews were 60 minutes on average, ranging from 45 minutes to 69 minutes. All interviews took place during February of 2020. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed using Trint transcription software. When the automatic transcription was unclear or seemed off, the transcription was compared to the original audio and edited. The process of checking the transcription also served as the process of becoming familiar with the data (the first step in analysis, see Braun & Clark, 2006). In addition to correcting errors, names and other identify information were changed to pseudonyms during the process of checking the transcription.

Analysis

To analyze the interviews, the responses were coded in multiple phases, following a version of narrative thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006; Riessman, 2008). Although traditional narrative analysis tends to treat each person's narrative as an intact unit (Riessman, 2008), I chose to instead break up each overall narrative into different pieces and treat each sub-story as the unit of analysis. I did this because most interviews told multiple types of stories that didn't always fit together into a single narrative. In line with Riessman's (2008) model of thematic narrative analysis, I focused on the content of the stories and the themes within them, rather than focusing on how the story was told. Specifically, I took an inductive thematic analysis approach, meaning I coded the data "without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Overall, my goal was to group the data into different types of categories about what led up to their decision to get involved in MADA (see Riessman, 2005).

There are many valid ways to determine what qualifies as a theme and what makes a theme prevalent in thematic analysis. Guided by Owen's (1984) criteria, I focused on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. In my analysis, recurrence means at least two people discuss it, repetition means the same individual emphasizes it repeatedly, and forcefulness is about how they say it—if they emphasize it with volume, pauses, or similar moves (this is a slight adaptation of Owen, 1984). In my analysis, recurrence meant the theme was prevalent, and repetition and forcefulness meant the theme was particularly important to an individual—I treated both (prevalence and individual importance) as criteria for inclusion in my final report. In other words, if one person's backstory included something that no one else discussed, but they emphasized it repeatedly as a primary motivation for them, that would meet the criteria for an important, but not prevalent theme. Overall, I looked for themes and story elements on a semantic or explicit level, letting participants' words represent their reality rather than trying to identify underlying sentiment.

I used a consistent process to ensure that the data was analyzed systematically and reliably. I followed recommended steps to ensure referential adequacy by dividing the interview data into two datasets, completely coding the first, and then coding the second set in comparison to the first (Scharp & Sanders, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I took notes as I coded, including how I made decisions for ambiguous codes and why I combined or separated certain ideas. After coding the first half, I conducted a debriefing with another researcher in which I showed them my themes and categories, received feedback about what was or wasn't making sense, and adjusted or clarified my analysis as necessary. These careful notes and debriefing served to make the analysis dependable and confirmable, as methodologists have recommended (Scharp & Sanders, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the process of coding, I followed the six steps laid

out by Braun and Clark (2006). First, I read through the transcripts and noted initial ideas. Second, I coded the dataset systematically, examining each idea expressed in the interview and either adding it to an existing code or coming up with a new code if it represented a new idea. Third, I combined codes into themes. Fourth, I reviewed the themes, checking for (1) internal consistency—that the coded data actually all made sense together as one theme—and (2) connections between themes, so I could show how they all fit together in the larger context of the data and research question. This fourth step was an iterative process in which I rearranged codes into themes and rearranged subthemes into larger themes multiple times until I felt the conceptual map showed an accurate and useful picture of how the data answered the research question. Fifth, I named and defined the themes I had created, continuing to evaluate and clear up any mismatch between data and themes or overlap between themes. Finally, I produced a report that related the themes back to the initial research question and existing scholarship, using the most representative extracts to back up my analysis. This final step also included making connections between what I found in the survey and the interviews in order to draw out the central conclusions from the research.

Chapter 4

Survey Results: Make America Dinner Again and the General Population

Interacting with someone from a different social group is often anxiety inducing, so most people don't seek out such interactions voluntarily. The anxiety we feel about interacting with people from different groups, including people with different political ideologies, usually decreases when we actually spend some time with people who hold other views (Page-Gould et al., 2008), but the initial anxiety prevents many people from having more than incidental contact with people outside their own social or political outlooks (Plant & Butz, 2006). However, when people do step outside of their comfort zone and have meaningful interactions with those across the political aisle (or beyond racial or religious boundaries), most research has found that such interactions are usually positive and can have important benefits on both a personal and societal level (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014). For example, intergroup contact can reduce anxiety and make future interactions more likely (Page-Gould et al., 2008), and it has been found to reduce prejudice against the outgroup (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This is an especially important outcome in the context of political groups, where prejudice can get in the way of cross-partisan cooperation. Although neighborhoods and cities in America are increasingly populated by supporters of one political party or the other, most places still have a mixture of perspectives, and there remains a need to work with people of different parties to solve problems in government, business, or local communities. However, because most people avoid the potential discomfort of cross-partisan interactions, we are not reaping the rewards that intergroup contact offers. This is why it's important to understand what makes someone seek out opportunities to talk to people with different perspectives, so that perhaps we can encourage more people to engage in similar actions.

While most people avoid the uncertainty that comes from intergroup contact, participants of Make America Dinner Again have actually chosen to seek it out, making them an ideal population to understand what might compel people to reach across the political aisle. To gain some insight into their choices, we need to start with understanding who MADA participants are and how they align with the general population of the United States. With that aim in mind, I conducted a survey of MADA participants and compared their responses to nationally representative public opinion data from Pew Research, the U.S. Census, and American National Election Survey. This chapter presents the results of the hypotheses and research questions that compare MADA to a general population. I begin by exploring the demographic features and political behaviors of MADA participants compared to the general population (RQ1- RQ3). Then, I look at how much warmth or animosity MADA participants have towards the other political party—that is, measures of affective polarization—compared to the general population (RQ4). I also consider some specific attitudes that research suggests is related to willingness to engage in intergroup contact (H1-H4). Next, I compare MADA participants to the general population on some life experiences that could relate to someone's interest in interacting with those across the aisle (RQ5 and H5), and finally, I look at a contextual factor that could differentiate MADA participants from others: specifically, whether MADA participants are more likely to live in electorally landslide districts than the general population (RQ6).

Results

To get a basic picture of who has chosen to participate in MADA, I began by looking at some basic characteristics of the group. At the time when the survey was in the field in October 2019, there were somewhere between 2300 and 2800 individuals involved in MADA, all of whom were invited to take the survey. Of these, 362 took at least part of the survey, making the

response rate about 13%-16%. There was some drop off throughout the survey so that by the end (the demographic questions), most questions had around 316 responses. Because most of my questions can be analyzed individually, I will be using as much data as I have for each question (i.e. the *N* will vary), but all questions have over 300 responses, which is the minimum I needed, based on a prior power analysis. Demographic data for the general population comes from three surveys: The Political Typology Survey from Pew Research in 2017 (2017a), wave 16 of the American Trends Panel Survey from Pew Research in 2016 (2016b, April), and the Census Bureau's American Community Survey in 2018 (United States Census Bureau, 2018).

Since MADA is meant to bring together people from different viewpoints, one of the most relevant characteristics of the MADA population is their political affiliation (RQ1). Using questions about party preference, strength of that preference, and party leaning (for independents), Figure 1 shows how MADA participants and the general population map onto a range of political affiliation from strong Democratic to strong Republican. As the figure illustrates, there are many more Democrats or Democratic-leaning independents in MADA than there are Republicans or Republican leaners. In fact, there are nearly 3 times as many Democrats as Republicans in the MADA sample, which has 89 Republicans and 262 Democrats (includes leaners). While the general population does have more Democrats or Democratic-leaners than Republicans, the difference isn't as stark—of partisans in the U.S. (including Independents who lean towards a party, but excluding those who don't have a preference), 55% were Democrats and 45% were Republicans in a recent Pew Research poll, as Table 1 shows. A Chi-square test of proportions shows a significant difference between MADA and the general population in terms of party preference ($p<0.001$). Additionally, returning to Figure 1, the greatest difference between the proportions in each sample seemed to be the number of strong Republicans—less

than 5% of the MADA sample claimed to be strong Republicans, compared to over 15% of the general population.

Figure 1. Proportion of MADA and the general population that affiliate with each party.

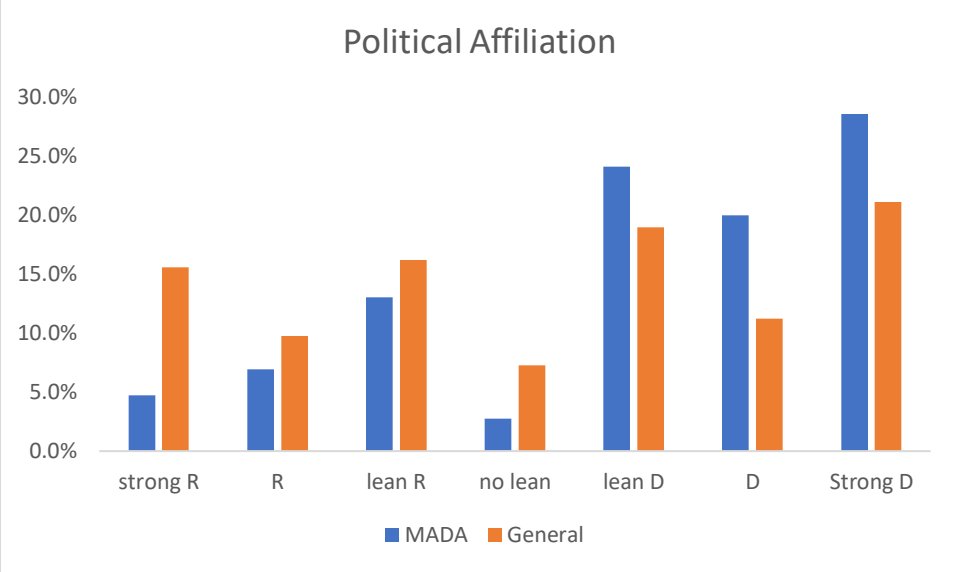


Table 1

Democrats and Republicans

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Party				
Democrat	75% *n* = 262	55% *n* = 2486	49.05	<.001
Republican	25% *n* = 89	45% *n* = 2013		
Total	100% *n* = 351	100% *n* = 4502		

Note: This table excludes true Independents (don't lean towards a party) in the proportions calculations.

In addition to party affiliation, the demographic makeup of MADA participants can tell us about what kind of people are most likely to be involved in such an effort (RQ2). Table 2 shows the MADA population and the general population on sex, race, age, religion, education, and income. A few differences between the MADA sample and the general population stand out. First, women were overrepresented in MADA with about 59% of the sample. Nearly 80% of the MADA sample was White, compared to around 60% of the general population, and people with

Black and Latino racial identities were significantly underrepresented—together they made up 6% of the MADA sample, compared to around 30% of the American population. MADA did have a range of ages, with 25- to 44-year-olds making up a larger than expected share at 43.5%, compared to the general population's 35%. Younger people (18-24) made up a relatively small share of MADA (4.2%), which is perhaps not surprising since that age range is generally less politically involved. The main takeaway from the religion comparison is that MADA's sample had fewer Protestants and Catholics and more atheists and agnostics than the general population. This is consistent with we might expect from the political makeup of the MADA sample.

The most significant results come from the education and income demographics. The differences in education between the MADA sample and the general population are stark—87.4% of MADA had at least a BA, while only 28.8 of the general population had a BA or more education. This huge difference suggests that education is a major factor in someone's likelihood of joining MADA. Income also shows a major difference between the samples, though slightly less stark—68.4% of the MADA sample said they make over $75K a year, compared to 35.1% of the general population. Many of the most active MADA chapters are in expensive cities like San Francisco or New York, so if cost of living were taken into account, the differences in average income might be smaller, but MADA participants would likely still be well above the general-population norm. Overall, this picture of the MADA sample shows that MADA participants not only identify more with Democrats, they were whiter, generally fairly well off and almost always well educated, compared to the general population.

Table 2

Characteristics of MADA respondents relative to the general population of Americans.

Measures	***MADA %*** *N = 316*	***Gen. Pop. %*** *N = 5009*
Sex		

Male	41.2	49.3
Female	58.8	50.7
Total	100%	100%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	79.4	61.1
Asian	7.0	5.4
Black/African American	2.8	12.3
Hispanic/Latino	3.2	17.8
Mixed Race	4.7	2.4
Other Race	2.8	1.1
Total	100%	100%
Age		
18-24	4.2	13
25-44	43.5	35
45-64	38.3	35
65+	14.1	17
Total	100%	100%
Highest Level of Education Completed		
Some High School	0.0	8.3
High School/GED	1.6	31.2
Some College	7.5	17.2
AA degree	3.4	14.3
Bachelor's Degree	33.5	16.1
Some Graduate work	10.0	1.0
Advanced Degree	43.9	11.7
Total	100%	100%
Religion		
Protestant	24.4	33.4
Catholic	6.6	19.9
Mormon	2.2	1.9
Jewish	7.3	1.7
Buddhist	3.5	0.6
Muslim	0.6	0.9
Hindu	0.3	0.5
Orthodox	1.6	0.4
Other	10.8	14.9
Atheist	12.0	4.1
Agnostic	14.2	4.7
Nothing	16.5	17.1

	Total	100%	100%
Household Income			
Less than 10K		1.7	9.0
10K - <30K		6.8	24.4
30K - <50K		9.9	17.7
50K - <75K		13.6	14.1
75K - <100K		16.6	13.0
100K - <150K		18.6	11.5
150K - <250K		19.3	7.2
250k+		13.6	3.4
	Total	100%	100%

To round out our picture of how MADA compares to the general population, level of political activity was another factor of interest (RQ3). For this, I focused on three measures: how often they say they vote, how closely they follow what's happening in government affairs, and whether they had attended a rally or political event (e.g. march or protest) in the last year. As Figure 2 illustrates, a large majority of MADA participants (91.8%) vote always or nearly always. This is significantly more than the general population, where 74.7% claim to always or nearly always vote ($\chi^2(1, N=5268)=47.16$, $p<0.001$—see Table 3). The question about following government affairs yielded similar results, presented in Figure 3—76.5% of MADA participants claimed they follow government affairs most of the time, compared to 59% of the general population, a significant difference according to a chi-square test ($\chi^2(1, N=5303)=37.52$, $p<0.001$—see Table 4). Finally, MADA also had a significantly larger percentage who had attended a political rally or event in the last year—47.5% compared to the general population's 10%, as Table 5 illustrates ($\chi^2(1,N=4999)=378.57$, $p<0.001$). Together, these three results show a large difference between MADA and the general population: MADA participants were generally much more politically active than the average American.

Figure 2. Voting behavior

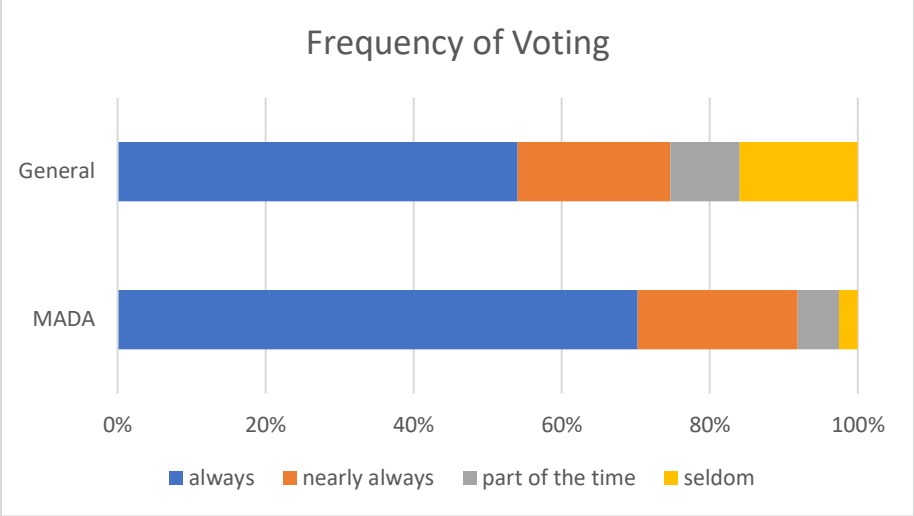


Table 3

Frequency of Voting

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Vote				
Always/ Nearly Always	91.8% *n* = 293	74.7% *n* = 3695	47.16	<.001
Part of the Time/ Seldom	8.2% *n* = 89	25.3% *n* = 1254		
Total	100% *n* = 319	100% *n* = 4949		

Figure 3. Answers to how much they follow what's happening in the government.

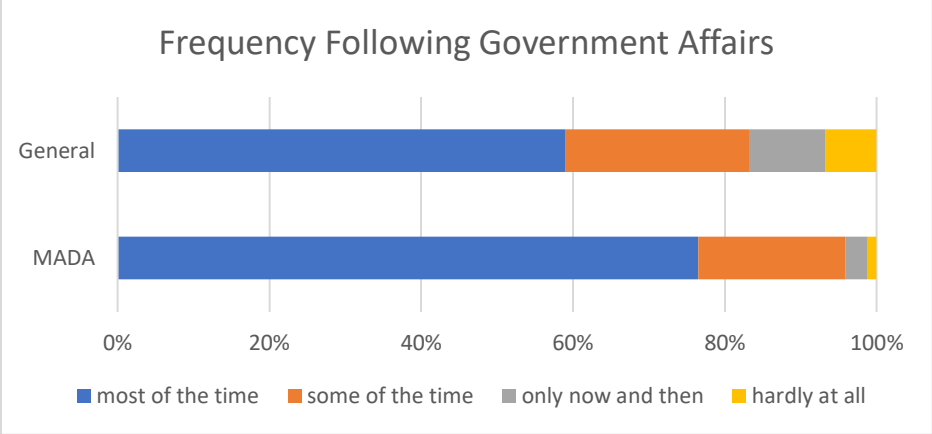


Table 4

How often follow government affairs

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Follow				
Most of the time	75% *n* = 244	55% *n* = 2941	37.52	<.001
Sometimes/now and then/ hardly at all	25% *n* = 75	45% *n* = 2044		
Total	100% *n* = 319	100% *n* = 4984		

Table 5

Attended a Rally/Event in last year

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Attended				
Yes	47.5% *n* = 149	10% *n* = 468	378.57	<.001
No	52.5% *n* = 165	90% *n* = 4217		
Total	100% *n* = 314	100% *n* = 4685		

Attitudes about Partisan Group Identity

Affective Polarization. While someone's demographic identity and political behaviors might make participation in MADA more or less likely, their personal beliefs or attitudes, particularly regarding political groups, can also influence whether they are interested in such an organization. Attitudes towards political groups that relate to how much someone likes their own party and dislikes the other are sometimes referred to as affective polarization. Reducing these negative feelings towards members of the other party is certainly one of the purposes of organizations like MADA, but it's unclear whether those who show interest in such an organization are more or less affectively polarized than the average American (RQ 4). Research shows that those who are more politically active are generally more polarized (Dimcock et al., 2014), but those who are interested in cross-partisan interaction might be less predisposed to

think both overly well of their party or overly poorly of the other. Looking at three measures of affective polarization, I found that MADA participants were generally more affectively polarized than the general population, meaning they had stronger feelings of dislike towards the other party compared to their own. I present and explain the results of each measure of affective polarization below.

The most common measure of affective polarization comes from a question known as a feeling thermometer, which asks respondents how warmly they feel towards their own political party and the other party, on a scale of 0 (coldest) to 100 (warmest). This question has been asked in public opinion surveys for several decades, and over time feeling towards the other political side have become colder while warm feelings towards one's own have remained relatively stable, as Figure 4 shows (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). In order to compare the MADA sample to the general population, I created a difference score of how they rated their own party minus how they rated the other party. Using data from an American National Election Studies Survey from October 2016 (ANES, 2016), I compared the average MADA difference score to the average difference score from the nationally representative sample, using a t-test. As Table 6 illustrates, the average difference score for MADA was 43.6 points, while the average difference score for the general population was 39.5. This difference was statistically significant, with a *p*-value of 0.006. It is worth noting, however, the time difference between when each test was taken. The most recent publicly available data of this feeling thermometer question is from prior to the 2016 election—three years before the MADA survey was conducted. Since the overall trend shows decreasing scores for the opposing party, it is possible that the 4 points between the two samples would disappear if the surveys had both been conducted in 2019.

Although this test shows that MADA members feel less warmth towards the other party than on average, it is plausible that they are similar to the average American on this particular measure.

Figure 4. Feeling Thermometer trends over time (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018)

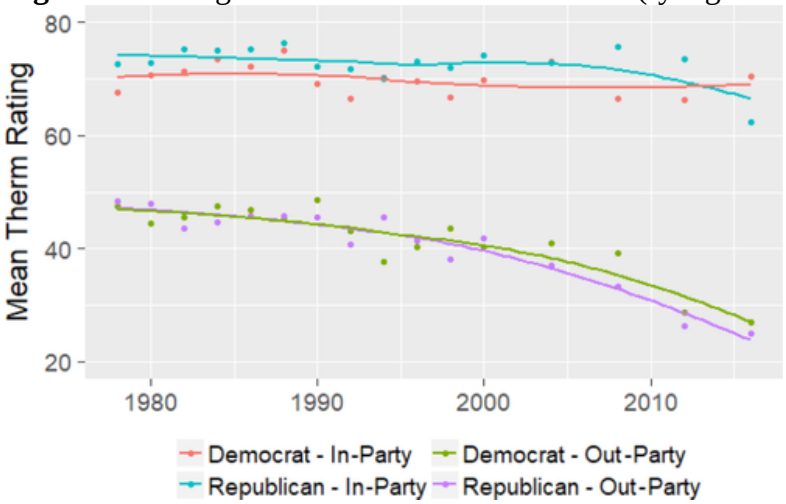


Table 6

Results of t-test and Descriptive Statistics for difference between feeling towards two parties by population.

	Group						95% CI for Mean		
	MADA			General Population					
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	Difference	t	df
Difference score	43.63	24.51	297	39.53	31.75	4270	1.15, 7.06	-2.73**	369

**p<0.01

However, if we use the feeling thermometer to just look at how members of each party view the other party, we see more of a difference between MADA and the general population. If we just look at the percentage of each population that rates the other party very coldly, 68% of partisan MADA participants gave the opposing party a rating under 30, compared to just 52% of partisans within the general population. This is a significant difference ($\chi^2(1,N=3783)=33.2$, p<0.001) which indicates that MADA members were more coldly inclined toward the other party than the average American.

The next measure of affective polarization provides more evidence for a difference between MADA and the general population. In a Pew Research Trends Panel from 2016 (Wave

16—2016b, April), respondents were asked which adjectives applied to how the other party makes them feel, with the options being a list of three positive and three negative emotion words. The results in Figure 5 show that while MADA and the general population were equally unlikely to associate positive emotions with the other party, the MADA sample was significantly more likely to associate the negative emotions with the other party. Chi-squared tests for each emotion confirmed this apparent finding, showing a significant difference ($p<0.001$) for "angry," "frustrated," and "afraid," but non-statistically significant differences ($p>0.05$) for "hopeful", "proud," and "enthusiastic." See Table 7 for detailed results for each emotion. As an example, 69.4% of MADA participants said that the other party makes them feel angry, compared to 42.6% of the general population. On the positive-emotion side, only 2.9% of MADA participants and 4.9% of the general population claimed that the opposite party makes them feel hopeful, a 2% difference that is not statistically significant. Overall, this shows that while the general population doesn't seem to have more positive feelings for the other side compared to MADA, there are fewer people in the general population who feel these particular negative emotions about the other party.

Figure 5. How the other party makes them feel, for MADA and the general population.

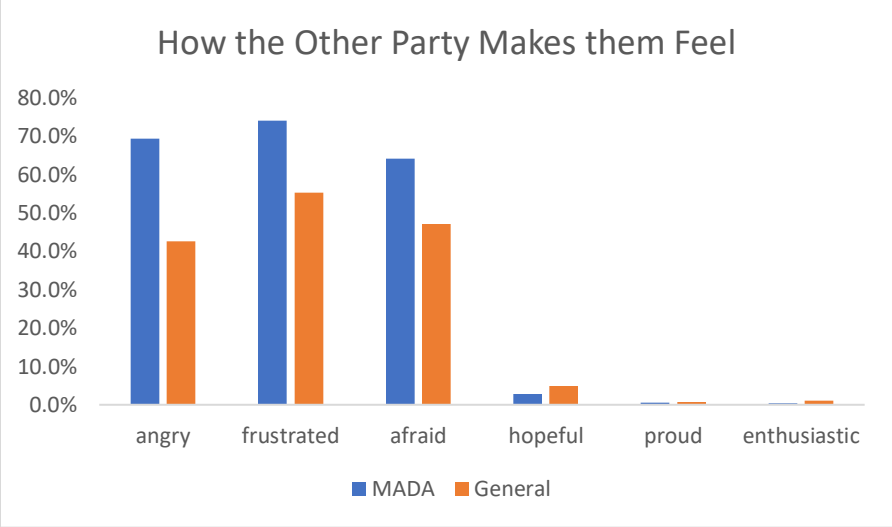


Table 7

How would you feel if a member of your family married someone from the opposite political party?

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Feeling				
Angry	69.4% *n* = 240	42.6% *n* = 1908	92.21	<0.001
Frustrated	74.0% *n* = 256	55.2% *n* = 2474	45.31	<0.001
Afraid	64.2% *n* = 222	47.1% *n* = 2110	36.8	<0.001
Hopeful	2.9% *n* = 10	4.9% *n* = 218	2.36	0.12
Proud	0.6% *n* = 2	0.7% *n* = 30	<0.001*	1
Enthusiastic	0.3% *n* = 1	1.1% *n* = 48	1.26*	0.26
Total	100% *n* = 346	100% *n* = 4480		

*because some boxes have values less than 5, these estimates may be unreliable.

A final measure of affective polarization involves assessing how someone imagines they would feel if a member of their family were to marry someone from the other party. This question was asked on a Polarization Survey done by Pew Research in 2014 (Pew Research, 2014a), and then on the MADA survey in 2019. Although the surveys were conducted 5 years apart, the responses of both samples are notable, as depicted in Figure 6. The majority of both samples said such a marriage wouldn't matter to them, but more than twice as many MADA respondents said they would be unhappy if a member of their family married a member of the other party—34% compared to 16% (a significant difference according to the chi-squared test shown in Table 8: $\chi^2(2,N=3241)=66.5$, $p<0.001$). Like the previous test, this seems to indicate that MADA participants have stronger negative feelings towards the other side than the general population, or at least stronger than the general population felt a few years ago. Altogether, these three tests provide some evidence that the MADA population has somewhat stronger negative feelings toward the opposite party than the general population.

Figure 6. Feelings about family members marrying someone from the other party.

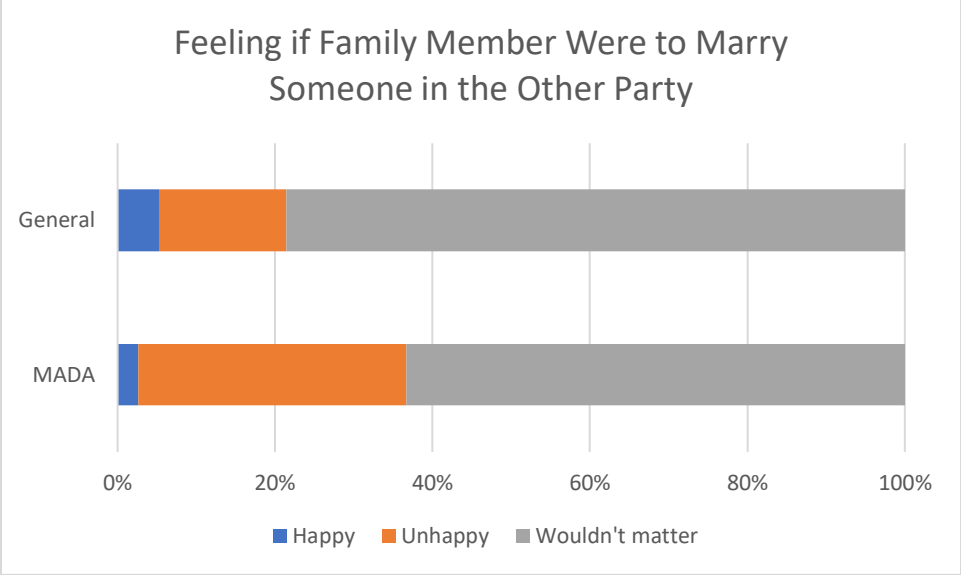


Table 8

How would you feel if a member of your family married someone from the opposite political party?

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Feeling				
Happy	2.6% *n* = 9	5.2% *n* = 151	66.52	<.001
Unhappy	34.0% *n* = 116	16.1% *n* = 471		
Wouldn't Matter	63.3% *n* = 216	78.5% *n* = 2278		
Total	100% *n* = 341	100% *n* = 2900		

Other party a threat. Beyond the measures of affective polarization, there are several specific attitudes about outgroups that previous research suggests might make someone more or less interested in intergroup contact. These are outlined in hypotheses 1 through 4. The first examines whether someone believes the outgroup—in this case the other party—is a threat. Beyond simply disliking the outgroup, intergroup prejudice can lead someone to believe the other group is a threat to them and their way of life. In politics, where the number of elected

seats in government is finite, seeing the other party as a threat is particularly relevant. This particular outlook is especially likely to discourage intergroup contact (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Blascovich et al., 2001), so I hypothesized that MADA participants would be less likely to think of the other party as a threat to the nation. This question was only asked to respondents who said their attitude towards the other party was "very unfavorable" on the Pew Research Politics and Foreign Policy Survey (April 2016c), or below 40 points on the MADA survey's feeling thermometer (scale of 1-100, where 50 is neutral). A larger portion of the MADA population was asked this question, which may have been the result of a more lenient filtering process. To account for this, I ran chi-squared tests for both the original data (where anyone under 40 points was asked the question) and an adjusted test where I only considered answers from those who had rated the other party under 30, a threshold which likely corresponds to a "very unfavorable" rating more unambiguously. The results of both tests were similar, so I report the latter, more conservative test, below. Figure 7 shows 54.5% of MADA participants said the other party is a threat to the nation and another 4.5% said both parties are a threat to the nation. This compares to 39% of the general population saying the other party was a threat and another 3% saying both parties are a threat. The one-directional two proportion z-test confirmed that there was a significant difference between the MADA and general population samples, but in the opposite direction than I hypothesized ($\chi^2(1, N=2137)=32.28$, $p<0.001$—see Table 9). The data are not an identical match, but the comparison nonetheless suggests that MADA participants are actually more likely to say that the other party is a threat to the nation, compared to the average American. This corresponds with the previous finding that MADA participants have stronger negative feelings towards the opposite party.

Figure 7. Is each party a threat to the nation?

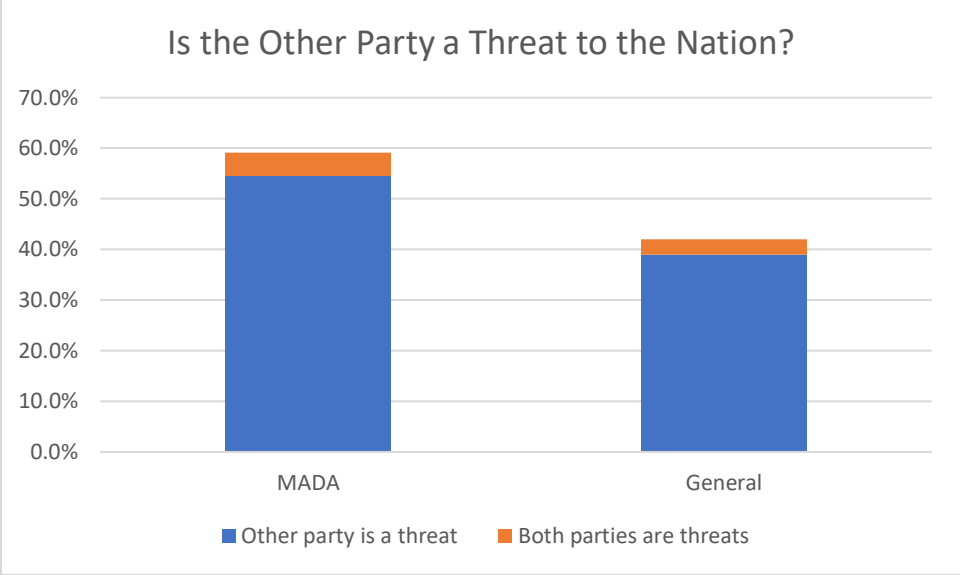


Table 9

Is the opposite party a threat to the nation

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Amount				
Yes	59.1% *n* = 195	42% *n* = 759	32.28	<0.001
No*	40.9% *n* = 136	58% *n* = 1048		
Total	100% *n* = 330	100% *n* = 1807		

*Includes those who weren't asked because they didn't have a cold or unfavorable view of the other side.

Other party has good ideas. Just as believing negative things about the outgroup is thought to discourage interaction, those who have at least some positive beliefs about the outgroup have been found to be generally more open to engaging with them (Turner et al., 2013). For this reason, I hypothesized that MADA participants would be more likely than the general population to say that the other party has "some" or "a lot" of good ideas. I compared the data from the MADA survey to data from Pew Research's American Trends Panel Wave 16 (2016b, April). However, this test was consistent with the previous two findings. Specifically, Figure 8 shows only 15% of MADA participants said that the other party has "a lot" or "some" good

ideas, compared to 20.7% of the general population. The one-directional test of proportions revealed that this difference is statistically significant ($\chi_2(1, N=4619)$=5.85; p=0.008—see Table 10), but in the opposite direction than was originally hypothesized. MADA participants, it turns out, were less likely than the average American to say that the other party has at least some good ideas.

Figure 8. How many good ideas does the other party have.

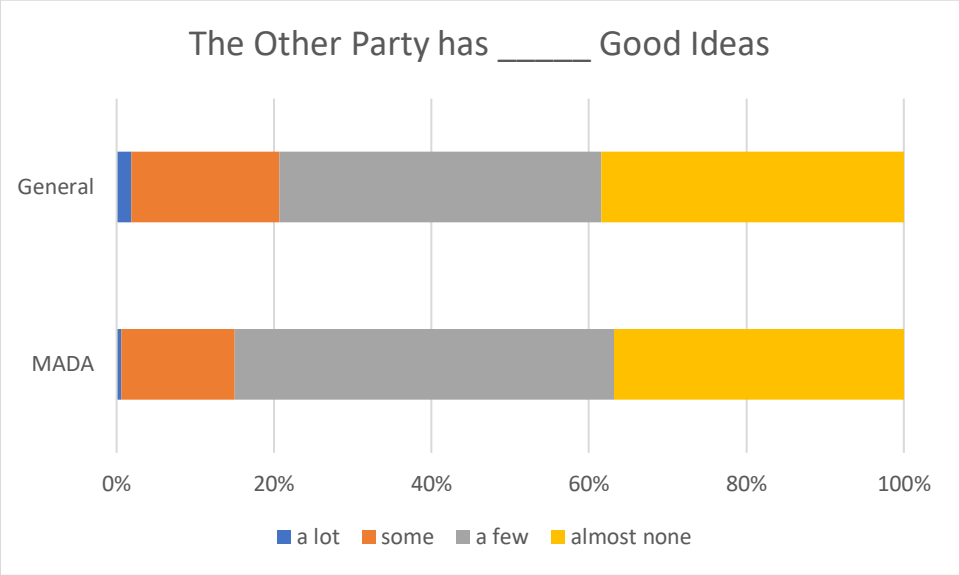


Table 10

How many good ideas the other party has

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ_2	*p*
Amount				
A lot/ Some	15.0% *n* = 50	20.7% *n* = 855	5.85	.008
A few/ Almost none	85.0% *n* = 284	79.3% *n* = 3400		
Total	100% *n* = 334	100% *n* = 4285		

Desire for compromise. Beyond positive or negative beliefs about the outgroup, more specific beliefs about what a person and the outgroup share can have a separate effect on likelihood of engaging in intergroup contact. Specifically, the belief that one's ingroup and

outgroup have a shared future and have to learn to work together has been shown to make intergroup contact more likely (Dunne, 2013). One question from a Pew Research study (2016b, April) that examines this asks how much compromise the respondent would like to see between Democrats and Republicans in the government. The question asks on a scale of 0-10 where 0=Democrats getting everything they want and Republicans nothing, and 10=Republicans getting everything they want and Democrats nothing, where they would like the country to end up. A response of 5 would indicate a desire for total compromise, so the distance from 5 was used as a measure of how much compromise members of each group want. I hypothesized that MADA participants would have a greater desire for compromise than the general population, or, in other words, their average distance from 5 (total compromise) would be lower. Using a one-sided t-test, I compared the mean distance from 5 for each group, with results in Table 11. The data show that MADA participants did have a lower mean (1.55 compared to 1.68), meaning they were closer to the middle in their desired compromise, and the *p*-value was 0.05, suggesting this result is likely not due to chance. Altogether, this provides evidence for the hypothesis that MADA participants want the two parties to compromise more than the general population. This desire for compromise distinguishes MADA participants from the general population and could be a motivating factor driving people to MADA.

Table 11

Results of t-test and Descriptive Statistics for desired compromise by population (lower score means greater desire for compromise)

	Group						95% CI for Mean Difference[1]	t	df
	MADA			General Population					
	M	SD	N	M	SD	n			
Distance from 50/50 compromise	1.68	1.35	336	1.55	1.72	4545	-0.02, 0.28	1.65*	421

*p=0.050

Those who disagree on politics share other values. Just as believing in a shared future increases someone's interest in cross-partisan interaction, believing that one has something in common with the outgroup can also make people more open to intergroup contact. In fact, recognizing common ground is often a crucial part of successful intergroup contact interventions (see, for example, Hartz-Karp, 2005). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 states that MADA participants are more likely than the general population to believe the other party shares some of their values. Using a question from Pew Research's 2017 Typology survey (2017a), I compared the two samples using the one-directional two proportion z-test reported in Table 12. The results show that 68% of MADA respondents said they believed that members of the other party share their values, compared to 60% of the general population, and this difference was statistically significant ($\chi_2(1,N=2599)$=7.68; p=0.003). Therefore, despite their negative emotions towards the opposite party, MADA members were more likely than the average American to want compromise and believe they have values in common with the other side.

Table 12

Do people across the aisle share many of my values, even if they feel differently about politics

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ_2	p
Share Values				
Yes	68.3% n = 226	60.2% n = 1364	7.68	.003
No	31.7% n = 105	39.8% n = 904		
Total	100% n = 331	100% n = 2268		

Life Experiences

Cross-partisan friendship. A person's life experiences likely are among the most important factors influencing attitudes towards a political outgroup and the prospect of interacting with that group. While the precise experiences that lead to engaging in something like

MADA are certainly varied, past research suggests that having cross-partisan friendships has a strong effect on reducing prejudice and opening people up to further interaction (Page-Gould et al., 2008; Al Ramiah et al., 2015). However, not everyone has many opportunities to develop such friendships. In fact, this is one of the reasons MADA exists—the San Francisco-based more-liberal founders wanted to actually meet some Trump supporters. Therefore, research question 5 asks whether MADA members are more or less likely than the general population to have a lot of cross-partisan friendships.

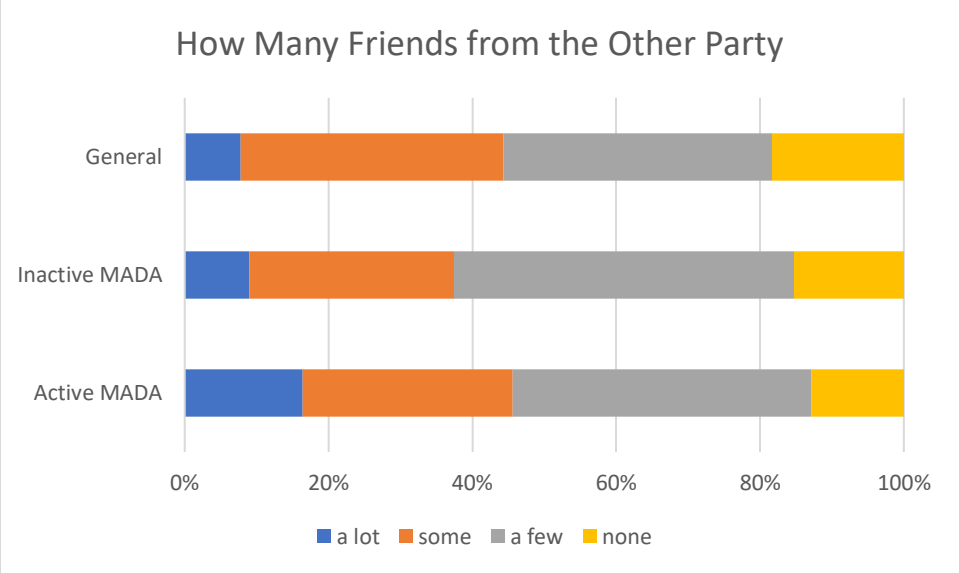
For this analysis, the general population data came from the Pew Research American Trends Panel study in 2016 (Wave 16—2016b, April). Table 13 shows that 86.5% of MADA participants said they have at least a few friends across the aisle, compared to 81.7% of the general population. A chi-squared test revealed this difference to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N=2594)=4.26$, p=0.04—see Table 13). Although this shows that MADA participants were more likely to have at least a few friends across the aisle, compared to the general population, it's unclear whether MADA participants join MADA because they have these friendships or gain these friendships because of their involvement in MADA. When comparing those on the survey that have been actively involved in MADA (they're on the Facebook group or had attended at least one dinner) to those who haven't (ones who had signed up for MADA but had not yet attended an event), the actively involved had slightly more people who answered that they had at least "a few" friends from the opposite party (85% for inactive MADA participants and 87% of , but a greater proportion of people who have "a lot" of friends across the aisle: 16% of 176 active MADA participants said they had a lot of friends from the other party, compared to 9% of the 147 inactive MADA participants (see Figure 9). Of course, we still don't know if the friendships of the active participants were pre-existing, but this does suggest that the active MADA

participants may have gained cross-partisan friendships through MADA. Regardless of whether cross-partisan friendship is a result or a motivator of MADA involvement, the difference from the general population is notable.

Table 13
Amount of Friends in the Other Party

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Friends				
A lot/Some/ A few	86.5% *n* = 288	81.7% *n* = 1847	4.26	.04
None	13.5% *n* = 45	18.3% *n* = 414		
Total	100% *n* = 333	100% *n* = 2261		

Figure 9. How many friends across the aisle members of each sample claim to have.



Past conversations about politics. Although friendship makes a big difference in our willingness to engage in intergroup contact, cross-partisan friends don't necessarily talk about politics. That is why our past experiences talking about politics also influences our interest in future interaction with members of the opposing political group. If people have had bad

experiences with intergroup contact in the past, such as negative moments talking to someone with different political beliefs, those negative interactions often have a disproportionate effect discouraging people from future contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). For this reason, I hypothesized that when asked about their experience talking with people with different views, MADA participants would be more likely to find these conversations "interesting and informative" as opposed to "stressful and frustrating" (Hypothesis 5). This question was asked on the MADA survey and the Pew Research Trends survey from 2016 (Wave 15—2016a, March). However, the results of a one-directional test of proportions shown in Table 14 did not support this hypothesis. The difference between the general population and MADA respondents with respect to finding conversations "interesting and informative" was only about 4%—56.5% for MADA compared to 52.4% in the general population. This was not statistically significant though it was fairly close ($\chi^2(1, N=4946)=1.99$, p=0.08). A slight majority of both groups said they found such experiences "interesting and informative" more than "stressful and frustrating."

Table 14

When they talk with people with different political perspectives, they find the conversations…

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	p
Conversations				
Interesting & Informative	56.5% *n* = 190	52.4% *n* = 2416	1.99	.08
Stressful & Frustrating	43.5% *n* = 146	47.6% *n* = 2194		
Total	100% *n* = 336	100% *n* = 4610		

However, on another question about past political conversations, MADA participants differed more distinctly from the general population. Specifically, both groups were asked if when they talked to people with different perspectives, they found they had "more in common" than they expected or "less in common" than they expected. On this question, 49% of MADA

respondents said that they usually find they have "more in common" compared to 37% of the general population, a highly significant difference ($\chi^2(1, N=4891)=17.81$, $p<0.001$—see Table 15). This experience of finding things in common with those with whom they disagree seems to distinguish MADA participants from the general population, and it may be one factor that makes some people more willing to engage in cross-partisan contact.

Table 15

When they talk with people with different political perspectives, they find that they have…

	Sample			
	MADA	General	χ^2	*p*
Conversations				
More in common than expected	49.2% *n* = 162	37.4% *n* = 1705	17.81	<.001
Less in common than expected	50.8% *n* = 167	62.6% *n* = 2857		
Total	100% *n* = 329	100% *n* = 4562		

Contextual Factors

Finally, we know that contextual factors such as the neighborhood in which one lives can influence a person's likelihood of engaging in intergroup contact. When someone lives around more diverse people, they have more opportunities for interacting with them, which, over time, can make people more accepting of different groups. Perhaps MADA participants are more open to cross-partisan contact because they have already had positive interactions with people of differing political outlook, or perhaps they are seeking out these opportunities through MADA precisely because their lives don't naturally provide such opportunities. Past research has demonstrated that the proportion of the United States that lives in electorally landslide districts (districts in which one presidential candidate wins by 20 points or more) has increased significantly in the past few decades, from nearly 40% in 1992 to 61% in 2006 (Wasserman, 2017). To see how the MADA population compared to this (Research Question 6), I asked

MADA respondents to enter their zip code and then entered the corresponding voting percentages for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election (using a map created by the New York Times—see Katz & Quealy, 2018).

This yielded a few interesting results. First, Figure 10 shows that 88% of MADA respondents resided in neighborhoods that were won by Clinton, compared to 55% of the general population (Frey, 2017). This is perhaps not surprising, since many of the active MADA chapters are in more liberal, urban areas like greater Seattle and Washington, D.C. What is more surprising, however, is how many of MADA members' neighborhoods were won in an extreme landslide. Figure 11 shows that 84% of the MADA sample said they live in areas where the winner had at least a 20-point victory margin, and 57% of them—more than half!—said they live in areas where the winner won by 50 points or more, an extreme landslide. The general population, for comparison, had 61% living in landslide districts, with 21% of that coming from extreme landslides. A chi-squared test confirmed that MADA participants were much more likely than the general population to reside in an area where one candidate got an overwhelming majority of the vote ($\chi^2 = 247.99$, $p < 0.001$). Altogether, since MADA participants mostly live in 2016 Democratic Party landslide areas, this meant that most of the Democratic participants came from areas where most people agree with them (only 8% of MADA Democrats said they live in a Trump-winning zip code), and most of the Republican participants came from areas where most people disagree with them (78% of MADA Republicans live in a Clinton-winning zip code).

Figure 10. Proportion of each group living in areas won by each candidate.

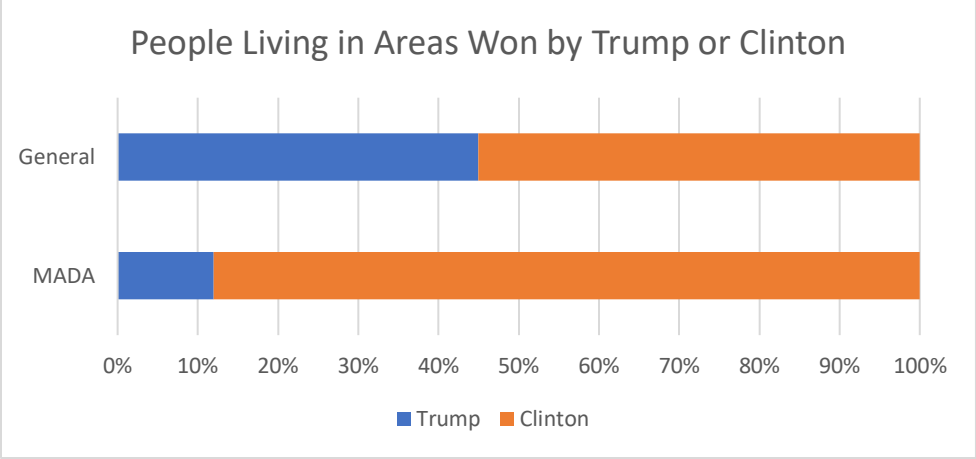
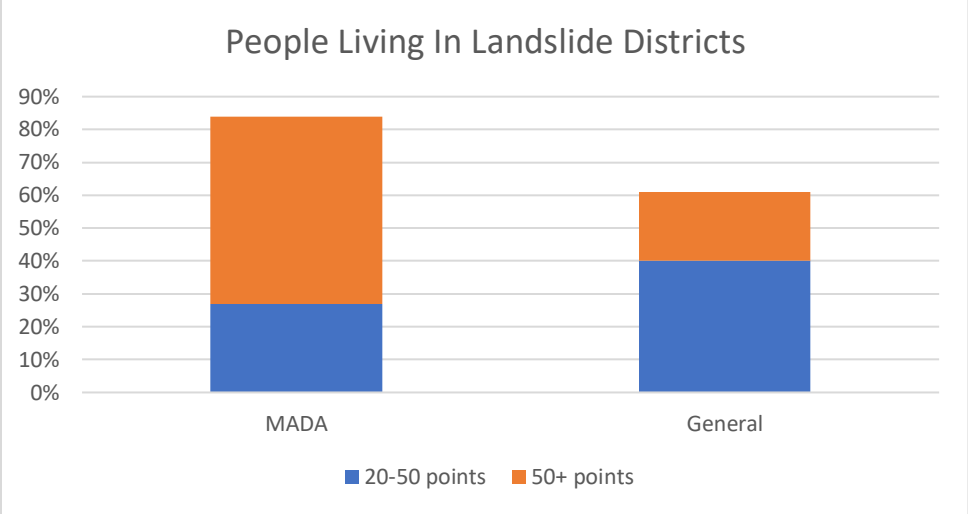


Figure 11. Proportion of each group living in landslide and extreme landslide districts.



Discussion

Demographics and Political Behavior of MADA

Overall, survey data that enable comparisons of the MADA population to the general population of the United States have provided some useful insights into what type of people are voluntarily seeking out cross-partisan contact and why they might be doing it. The first notable finding, of course, is that MADA as of autumn 2019 has many more Democrats than Republicans. There are a number of reasons this may be so. First, although MADA does have a Facebook discussion group, most of the MADA population comes from the in-person events.

Such events are just more feasible in densely populated areas, and more urban areas are generally more liberal. Additionally, the chapters that have the largest number of participants are in especially liberal cities like San Francisco, Seattle, and New York. Altogether, this means there are simply more Democrats than Republicans near these events. Common personality differences between liberals and conservatives also may be contributing to the imbalance. Research has shown that liberals are generally more curious and interested in new experiences than conservatives, who value loyalty and tradition more than liberals (Amodio et al., 2007; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Such a patterned difference may also be contributing to more interest in MADA from the left than from the right. Regardless of the reason, this finding represents an important opportunity for growth for MADA and similar groups, who may have an imbalance between Republicans and Democrats. Since their efforts to help people form connections across party lines requires that there be a good mix of perspectives, this imbalance is something that organizations like MADA are continuing to work on. These groups can focus on growing chapters in more conservative cities, as well as doing more outreach through conservative news sources in order to increase participation from Republicans.

Another notable characteristic of the MADA sample is how politically active they are. Obviously, someone who cares about politics enough to sign up for MADA would be fairly politically active, but it is still remarkable that almost all of the MADA sample always or nearly always votes, and almost half of them have been to a political event such as a rally or protest in the last year. A defining characteristic of a MADA participant seems to be their level of political activity. This has implications for intergroup contact theory in general because it may indicate that those who are the most invested in their ingroup are also the most likely to go out of their way to connect with the outgroup. Further research needs to be done to investigate this theory,

but it's plausible that someone who is highly invested in their cultural identities (race, religion, politics, etc.) would be more interested in an opportunity to share their group's perspective, at least in a context that meet's Allport's criteria for intergroup contact—when there is institutional supports, the groups are of equal status, and the interaction has a cooperative purpose (Allport, 1954). Perhaps they wish to persuade or are motivated by a general sense of learning and engagement.

The rest of the demographic information about MADA corresponds clearly with the political makeup and the level of political activity in the group. Research has shown that people who are wealthy and well educated are much more likely to be politically active (Pew Research, 2018a; Ingraham, 2014), so it is perhaps unsurprising that MADA's population is wealthier and much more educated than average. Additionally, the religious makeup of the group—with fewer self-identified Protestants and Catholics and more atheists and agnostics than the general population—corresponds with national trends for Democrats (Pew Research, 2014b). A report from Better Angels shows that they may have similar demographic imbalances as well, at least in terms of race and education level (Jacobs, Kuhne, and Peak, 2019). Even though these demographics aren't necessarily surprising, they do represent another opportunity for organizational and civic development. For cross-partisan organizations such as MADA to be successful in exposing people to differing perspectives, more diversity in race/ethnicity, education, and income would be helpful, and indeed arguably is essential, in addition to a greater balance between conservatives and liberals.

Beliefs and Attitudes Motivators

The investigation of MADA participants' attitudes about political groups yielded surprising results. Overall, MADA participants had more negative feelings towards the opposing

party than the general population did. Specifically, more MADA members rated the other party very coldly—under a score of 30—on the feeling thermometer, more MADA participants said they would be unhappy if a member of their family married someone from the other party, more MADA participants thought the other party is a threat to the nation, and MADA participants were less likely to say that the other party has "a lot" or "some" good ideas. The analysis of how they feel about the other party revealed that the difference between the two samples doesn't seem to come from the general population feeling more positive feelings about the other side; rather, the surveyed MADA participants just had stronger negative feelings about the other party, while many members of the general population were more neutral. Although this is surprising, given that MADA participants are going out of their way to interact with members of a political party they have such negative feeling about, the strong feelings about politics are less surprising when one considers how politically active the MADA group is. Many studies have shown that those who are very politically active are generally also very affectively polarized, while those who are more neutral or apathetic in their feelings tend to be less active. Feeling strongly about politics, including strong negative feelings about the opposing party, seems to go along with taking political action, though it's uncertain whether being politically active makes a person affectively polarized or vice versa (Mason, 2015; Huddy, 2015; Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006). Paradoxically those strong negative feelings might be driving people to participate in MADA rather than driving them away, since being part of MADA is one type of political action that people who care about politics may want to take.

Still, there are many people who feel so strongly about politics and are so loyal to their outlook that the idea of having a civil conversation with someone from a very-different viewpoint seems impossible. So, what makes MADA participants different than these other

politically active partisans? Well, the answer to hypotheses 3 and 4 may give us some clues. These analyses revealed that MADA members were more interested in compromise than the general population, and they were more likely to say that those who have different ideas about politics still share many of their values. In other words, even though they had negative feelings about the other party, MADA members still said that they had things in common with members of the other party and they still said the two sides should work together. While this research establishes correlation, not causation, it's possible that these beliefs are key motivators for their activity in MADA, and they correspond with research that shows those who believe they share a future with the outgroup are more interested in engaging with them (Dunne, 2013). Further research should explore and expand on these particular motivators, but this study provides evidence for their importance in driving people to engage in intergroup contact.

Life experiences and Contextual Motivators

Finally, looking at the life experiences and environment in which MADA participants live gives us further potential insight into why they have chosen to engage with MADA. MADA members, for example, are more likely than the general population to claim to have at least "a few" friends from the other side of the partisan aisle. Some of these friendships could have come from actually participating in MADA, but regardless of whether it's an antecedent or outcome, their friendships with members of the political party show willingness and opportunity to engage with people with different political views. Additionally, although the test wasn't quite statistically significant for the first question about their experience with past cross-partisan conversations, MADA participants did report a higher percentage than the general population that past cross-political conversations were "interesting and informative" rather than "stressful and frustrating." And for the second question about conversations, the MADA sample had a

significantly larger percentage (compared to the general population) who said that when they talk about politics with someone who has different beliefs, they usually find they have "more in common" than they expected. These positive experiences with cross-partisan contact likely make a major difference in encouraging interest in MADA. Research has shown that negative experiences with intergroup contact tends to discourage future contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), and these findings provide some evidence that positive experiences can also encourage future contact, though further study is definitely needed. There may be particular ways of perceiving past conversations that make the biggest difference in encouraging future contact, and the questions asked on this survey are just the beginning.

Finally, looking at where MADA participants live revealed environmental factors that could impact both interest in MADA and the dynamic of the group once formed. We learned that a large majority of MADA participants live in districts won in the 2016 presidential election by Hillary Clinton, and a majority of MADA participants live not just in landslide districts but extreme landslide districts, where the winning candidate won by more than 50 points. While an increasing share of the American public lives in landslide districts (Bishop & Cushing, 2008), the percentage in extreme landslide districts for the general population is less than half as much as the MADA sample. This has both positive and negative implications for MADA and organizations like it. On the one hand, the fact that most of the participants were from landslide districts suggests that MADA is providing an important opportunity that many participants have less ability to easily access—if almost everyone in one's neighborhood votes the same way, then MADA might be one of the only options for cross-partisan interaction. On the other hand, the fact that most of those landslide districts are places where Clinton won might discourage more Republicans from joining. Republicans living in landslide Clinton districts don't need MADA to

meet Democrats—they're surrounded by them. Most of the Republicans in MADA live in districts where they are the minority, and spiral of silence theory shows us that voicing your opinion in such settings is rare and takes a lot of courage (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). While personality differences may be part of why there are more Democrats in MADA, it's also probably easier and more appealing for Democrats because a lot of the MADA activity is taking place in Democratic Party-majority places. Other partisan-bridging organizations have active chapters in different cities, so the particular context may differ, but more and more of the country is becoming politically homogenous, and being aware of the local environment is relevant to all such groups. To maximize the potential of the programs, organizations such as MADA that are based in more liberal cities should work on recruiting from the red districts that often surround the blue, urban areas, and also focus on growing and forming chapters in the more conservative urban areas. This way, cross-partisan-communication organizations can provide more opportunities for Republicans to develop understanding and empathy for the other side, in addition to providing those enlightening experiences for Democrats.

Chapter 5

Interviews: Motivations for Joining Make America Dinner Again

This chapter presents the second part of this project, which involved interviewing participants about their interest in engaging in cross-partisan contact through Make America Dinner Again. While the surveys provided insight into who MADA members are and how they differ from the general population, the interviews allowed for deeper exploration into what led participants to actively seek out intergroup contact with those across the political divide. As Paolini and colleagues (2018) point out, there is little research about the "personal, situational, and wider social factors [that] move individuals towards… intergroup contact" (p.1), which makes exploratory qualitative research like this particularly needed at this time. My central research question for the interviews was "What are the important themes in participants' stories about how they became interested in MADA?" I employed a narrative interviewing style to keep the interviews very open, allowing participants to decide what was important to their story, and analyzed the interviews inductively, using thematic analysis.

Ultimately, the analysis identified four *identity themes* that occurred across the personal narratives. They were not necessarily present for each person and certainly not in equivalent amounts; that said, these were the themes that commonly recurred across the corpus of interviews: (1) the political context—specifically how people have experienced and interpreted politics during and since the 2016 election, (2) the experiences that spurred individuals to be open to interacting with people different than themselves, (3) the parts of their personal self-concept that they considered important to their interest in MADA, and (4) the core beliefs and values that they said influenced their decision to take action. I begin this chapter by explaining the main lines of discourse that emerged within each of these four identity themes. Finally, I

conclude this chapter with a discussion of how these findings contribute to theory about intergroup contact, and what additional research might be undertaken to understand these findings better.

Context: The 2016 Election and Politics Since Then

A major aspect of almost every participant's narrative was a discussion of what their experience has been like with politics for the last few years. Of the 27 participants, 25 directly mentioned something about what they experienced during the 2016 election or how they feel political discourse has changed since then, and the other two talked about their experience discussing politics more broadly without saying anything about the most recent election. For many participants, some aspect of the election was so concerning that it made them realize the need for cross-partisan contact, and for others, the election was mostly influential because it created more opportunities like MADA and compelled a lot of other people to think about issues that they had been focused on for some time prior to 2016. In either case, participants talked about the political context—how they've experienced and interpreted political events, conversations about politics, and what they see in the media (and on social media)—as part of the story of how they became interested in MADA. Specifically, there were three aspects of recent politics that people expressed concern about: (1) Trump himself, (2) a breakdown in political discourse, and (3) partisanship and its effects. Regardless of which aspect was the primary focus, many participants were driven by concern about the state of current politics and the desire to help solve the problems they were seeing.

Reactions to President Trump

Many participants mentioned President Trump's election as a particularly bitter time in political discourse among their friends and family, but some people on both sides of the partisan

divide saw Trump himself as the problem they wanted to help solve. Individuals who emphasized how they feel about Trump were part of this sub-theme, which focuses on who Trump is and how he governs, not just how they felt about his election. Only 4 of the 27 participants emphasized this sub-theme, but it was a significant and repeated factor for 3 of those 4, and thus warrants some discussion. To begin, Daniel (all names are pseudonyms), who said he leans Republican, talked about how he found Trump's "entire style and brand of politics" offensive. He mentioned that Democrats and the media have also contributed to the incivility he sees in politics, but that "other presidents, regardless of how successful they were, at least tried to be the president of the entire country, and Trump has said he'd like to just be the president of his base and downplay anyone else. And that's not what I believe in." Trump's behavior influenced Daniel significantly, including where he works and how he approaches his job—he works for a conservative media company but said he is careful to never include ad hominem attacks in anything he writes because he is consciously trying to counter the negative influence he feels Trump has had. Because Trump's rhetoric, and often the Democratic response, is so divisive in his view, he has focused more on taking part in unifying efforts like MADA. He also said that, if it weren't for Trump, he might not have seen the need for something like MADA, so his feelings about Trump have been very influential.

Brianna and Helen also emphasized their feelings about Trump, but their perspective was slightly different. Brianna, who described herself as a lifelong Democrat, said she found MADA because she was trying to make sense of Trump's election. "I could not understand how anybody could elect the person that we elected. And so it just was really trying to understand that and found out about [MADA]." She expressed that she has tried to develop more empathy for the other side, but it's sometimes hard for her to get past how she feels about Trump: "there's not a

day for me that goes by that something he says or does isn't cringeworthy, anger-inducing, and spikes up my anxiety." Helen, who considered herself a Republican until the 2016 election but now said she leans Democrat, expressed very similar emotions about Trump, saying, "I was devastated when… Trump got elected." Both Helen and Brianna said they joined MADA to try to make sense of the election, but also to try to do something about Trump—Helen said she started getting politically involved, including in MADA, because "we've got to get rid of Trump" and she "wanted to do [her] part" to help that happen. They expressed hope that interacting with the other side might lead to compromise or some political change, not just more empathy with the other side. For these three individuals, Trump himself, not just the discourse around his election, was a problem that made them want to take action.

Breakdown of Political Discourse

While a few participants said that Trump himself was the problem they wanted to solve, many more—some who supported Trump and some who didn't—said that the way discourse had devolved during and after his election was the larger problem. Although participants also claimed that political discourse has been fraught with unkindness and disrespect for much longer, many said that the 2016 election was especially bitter and concerning enough that they wanted to do something about it. Specifically, participants illustrated the problem with political discourse through stories of people seemingly silenced or being verbally attacked for having a different view, relationships that were damaged because of political differences, and seeing or experiencing political bias and stereotyping. Overall, the breakdown in political discourse was emphasized in claims that disagreements about political issues led to (or could have led to) significant social damage for the individual offering the divergent opinion.

One major concern that some participants expressed was that some people feel silenced, like they can't have a voice because their political view is in the minority in their community. Bryce, who says he leans Democrat, mentioned seeing this in regard to a cooking class he was teaching at the university where he worked: a group of students were reluctant to tell him that they knew each other through the College Republicans group because they said "oftentimes people will look down on us for it." He said he was surprised because he knew there were plenty of conservative leaning people on campus, but it seemed that these students felt they had to be careful who they told about their party affiliation. Seeing people afraid to voice their opinion was especially concerning to Bryce, who said that if there's no open forum for people to discuss ideas, they will just go to groups that agree with them and people will end up more extreme because of it. Caroline also expressed that, as a conservative in a liberal area, she didn't want to be too public about her support for Trump—like with a yard sign or bumper sticker—because she said it would be "dangerous." Ryan, a liberal in a conservative city, expressed feeling "guarded" in public, though his friends are fairly like-minded. Overall, around 8 participants spoke of feeling silenced in some manner or knowing others who they believe have felt silenced, especially since the 2016 election. To them, this was a concerning sign of the breakdown in civil political discourse.

Much of the fear of speaking out among participants came from the fear of being verbally attacked or worse, and the stories that over half of participants told about the verbal attacks they've seen or experienced showed that these fears had some merit. When Daniel, a conservative, posted on social media that he wasn't going to support Trump, people he considered friends told him he should "shut up and get out of politics" if he wasn't going to support Trump. Curtis, a Republican and NRA member who lives in San Francisco, talked about

how his city government declared the NRA to be a terrorist organization, so he feels his elected officials are essentially calling him a terrorist. Marco, who identifies as a Democrat, talked of how he has a conservative coworker that he feels like he can talk to about a lot of topics, but when it comes to politics, she would always shut down the conversation "with a little jab or some type." Preston, who leans Republican, talked about an acquaintance who called him a pervert online because of a disagreement over immigration policy. Brandon, who leans Democrat, mentioned how the teenagers in a youth group he leads can't seem to disagree on something without turning to personal insults. Most of these experiences happened in the last few years, when participants claim they saw an increase in the incivility and personal attacks surrounding politics, particularly online. On the other hand, some pointed out that this has been going on much longer than that—Emily, a Republican, said that in the very liberal community she lives in, conservatives had their cars keyed and their businesses vandalized "over their George Bush bumper sticker" in the early 2000s, "and they're now just terrified to reveal any sort of political view in public." These personal attacks were the most poignant examples of how toxic political discourse has become for many participants.

Even if they weren't outright attacked for their point of view, many participants expressed concern about the political stereotyping and generally toxic tone they were seeing online. For example, Peter, who defines himself as a centrist, talked about how because he's a gun owner, people will automatically jump to claiming he doesn't care about children if he questions their statements about gun control. Similarly, Brianna talked about how members of her family believe that "if you're pro-choice, you're for murdering babies." Bianca, who leans conservative, talked about how she's heard liberals claim that conservatives don't care about helping the poor or supporting schools, but when you look at her conservative community, they

voluntarily donate a lot of their own money to the schools to support certain programs. Several conservatives recalled being called racist after expressing support for something that didn't seem to relate to race—Curtis after just mentioning he had lived in the south, and Raymond because he expressed support for the Tea Party. These insulting stereotypes were not always directed at the participants themselves, but many felt that when someone says "liberals are this" or "conservatives are this" the implication is still personal. Participants expressed concern about these stereotypes because they tend to shut down the conversation, and also because they don't allow for the possibility of more nuanced perspectives. Alex, who identifies as Libertarian, put it this way: "They just automatically assume that if you do X, Y, and Z and you're part of this, then you're going to be this person," when in reality, someone can agree with some positions of a particular party and disagree with others. Basically, participants expressed concern about the trend of stereotyping and assuming things about someone who has a different perspective because it makes it difficult to have a real discussion, so this was another major part of the breakdown in discourse.

Most of the time, participants pointed to concerning toxicity in the discourse online or among strangers, leading to negative experiences and sometimes negative social effects. However, sometimes the social impact was more severe, leading to closer relationships that were broken or damaged. Emily, a Republican, has friends who "decided to disconnect because they couldn't handle hearing a different opinion." Samuel, a Democrat, mentioned two friends of his that almost got into a fistfight over politics. Caroline, who leans Republican, tried to talk to her son's godmother, who she went to church with for years, about their disagreements, but her friend eventually said, "I'm going to have to cut you off." The experience was really painful because she said it felt like her friend "just really didn't want [her]" and would just immediately

invalidate her point of view without listening to it. While only a handful of participants talked about relationships that had actually been severed because of politics, others talked about how they've avoided talking about politics with some close friends and family because they know it could cause damage to their relationships. For example, Helen recalled going to her aunt's house recently, and just hoping she wouldn't bring it up because such conversations are "highly risky." Although some participants were, themselves, very emotionally invested in politics and could see why this damage might happened, participants said that the impact on relationships is a clear indication that the way we talk about politics has become unhealthy, giving a sense of urgency to the need to improve political discourse.

Partisanship and Division

A final aspect of the recent political context that participants expressed concern about was the division between the two sides. Unlike the previous section, which focused on problems with political conversations, this section focuses on concern with partisan division. In other words, when participants talked about their concerns about division, it wasn't about how people talk about their ideas, but rather about the actual ideas that are being expressed. Some participants were concerned that the ideas being expressed were too extreme or too one-sided, and that would be damaging to the country long term. Specifically, participants were concerned that (1) the media are too biased and limited in the ideas they represent, (2) communities are too one-sided, so a mix of perspectives don't get heard, and (3) the middle ground, which they identify with, seems to not be represented.

First of all, some participants expressed concern with media bias, generally regarding mainstream media, but sometimes more broadly as well. For some of the conservative participants, one issue was that a majority of mainstream news stations seem to have a liberal

bias. For example, Caroline (who voted for Obama in 2012 and Trump in 2016, but generally leans Republican) talked about how during the 2016 election, it seemed like "there'd be 5 or 6 articles about how great [Clinton was] and then 100 articles about how awful Trump was." She said that the imbalance bothered her, and she started to conclude that most of the big news organizations seemed to skew liberal, which made her feel like conservative voices didn't have anyone to speak for them. This, she said, motivated her to be more outspoken herself. Raymond also said that since he sees most major outlets as leaning liberal, "people who think like [him] are being pushed out." Beyond the concern about a liberal spin in the mainstream media, other participants from both sides of the political aisle expressed concern that more and more news outlets seem to have a spin one way or another, so you have to be able to sort through the interpretation to get to the facts. For example, Samuel, a Democrat, said, "When it comes to discussion of political figures… if I start reading adjectives in front of that person's name, I immediately stop reading… and I find it on both sides, this kind of prejudicial language attached to figures." Participants expressed concern about this media bias because they saw it as blurring the lines between fact and opinion, making it harder to establish a shared truth between Americans. Beyond that, some participants expressed concern that nuance, both in ideas and in people, wasn't being shown in the media. As Gene, who leans Democratic, expressed, "There's not a good faith effort to really present all the nuance"—it's generally just one person representing each side. Overall, about a third of participants expressed concerns about media bias and how they fear it is increasing the division between Americans and making it harder to find common ground.

But the media were not the only place where participants said diverse perspectives weren't being represented. Many of them expressed an interest in MADA because they see their

community as too one-sided. Whether they were in the majority or minority in the community, this one-sidedness made it difficult to really have good conversations where multiple views could be openly discussed. For example, Heather, a Democrat who has mostly lived in large liberal cities like New York, talked about realizing that she didn't have any Republican friends, so when she wanted to start talking to people with different perspectives, she had to reach out to organizations including MADA. Marco, a Democrat who lives in an area that leans conservative, said that although he's the minority in the community, he's turned to organizations like MADA to have conversations about politics because there doesn't seem to be much interest in having conversations across party lines. Emily, a Republican in a liberal area, talked about how some Democrats she didn't know reached out to her after the 2016 election because they were shocked by the results and wanted to make sense of it but didn't know any Republicans they could talk to. Some participants also acknowledged that even if the larger community around them had a mix of perspectives, the people they spend time with were generally more like-minded. The one-sidedness of their communities was concerning to different people for different reasons—for some, it was a problem because they said their perspective wasn't heard or acknowledged; for others, it was a problem because they recognized a need to work with the other side, but they didn't have a chance to do that because they were so separated from them.

Both media bias and one-sided communities contributed to the final aspect of partisanship that many participants discussed: feeling like extreme positions were the only ones that had a voice, and people in the middle weren't represented at all. For example, Audrey, who calls herself a centrist, explained that she had voted for people from different parties all her life, and she is "stuck in the middle" because she often sees the value in the perspectives on both sides and doesn't feel a particular loyalty to either one. Helen discussed feeling conflicted

because her perspective on many issues (e.g. immigration, refugees) aligns more with Democrats, but she's pro-life and an evangelical Christian, so she doesn't feel like she really fits in anywhere. She referred to herself as part of the "confused middle." Bianca, who leans Republican, also complained that it feels like "moderate voices, regardless of whether they were on the moderate Democrat side or moderate Republican side, have really been lost in political discussion." Altogether, about a third of participants expressed a frustration that they didn't have a place in politics because moderate voices aren't often focused on. This problem, they said, was alienating people from politics and contributing to a more divided country.

Altogether, media bias, one-sided communities, and lack of representation for a moderate perspective culminated in a general concern that Americans are losing any sense of common ground. This concern was expressed in some poignant ways by participants. Daniel expressed it this way:

> No matter who is going to be president, no matter who is in control of Congress, there's roughly two sides of the country… They're going to still be there no matter who is in office. And if we're going to be completely polarized and just hate each other, it makes us very vulnerable as a country. But that's also not really even a country—where we can't work together and can't be friends despite political differences. I don't think our country can survive that.

In other words, the separation between the two sides and the feeling that you have to be on one side or the other is splitting the country in a way that many participants said was unsustainable. Some even expressed that while they used to be more focused on getting particular policies passed or getting their side elected, recent politics changed their focus to be more about bridging divides. As James put it, when he realized how divided the country is, "I no longer felt like electing Democrats was the solution. I felt like the problems were much deeper." Altogether, at least 24 participants mentioned their concern that the issue goes beyond incivility, to the actual division and lack of common ground between Americans.

Experiences Connected to Participants' Appreciation of Diversity

Although concern about some aspect of current politics was nearly universal among the participants I interviewed, that alone doesn't explain why they chose to seek out intergroup contact with those who have different political identities from themselves. After all, everyone in the country experienced Trump's election, and many have probably recognized similar problems with incivility and partisanship, but not everyone chooses to respond by seeking interaction across party lines. The other identity themes give us clues as to what makes these participants unique, starting with the experiences that participants said helped them gain a desire to hear diverse perspectives. Any experience that they connected to their interest in different perspectives, their ability to get along with people who are different from them, or their willingness to hear a contradictory viewpoint fit into this category of experiences that made them open to diversity. These experiences fit into two types: positive experiences with diversity—both political diversity and other types of diversity, and negative experiences, or experiences with some negative emotion attached, from which they learned to be willing to hear others' views. The following section will cover those two types of experiences that helped them develop an openness to diversity.

Positive Experiences with Diversity

Participants' positive experiences with diversity were expressed in three types: (1) positive exposure to different cultures through travel or living in many places, (2) a close relationship with someone from a different identity, and (3) good experiences talking or working with a diverse group (differs from the second type because these were usually temporary arrangements, not a lasting relationship). I discuss each in this first sub-theme.

To begin, 12 participants who had the opportunity to travel or live in many different places explained that their exposure to many cultures made them more open to interacting with different groups in something like MADA. They didn't focus on a specific person or specific conversation but discussed how being exposed to many different ways of life helped them feel more comfortable around different types of people and more interested in the diversity of human experience. For example, Parker, a Democrat, talked about being raised in France before moving to the United States when he was 11. He said, "When I came to the U.S., I was kind of an outsider learning American culture… and it was interesting to me." He then expressed the belief that "if you've been lucky enough to live in different cultures, you're more open to cultural difference." Richard, a Democrat, talked about an eye-opening trip to Poland, where the kindness of strangers broke down some of the stereotypes he had learned from his Grandmother (who had experienced persecution in Poland for being Jewish) and also helped him see his own culture differently. Kristin, who leans Republican, discussed how she had lived in several areas of the US, some very conservative and some very liberal. Moving from the South to Los Angeles, in particular, "started changing the way [she] saw the world." Peter, who considers himself a centrist, spoke of living in both conservative and liberal places in the United States, and how he believed that conservative exposure made him "more forgiving of a conservative attitude" than the people around him in the very liberal city where he now lives. Though the specifics of these stories differed, the common thread was that traveling or living in different places forced them to consider others' perspectives in a way they might not have otherwise, and for them that exposure had been positive. Basically, these twelve participants said that they had grown as people from these experiences, and that made them more interested in actively seeking out other experiences

where they could be exposed to different types of people or speak about these eye-opening experiences to others who might not have had the same opportunities.

About two-thirds of participants spoke about close friends or family members who have a different identity, whether that difference was political, racial, or religious. Some briefly mentioned these relationships and others dwelled on them extensively. One reason these relationships were important to participants is because it provided them with the chance to hear different perspectives from someone that they liked and could be open with. For example, Gene said this of his brother-in-law, who has a different political perspective from him: "he and I have just been really encouraging example of two people who have really deep, intense, long conversations and disagreements. But we've always stayed respectful of each other." In general, having family members with different perspectives was common, and though some said it put a strain on their relationship, others said it gave them more respect for people who have different views, and a way to counter the stereotypes they sometimes see. Susan, who considers herself a centrist, expressed this idea by saying "We have people of different opinions in my family, and… They're not stupid. They're not racist. They're not bleeding-heart liberal characters or whatever. They're actual people just who view how you get to a society in a different way." Friends with different perspectives served a similar purpose. Lucy, who leans Democratic, talked about her friend who is a very strong gun rights advocate, which is different from her perspective, but when they talked about it, she recognized the commonality between them:

> Emotionally, we're in the same place of feeling like… it's the responsibility of adults to keep their kids and all kids safe… Neither of us said we're going to change our minds about gun policy, but I can't villainize NRA supporters at this point, and I think it would be hard for Bob to villainize people who want to take our guns.

Even though her friendship with Bob didn't change her mind about policy, she said it helped to break down some stereotypes and allowed her and her friend to see the other side as good people

rather than the enemy. Overall, many participants expressed that having close friends and family with different political views helped them recognize that those with different views can be good people and made them more hopeful that cross-partisan contact could be positive.

But the differences in their friends didn't have to be political for participants to connect their friendships to their interest in MADA. For example, Kristin, a White woman who grew up in a community she described as 97% White, talked about the significance of a friendship she developed with a Black man:

> I started realizing how insular my world was from a cultural and racial perspective, and it helped me start to see… some of my ignorant mindsets about things… I just really feel like he taught me how to love and listen to people everywhere. It was a friendship with him that changed my world because I would just come to him with questions about what it was like growing up in Georgia. What are the things that happened to you? … I just loved him so much and that started broadening my perspective about the world.

Kristin said that the relationship with a person from a different racial identity opened her mind and made her interested in knowing and listening to people with all different identities—racial, political, or otherwise. Other participants had similar experiences with religious identities. Ryan, a retired Lutheran bishop, talked about his friendship with a Muslim man in his community:

> The relationship we have is somewhat that of a theological kinship. He was educated in Alexandria with what Muslims refer to as the middle way… And the tradition from I come from in my church, the Evangelical church of America, is very much the middle way… Obviously there are enormous differences between us theologically and we don't ignore those things. He appreciates my commitment, I appreciate his. And that's what has allowed us to continue and deepen our friendship.

While Kristin focused on how her friendship made her recognize and appreciate how different others' experiences could be, Ryan focused on how his friendship helped him recognize how much he had in common with someone that others might see as very different from him. Both made the connection between these friendships and their interest in MADA because the friendship was so meaningful to them, and the difference in their identities was part of what

made it meaningful. Overall, participants' emphasized how their close relationships with people from other identities—political, racial, or religious—showed to them that interacting with different types of people can be very positive, and an experience like MADA could open them to new relationships like that.

Many participants also spoke of working or talking with people who had different identities. Unlike the specific family or friend relationships, their contact with these people was usually more temporary or superficial, but it still left a lasting impact. For some, these experiences happened through jobs when an assignment they were given required them to work with people who saw things differently. For example, Gene worked in wildlife conservation, and though he was politically liberal himself, much of his work required working with a wide variety of people to find conservation solutions that could work for all of them. He said:

> I ended up working with ranchers and finding that they were far more nuanced than I had presumed. A lot of them had a huge love of wildlife and conservation that, you just assume they don't… So it was eye opening and rewarding to be able to work across the urban rural divide, liberal conservative divide and find common ground.

Gene expressed that working with different people helped breakdown some of the stereotypes of the other side and made him want to continue the conversations he was able to have in those contexts. By crossing social divides, Gene said he was able to come up with "win-win" solutions, which would be more lasting and important than trying to do the work on his own.

Another participant, Dallin, expressed a similar sentiment. As a conservative who works in the automotive industry, he often found himself in conversations about climate change, particularly regarding cars and pollution. Since he knows a lot about how cars work and the pollution they generate, he expressed that he often had to explain the details and show people how the issue is more complex than they thought. Although he was sometimes frustrated by the assumptions people made, he also had experiences where people were able to come to a more

nuanced understanding of things, and he appreciated how these conversations could bring them closer to a middle ground. “Somewhere in the middle is where the truth is,” he said. And by having these conversations, Dallin expressed a hope that they could get closer to the truth and talk about solutions that would actually work, rather than just political talking points. Overall, participants’ experiences working with diverse groups sometimes helped them recognize the possibility (and sometimes necessity) of working across party lines in order to achieve the outcomes they were hoping for.

While many participants had positive experiences with difference through work or family, sometimes these chances to interact across lines of difference came in more unexpected ways. For example, Alex, a libertarian, told the story of a Thanksgiving dinner they hosted for people in the “couch-surfing” community (people who have signed up to stay with locals through couchsurfing.com). They invited a large group of couch-surfers in their area and ended up with an interesting mix of 6 people, who were diverse in terms of race, religion, and politics. They ended up having in-depth discussions about politics, and even though it was tense at times, Alex was amazed at how positive the experience was, overall. They concluded the story saying, “The guy who was the Republican was very staunchly pro-Israel, and to be able to sit in the room with a person who is Palestinian American… the different perspectives were nice, and just having those conversations opened up a whole new avenue of thought for people. And I enjoyed it, and I wanted to see it again.” Even though they weren’t planning on having these intense political discussions at the dinner, the experience was so positive for Alex that they began seeking out more opportunities like that. Many other participants also talked about positive experiences they had talking about politics—whether with friends, family, acquaintances, or stranger—and

overall, the fact that they had political conversations that stayed respectful made them hopeful that such conversations could happen through something like Make America Dinner Again.

Learning Experiences that Helped them Be more Open

More negatively charged experiences were also formative in some participants' desire to join MADA. While many negative experiences were about the state of current politics that was the focus of an earlier section, six participants also talked about the negative effects of division they had seen outside of current politics. In particular, a couple Jewish participants related current political conflicts to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Richard, for example, grew up Jewish but more recently has been drawn to Sufiism, the mystical branch of Islam. He talked about explaining to a friend from his Mosque why the Jewish people want to be in Jerusalem and realizing that both sides really want the same thing: "all these divisions are artificial… and yet it's enough to cause people to kill each other." Because he had a foot in both worlds, he had empathy for both sides and could see the destruction it was causing. He later said about MADA, "This is exactly what it takes" to mend deep rifts like this: "one dinner at a time, one connection at a time." Another participant, Samuel, talked about growing up as the son of a refugee who escaped from Nazi Germany. He grew up hearing about relatives who died in concentration camps and recalled, "There'd be pictures of them in their apartment, and I remember the amazement that all these people had been killed over just an irrational view of who they were." Samuel (who is a Democrat) also recalled the protests of the 1960s and how some "violent left-wing groups" seemed to emerge because people "felt they couldn't be heard, that there wasn't any political path forward." Having witnessed and experienced the violence that can come from prejudice and division, he was concerned that if groups in current politics feel cut off from the conversation, that could lead to further violence. Ultimately, these types of experiences

contributed to participants seeing the division in current politics with more urgency, which fueled their desire to take action.

The other type of learning experience that almost half of participants talked about was times when they recognized their own bias or fallibility. For some, this was an experience where they changed their mind or realized their thinking about some issue had been wrong. James, who leans Democratic, said he has had many such experiences, but one of the earliest ones happened when he went to Bible camp as a teenager. His family was Jewish, but he was invited to Bible camp by a close friend, and he described this moment:

> I had a eureka moment where I went from saying that Jesus was not the savior to saying, "I don't know, maybe he was."… the counselor thought I was getting closer to converting, but really, I had gone from being certain of my view to just being open to any view. That was a really seminal moment of engaging with people where I realized that in all facets of life, not just in politics, that I was fallible.

Because of experiences like this, James said he learned early on that he didn't necessarily have all of the answers, and that has shaped his approach to politics, particularly his willingness to hear other perspectives. Preston, who leans Republican, also shared an experience where he recognized the bias he had been raised with. The community he grew up in was fairly segregated and he had never really interacted with people of color. He said he was "fearful of Black people… because they're different from me." Then, when he was working for an agency that helps people with disabilities, he was assigned to work with a child from a Black family and visit their home. When he arrived, they offered him food and basically treated him as part of their family. He said, "To be welcomed with such open arms like that, by anybody, to me that felt special… So that caused me to really examine how I looked at the world and how I presented myself to the world." He said that experience set him on a journey to being more open and "being able to appreciate people as people." Overall, these two stories illustrate what almost half

of participants discussed: experiences that revealed to participants their own fallibility and helped them realize that there are probably other things they're wrong about, which in turn made them more open to hearing from people with different political perspectives. In the end, both positive experiences with diversity, and experiences that showed participants the dangers of division or their own fallibility were all significant aspects of what led participants to MADA.

It's Personal

Participants also often attributed their interested in MADA to some part of their core personal self-concept. Sometimes participants were able to trace a part of themselves to specific experiences that had, and other times they simply thought of it as how they had always been. Statements were identified as being distinctly personal when participants said things like "well I've always been this type of person" or "part of who I am is…"—basically, whenever participants discussed themselves as an entity with particular characteristics or roles. Unlike beliefs or values, these were not statements about how the world is or how they believe it should be, but rather statements about how they see themselves as individuals—their unique abilities, interests, or characteristics. The most common personal factors across the 27 interviews were (1) an interest in politics, (2) a deep curiosity about people, (3) a willingness to look at things differently, (4) being a person who takes action, and (5) feeling that bridging divides is their personal contributory role—something they are naturally good at or uniquely suited to.

When asked about the backstory of how they became interested in MADA, many participants started with an explanation of how they got interested in politics. For most, an interest in politics was a precursor to an interest in bridging political divides or having political discussions through organizations like MADA. Among those who discussed where their interest in politics came from (about two-thirds of participants did this), a few focused on the current

context as driving their political interest, but for most others, politics was a lasting interest that was ingrained in their personal identity. Bryce, Ryan, and Samuel talked about being raised by very politically active parents who instilled in them a desire to be aware and involved in some way. For example, Bryce said "My mom was always really politically active—for her that was going around canvasing. And I felt like I wanted to get involved, but [in a different] way." Ryan also described his mother as an "active volunteer in Democratic Party circles," and as a kid he remembers thinking, "this is how we do life; this is part of who we are." Beyond that, a substantial subset of participants had even turned their personal interest in politics into a professional one—6 participants had spent some part of their career working in politics in some way. Emily, Daniel, Curtis, and James had all worked for members of Congress, in their office or on their campaigns. For instance, Emily explained that she "always enjoyed learning how things work… and politics seemed like a really natural fit for that" so once she was introduced to politics, she started getting actively involved pretty quickly. She described getting involved in local campaigns when she was 15, and it wasn't long before she wasn't just volunteering but actually getting paid to work on congressional campaigns. Although she's stepped back from campaigning fulltime, she said she is "still hooked" and continues to volunteer in her free time. Additionally, Daniel worked for a conservative media company, Brianna worked for various advocacy groups in D.C., and Parker had run for state representative and worked as an activist. For these 6 participants, politics was more than a hobby; it was a major part of their life and who they are. Something like MADA was maybe a new way to apply their political interest but being involved in politics happened long before MADA for most participants.

Another characteristic articulated by many of these MADA participants was a deep curiosity about people and their perspective. For some who weren't as focused on politics, this

characteristic was more important than their interest in politics. The most poignant example of this is Audrey. When asked about her backstory, she said, “My most prized possession… is my friend network…People are my hobby… Some people collect baseball cards, I collect people and their stories. So I looked at this as another opportunity to learn something about some new people and get some new stories.” For her it really wasn’t that much about politics, she said she was “more interested in the people.” While most others had at least some interest in the political context, 11 other participants expressed being driven by a deep curiosity. James discussed being more interested in talking to someone when he finds out they disagree with him, politically: “When I hear a progressive argument, it makes sense to me, even if I disagree with it. So I don’t find it as interesting. When I hear conservative arguments, they spark sort of a visceral reaction in me… and I find that much more interesting and more fun to engage with.” His curiosity about other perspectives made it so he was not only willing to talk to others who disagree with him, but he actually prefers it. For many participants, they didn’t really know why they were so curious or where it comes from. Raymond, for example, said he’d been that way “for as long as [he could] remember.” But finding people and their stories interesting, and just wanting to understand why they feel the way they do, was a common characteristic among a little less than half of participants.

A third common characteristic that participants expressed was a willingness to look at things differently, or an ability to be comfortable with nuance and uncertainty. Emily, for example, talked about living through some very uncertain times in her life, and to get through them, she had to learn how to deal with uncertainties in nuance in life and in politics.

> It is kind of this weird tightrope that I walk a lot of the time where I'm very ideologically conservative, but I have very nuanced views on a lot of things because I have experience with them. And I am constantly questioning and there's some cognitive dissonance on a couple of things that I recognize, and I just have to constantly struggle with.

Even though developing this ability was difficult for her, she said it has given her the ability to look at politics differently and see other perspectives, which is a valuable skill. Other participants also expressed a willingness to look at things in a different way, which some attributed to experiences where they recognized their own fallibility. Lucy, for example, talked about how her own views have evolved and because of that, she said, "I don't feel my views are set in stone." And she doesn't feel that changing her views would mean changing her identity, so it's not hard for her to listen to views that are in conflict with her own. Rather than her particular views defining her, it's more her willingness to engage with different ideas that defines her. This was similar with the other participants who expressed this idea—they often had strong opinions, but they also said they were the type of person who was willing to listen and change their opinion if new information or experiences warranted such a change.

Perhaps one of the most important personal factors that people expressed as a factor driving them to MADA was identifying as a person who is outspoken or takes action when they see a problem. For example, Brandon explained that, as an engineer, "By nature, I try to solve problems," so when he noticed how uncivil people were being when they disagreed, he sought out an organization that is trying to do something about that. Peter described himself as a "rip the Band-aid off kind of person" who wasn't satisfied with just watching things fall apart and felt he needed to help "in [his] own little way" by getting involved with MADA. Susan saw MADA as an "opportunity to feel like I could do something with other humans that might actually have an impact on the world", which fit with the kind of person she wanted to be. About half of participants echoed some kind of statement like this, about not being (or not wanting to be) the kind of person who just sits on the sidelines, but instead wanting to get involved and have an impact. For many of these participants, getting involved in something like MADA came

logically because they consider themselves outspoken individuals. Bianca described it as "I'm the loudest person in the room… and I don't worry too much about what everybody is thinking." Emily, likewise, explained that, "I am not the type of person to be intimidated… so I decided that it was my responsibility as a not-scared Republican to put myself out there" and break down stereotypes. Overall, whether they were commonly outspoken or just determined to make an impact, many participants saw themselves as the kind of person who takes action and gets involved, which was key to their decision to join MADA.

Finally, for a few participants, their involvement with bridging divides went beyond a desire to take action; some considered bridging divides to be a lifelong calling and special ability of theirs. For example, Lucy grew up in a conservative Midwestern state as an LGBTQ individual and then moved to a more liberal city, and she said her unique background has always made her a natural bridge between political divides. She said she can talk to her liberal friends about her conservative family and break down some of their stereotypes, and she can break down some of the stereotypes her family might hold about liberals or LGBTQ individuals. She has also been hosting guitar jam sessions that bring together a unique mix of younger, liberal people from the LGBTQ community and older people from Lucy's suburban neighborhood—creating local opportunities for bridging, even though that wasn't her primary goal. Other participants chose to act as a bridge even more deliberately, devoting their professional life to bridging work. For Richard, who is a collaborative law divorce attorney, this meant a focus on helping couples end their marriage with some understanding and respect so they could go on and raise their children peacefully. For Parker, his career as a sociologist, a professor, and then a nonprofit director has always been about bridging. He said, "I am concerned generally about civility and people's ability to talk across lines of difference. So my professional work is very much devoted to that.

And it's been a in some sense, a lifelong interest of mine." Throughout his career, he has focused on "bringing people together," so it's more than just a recent or temporary interest for him. Five of the 27 participants had spent at least part of their career in a job that focused on building bridges, and several others told stories like Lucy's, where they had made efforts to form bridges in other ways—through hobbies or volunteer work. For these participants, their role as a bridge-builder was very much part of their personal identity. Expanding that focus to include MADA was, then, not much of a stretch because they were already doing similar things in other parts of their lives.

Beliefs and Values

As participants discussed the political context, their experiences with diversity, and their personal distinctions, they often connected these factors to beliefs and values. This means that many of the beliefs and values have already been touched on through the quotes and stories that have already been mentioned. However, summarizing these core beliefs can provide insight into how participants developed an interest in cross-partisan contact through MADA. Statements about how the world (or people) is or how the world (or people) should be were classified as belief or value emphases. These beliefs fell into two types: beliefs about human beings and how they should be treated, and beliefs about politics and how political discourse should function.

Beliefs about Human Beings

Some participants expressed a strong belief that humans are generally good and reasonable, despite how members of the other political party are sometimes portrayed online and in the media. For example, Samuel explained that he thinks there is "a baseline of good intent that runs through all people." While he acknowledged that some people have beliefs that he finds abhorrent, he also said that you can't only pay attention to the bad parts of people. You can

dislike one part of someone's character and also recognized "that's not the only component of you." Raymond expressed a similar belief that it's wrong to judge someone's whole character based on a political disagreement. "Maybe they believe differently, but that doesn't mean they're a bad person," he said. On a similar vein, some people expressed that people who disagree with them are not only decent people, but also pretty reasonable. Susan expressed this by saying, "I never fundamentally felt like half of the country must be stupid or wrong. That doesn't make logical sense to me…" and she could see that her family members who have widely different views were all still pretty reasonable about them. Others likewise expressed that when you look at someone's background, you can see how they came to their point of view. "There's a really legitimate reason why that person believes that," Brandon said. Overall, many participants expressed that when you get to know a person and see a whole human being, not just a caricature, you'll find that people have good intentions and reasons for believing as they do. This belief in the general goodness of human beings was claimed as an important factor in several participants' willingness to engage with those who had different political views.

Relatedly, many participants expressed that not only are people generally good, but people generally have a lot in common that supersede political differences. Lucy talked about music being a unifying factor at the monthly guitar jam sessions she hosts, which attract people from both sides of the political aisle. Others talked about how religious commitments were often a unifying factor, even across different religions. Speaking of his friendship with a Muslim man (while he is Christian), Ryan expressed "He appreciates my commitment, and I appreciate his," and Daniel talked about how he goes to church with people who have different political views, but their religion is "something in common" that they can build from. Gene and Brandon talked about how a love of nature and the outdoors was often common ground that people could start

from. One of the most important commonalities, that Ryan, Lucy, Brandon, and Susan pointed out, was the love people have for their families and especially their children. As Susan put it, "most people love their kids and want to see their kids have kids. And I think you need a little more faith in that." At the end of the day, these participants expressed the belief that "we have more in common than different," as Gene put it. Being part of MADA was a way to invest in relationships that might unite us.

Partially informed by these beliefs about human nature, some participants expressed deeply held beliefs about how humans should treat each other. Specifically, many participants expressed some version of the belief that we should care about all people and treat them kindly. For many participants, this was tied to their spiritual beliefs. For example, Daniel said, "My Christian faith is… the core of where my interest in MADA comes from, because I believe that people should be treated well." Kristin also mentioned her religious beliefs, saying, "I do believe in following the Savior… which means I get to honor and value every person because every person is made in the image of God." She said this belief led her to MADA because she saw it as in line with how she "had been trying to live." Richard phrased a similar belief but in less religious terms when he told of an experience where he realized he didn't want to keep winning at others' expense. "The only real win is a win-win," he said. This reflects a belief that he should care about all people, even if stated more indirectly. Ryan explained how he developed the value of caring about others as a young child by watching his parents, who were always "on the lookout for and helping people who needed a hand up… and it became part of the ethic of the family." For Brandon, the commitment to helping others and treating them well came from childhood experiences where he was bullied and resolved to never treat others that way, no matter how much he disagreed with them. Overall, seven participants repeatedly focused on their

core beliefs that we should care for others and treat everyone with respect, and that belief was a driving force to wanting to counter the unkindness they often saw in political discourse.

Beliefs about Politics and Political Discourse

In addition to the beliefs expressed about human nature and how we should treat people, participants also communicated some core beliefs about politics and political discourse that made them more interested in MADA. One of these was that not only do people have common ground outside of politics, but people have more common ground about politics than we tend to think. For example, Emily described talking to people across the aisle and realizing that they agreed on certain policies. As a conservative, she didn't expect to find common ground about immigration with a liberal woman she was talking to, but she found that on the specific issue of chain migration, they had "almost identical views." Other participants mentioned that it seems like people have different ways of approaching an issue, but they sometimes get to the "same conclusion in two different directions," as Samuel put it. Or as Peter put it, if you look at things at a more abstract level, you can sometimes learn that "you're actually on the same page" which can be the starting ground for finding policies you both can live with. In the end, although some participants lamented that they can't seem to find common ground with the other side, others still expressed a belief that the two sides have political changes they could both get behind, if we could only talk to each other long enough to figure those things out.

Another interesting belief that some participants expressed was the idea that conflict can be productive. While they get why some people avoid political conversations because the potential conflict is uncomfortable, one-third of participants emphasized that such discomfort can lead to really important outcomes. Because of his job as a collaborative attorney, Richard has been trained in mediation and learned that "every conflict is a green light to break through to the

next level of intimacy." In other words, he expressed that conflict can bring people closer together and deepen their relationship, while avoiding it just keeps people at a distance. Dallin explained that the back and forth discussion between different sides is how we get to the truth, which is generally somewhere in the middle of the two extremes. Jack, who lived near Ferguson, Missouri during the protests over the Michael Brown shooting in 2014, talked about how the incident sparked a lot of discussion that was really difficult, but ultimately really valuable and helped him see things differently. For these participants and several others, conflict was an important part of living in a democratic society. As Alex put it, disagreeing about ideas "doesn't make us weaker, it makes us stronger… we have this unique experiment which is our democratic republic" and that allows us to "try out different ideas." Ultimately, this belief that conflict is productive and important helped these participants to be open to the discomfort that cross-partisan contact brings, rather than shying away from it.

Finally, even if participants weren't exactly excited about engaging in uncomfortable conversations, most participants shared a belief that such conversations are necessary because conservatives and liberals have a shared future. In other words, people expressed the desire to learn to work together and build communities together because they see it as the only way forward. Gene put it this way: "We have a huge nation, people with different perspectives and different needs. And we have to find a way to govern that includes the needs of everyone. We can't just have someone in office who is favoring their base for four years and then flip that." Several other participants also expressed concern that it was dangerous to just going back and forth between which side gets to have what they want. Instead, participants had a vision of a future where people could agree on some things and compromise on others. Jack said that by engaging on difficult topics, people could build deep relationships across lines of difference that

would ultimately add "value to a community that is really critical" and "push against a lot of the coarseness." Since his community contains people from both sides of the aisle, he said it was important to try to build communities that include different perspectives. Perhaps the most concise statement of this belief came from Parker, who said, "I think that for the future of human societies, which are growing more diverse, that our ability to get along across lines of difference is crucial for our welfare in the long term… It's one of the most important issues for the future of human societies, not just American society." Altogether, this belief —that the future of our society depends on our ability to work with the other half of the country—was one of the main reasons some participants chose to focus attention on bridging divides rather than just fighting for their own side.

Discussion

I began the interviews with the goal of understanding what common factors are involved in how people develop an interest in cross-partisan contact. Considering that MADA was started largely as a response to the 2016 election, it's not a surprise that most participants discussed the recent political context as an important part of their interest in MADA. But the fact that so many people focused on recent political divisiveness and how it affected them is significant. We know from public opinion data that polarization, which has been increasing for years, has increased more sharply since the 2016 election cycle (Pew Research, 2018; Jones, 2019), and many participants have experienced the tension that has created on a very personal level. This might suggest that when intergroup conflict starts to affect people more personally, it creates a sense of urgency that drives people to want to take action. Obviously, there are many different ways to take action, but it's clear that for many of these MADA members, they didn't see the need to focus on bridging divides until the political conflict started feeling close to home. When they

could see it in their neighborhoods, on their social media, and in their own lives, they started to feel the need to do something about it. Future research should investigate whether this pattern holds in other contexts, but in this context, participants were more interested in seeking out intergroup contact when the conflict between groups began affecting their lives and communities.

The way political conflict affected them was different for each participant, though, and many were focused on a particular problem within the current political context. Often which issues they focused on translated to a particular goal that they hoped they could accomplish by getting involved in MADA. For participants who expressed concern about Trump and believed the two sides have a shared future and have to work together, their stated goal was to create a conversation that could ultimately lead to compromising on issues and creating political change. For participants who emphasized the incivility in political discourse, their stated goal was usually to counter this incivility by contributing to respectful debate. Those who expressed more concerned with division and the lack of different perspectives in the community said they went in hoping to give a minority perspective (especially if they had expressed feeling silenced as the political minority in their community) or listen to and understand new perspectives. For the participants that had not just attended events, but actually volunteered to moderate or organize events, their goals went beyond just hearing different perspectives to facilitate bridging divides for other people. In addition to being concerned about incivility or division, these participants had a particular commitment to bridging work and often saw themselves as a bridge-builder. Finally, some people were not as driven by the specific political context and were more driven by the goal of meeting people and forming relationships with new types of people. This connection—between how people were seeing the political context and their goals for intergroup

contact—is significant because it's possible that certain goals lead to more desirable outcomes. Additionally, some participants who had already been to a few MADA events talked about the difficulty that arose when attendees had different ideas about what the event should accomplish, which suggests that it can be problematic when people bring different goals to the intergroup contact situation. Overall, more research is needed to understand which goals are associated with positive results in intergroup contact, but it seems that learning how people are assessing the context of the conflict between groups could be an important part of understanding how they are likely to approach the opportunity for intergroup contact.

Regardless of their specific political concerns and goals for MADA, it's significant that participants didn't take the approach of avoiding political conversations or trying to beat the other side. Research has shown that generally, when people see the outgroup as a threat to their own well-being, they avoid intergroup contact (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Blascovich et al., 2001). Participants often said that some of their friends were taking that approach, but those that chose to join MADA saw the threat differently. Instead of focusing on the outgroup as the threat, participants saw the threat as the breakdown of discourse or the growing division between parties. Some found Trump himself threatening to their well-being, but the focus was more on him than on Republicans in general. This points to another potential insight about what makes someone want to engage with those in the opposite social group—perhaps partisans who see the intergroup *conflict* as threatening, but don't attribute that threat to the specific *people* on other side, are the most likely to want to engage in intergroup contact. Recognizing a threat may motivate people to take action, but how they are interpreting the threat may influence what kind of action they want to take. Future research on how people interpret the root of the issue in an

intergroup conflict situation can help confirm what kinds of threat appraisals drive people to or away from intergroup contact.

Several interview participants emphasized the current political context in unique ways, and their experiences can give us some clues about why they avoided blaming members of the other party for the issues in recent politics. Almost all participants talked about some positive encounter with diversity that they had—it was the most ubiquitous idea, after the shared concern for the state of current politics. Other research has shown us that past experiences with intergroup contact influences someone's future interest in contact. Positive encounters can encourage future contact, but negative encounters disproportionally discourage people from future contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). How the interviewees talked about their experiences was actually quite remarkable because many of them had both positive and negative incidents with intergroup contact, but for them, the positive occurrences carried more weight than the negative ones. Why this was the case is unclear, but it may be because the positive experiences were often more lasting than the negative ones. The positive experiences related to relationships, travel, places they lived, people they worked with—it usually wasn't a singular incident, whereas, with the exception of those who had actually lost friends over politics, most of the negative occurrences were more surface level. Clearly, positive experiences with intergroup contact can have an important and lasting impact on someone's openness to later intergroup contact.

Another thing that was interesting about participants' positive encounters with diversity was the fact that even if the experience didn't relate to cross-partisan contact, many participants still found it relevant to their decision to join MADA. It was interesting that many talked about interacting with different ethnicities or becoming friends with someone from a different religion,

and then used those experiences to inform their expectations for a group like MADA. Even though it was a totally different type of intergroup contact, the fact that they had such a meaningful experiences with bridging one kind of *social* divide made them hopeful that they could have a meaningful experience bridging a *political* divide. The incidents people shared about recognizing their own biases were also sometimes about non-political issues. Learning about their racial or religious biases opened them to hearing new perspectives on other issues as well. This is an important discovery because it suggests that even if someone has never had a positive encounter with a certain type of intergroup contact, they still might be more encouraged to engage if they have had positive encounters with other types of intergroup contact. Of course, the challenge then becomes finding ways to give people from homogenous communities that initial positive encounter. Not everyone gets a chance to travel or move frequently in their life, after all. However, it is still encouraging that practitioners might be able to encourage more people to engage in cross-partisan contact by tapping into the positive memories people have from other types of contact.

Interviewees also expressed aspects of their personal self-conception that drew them to MADA. Getting involved in MADA was deeply personal to many participants, who expressed a desire to reach across partisan lines not just because of a casual interest but because the idea aligned with *who they are.* For some it started with the idea that being involved in politics is part of their personhood. Interestingly, it wasn't necessarily that participants were deeply attached to a partisan identity (though some certainly were), but rather that the idea of being politically aware and involved was deeply ingrained in them. Others specifically expressed that their identity as a person who can and should take action was particularly important to their involvement, in addition to some level of political interest. This has interesting implications for

intergroup contact in general because we would expect those with a deep partisan identity to be invested in the political conflict, but that alone might not motivate intergroup contact. In fact, some strong partisans might feel their identity is threatened and avoid contact as a result (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Blascovich et al., 2001). However, seeing themselves as an active or outspoken person, as well as someone who cares about politics, contributed to participants choice to take action because that lines up with how they see themselves. Additionally, seeing themselves as curious people who were open to hearing and even accepting new ideas was another important personal trait. This corresponds with the personality trait of openness, which relates to being curious and being open to new experiences. While research suggests that this personality trait is generally higher among liberals than conservatives (Carney et al., 2008), curiosity about people was an identity factor that was expressed equally by conservatives and liberals in my interviews. Therefore, it is possible that people from both sides of the aisle who are high on the openness personality trait are the most likely to be interested in engaging in cross-partisan contact. Overall, across the different personal characteristics that were expressed, one thing was clear: voluntarily engaging in cross partisan contact was something that appealed to some participants on a deep, personal level because it aligned with how they saw themselves or the kind of people they hoped to be.

Finally, there were a number of beliefs that participants expressed as formative for their interest in MADA. Beliefs and values are part of moral reasoning, and past research has shown that our moral reasoning is important to how we make and justify our decisions (see Haidt, 2007; Green & Haidt, 2002). The decision to participate in MADA was similarly explained through the lens of beliefs. In particular, significant beliefs included the beliefs that people are generally good and that we should treat people with respect, as well as the beliefs that humans have a lot in

common (politically or otherwise) and that conflict can be productive. These beliefs make sense in the context of past research, which has shown that people who have at least some positive associations with the outgroup will be more likely to engage with them (Turner et al., 2013). Believing in the goodness of human beings could certainly lead to those positive associations. Research has also shown that the anxiety and uncertainty involved in intergroup contact is one of the main factors that deters people from engaging across lines of difference (Paolini, Harris, & Griffin, 2016). However, participants who believed in the usefulness of conflict expressed being more okay with that uncertainty because they believed it would pay off in the end. This suggests that even if people feel anxious about interacting with a different social group, believing in the productive power of conflict can help them look past that anxiety and see a larger picture. Therefore, if practitioners can foster this belief, perhaps by drawing on people's experiences where conflict had a positive outcome, perhaps that belief can be a powerful way to encourage more intergroup contact. Although beliefs are generally formed and fostered over a period of time, recognizing which beliefs might encourage intergroup contact gives researchers and practitioners the opportunity to appeal to those who have already developed such beliefs and try to foster them further in the intergroup contact scenarios they create. This study suggests specific beliefs about human nature and politics that may be relevant, but it's clear that belief systems are an important motivator and should be the focus of further research.

Overall, these interviews provided several insights about what might have motivated these participants to actively seek out intergroup contact through MADA. These results are, of course, preliminary, and should be followed up with additional qualitative and quantitative research to further investigate and confirm some of these initial insights. Research should also be conducted with a more diverse group of participants in a wider array of intergroup conflict

situations to see which of these findings can or can't be transferred to other contexts. This study sets the stage well for such future research by illustrating several interesting motivating factors. I turn now to a final chapter, in which I synthesize scholarship and my findings across the survey results and interviews, with the goal of meaningful insights about who is driven to intergroup contact and why.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

> "I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." – Thomas Jefferson

"Americans are more divided than ever," reads the beginning of the Associated Press's series *Divided America.* Although this certainly isn't the first or only time Americans have been deeply divided—the Civil War being another example—both anecdotal evidence and extensive research shows us that there are deep divides between the political right wing and left wing in the United States. This is happening on both an ideological level, where Americans are more deeply divided on what the nation's top priorities should be (Jones, 2019), and on an emotional level, where Americans increasingly see conflicts between Republicans and Democrats as "very strong" (Schaeffer, 2020) and partisans are increasingly likely to have a "very unfavorable" view of those on the other side of the political aisle (Pew Research, 2017b). The negative effects of this division are both political and personal: Congress and local governments find themselves gridlocked, and personal relationships and workplace relationships are increasingly strained by political differences. And while ideological polarization isn't universally a bad thing (some have argued that it gives voters clearer choices), affective polarization, the increasing dislike the two sides feel for each other, is clearly making it harder for people with different ideologies to live, work, and form communities together.

Fortunately, there are ways to reduce some of these negative feelings that partisans hold towards each other. Intergroup contact theory states that, under the right conditions, positive interactions between people from opposing social groups can lead to decreased prejudice towards the other side, and hundreds of studies have confirmed that such interactions can have positive

effects (see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). While much of this research focuses on racial or religious divides, some research has shown that when we talk about politics in more politically diverse groups, our views will be less extreme (Sunstein, 2002) and when such interactions are collaborative or include cross-group friendships, they can help reduce partisan prejudice (Wojcieszak & Warner, forthcoming; Manbeck et al., 2018). However, despite its positive potential, many people avoid interacting with people from different social groups because it can be anxiety-inducing (Paolini, Harris, & Griffin, 2016). Still, there are many organizations devoted to bringing together people from different political perspectives—Better Angels, Make America Dinner Again, and Living Room Conversations to name a few—and these organizations are filled with people who volunteer to engage in such contact. Research suggests that many people avoid interacting with people from the opposite social group, but these volunteers are seeking out such contact. There is little research on what drives people to engage in intergroup contact, which is why those motivations became the focus of this dissertation.

This dissertation used the context of a specific organization that facilitates cross-partisan contact—Make America Dinner Again—to explore the people who have joined the organization and what drove them to join. Few intergroup contact studies have focused on what motivates someone to engage in intergroup contact, and even fewer have focused on partisan social groups, so this research adds to existing research in both those domains. Additionally, the vast majority of intergroup contact research has come from a social psychology tradition that focuses mostly on quantitative research, leaving an opportunity to explore new possibilities for motivational factors from the ground up, using qualitative research where people who have sought out intergroup contact can talk about how they became interested in doing so. By focusing on motivations and using a mixed methods approach that includes both a survey and interviews, this

dissertation has helped to contribute to our understanding of intergroup contact theory in new ways. In this chapter, I will summarize the key findings from the study as a whole (combining the survey and interview findings), discuss limitations and possibilities for future research, and finally conclude with the most significant implications of the study as a whole.

Key Findings from the Study as a Whole

I employed a mixed-methods approach to better understand those who engage in cross-partisan contact and their reasoning for doing so. First, I conducted a survey of Make America Dinner Again participants, drawing upon questions from national surveys which enabled me to compare the MADA population to a national population in the United States. The approach allowed me to better understand who participates in MADA and how they are similar to or different from Americans as a whole. The survey questions, and accompanying research questions and hypotheses, were selected based on what concepts proved significant in previous research about polarization or intergroup contact. In particular, I was able to compare MADA to a national population in several categories, including demographics, attitudes towards politics and political parties, their experiences engaging with people who have different political views, and their political environments (particularly how one-sided their community is). After analyzing the survey data, I then interviewed a subset of survey respondents to investigate further what factors they considered important to their interest in cross-partisan contact through MADA. These interviews primarily asked the question “tell me the backstory of how you became interested in MADA” and then followed up with what they answered to that question, thus allowing participants to define for themselves what was significant in their decision and to bring up topics that past research hasn’t necessarily considered. Using thematic analysis, I identified the major themes in the stories that participants told about how they became interested in

intergroup contact. In chapters 4 and 5, I reported the results of each method separately. This concluding chapter looks at the findings from both studies together, thus providing a summary of the major takeaways from the project as a whole.

First, both methods revealed interesting findings about the political activity of those who joined MADA. While we would expect MADA participants to be at least somewhat politically active, the difference from the general population on several measures of political activity were quite large. For example, MADA participants were more than 4 times more likely than the general population to have attended a political rally or event in the last year. The interviews reiterated that being politically active was an important part of what brought people to MADA, with many participants starting their stories of interest in MADA with some explanation of their history of being politically active. Together, these methods illustrate that an interest and engagement in politics is often a precursor to engagement in cross-partisan contact for many participants. In the broader context of intergroup contact, this suggests the importance of having some kind of personal interest in the context in which the intergroup conflict takes place—a person who is not really aware of or concerned about conflict between religious groups is probably not going to seek out opportunities to engage with people from other religions. In this context of partisan conflict, generally being interested in politics is often one element of how people become interested in bridging divides.

Other major findings about the demographics relate somewhat to the political engagement. The survey found that MADA's participants were significantly more educated and wealthier than the average American. Other research has shown a connection between wealth, education, and political activity (Pew Research 2018a; Ingraham, 2014)—education can help foster an awareness and interest in politics, and greater financial stability frees up time and

energy to focus on getting more involved politically. The MADA sample also differed from the general population in other ways—they were less racially diverse and about 75% of those who declared a preference were Democratic leaning, which is, of course, not reflective of the political preferences of the country as a whole. These imbalances represent a challenge for efforts to bridge political divides, including MADA and similar organizations, because for the contact to be most successful, it needs to expose people to a variety of perspectives. Political diversity is their focus, of course, but racial and economic diversity are also important for organizations that are seeking to reduce political bias and stereotyping.

The survey and interviews also yielded interesting findings about MADA participants attitudes towards politics and political parties. Across several different measures, the survey showed that MADA participants have stronger negative feelings about the other party than the average American does. Most of these questions were about the party as a whole, not necessarily individual members of the party, but on the question about how you would feel if a family member were to marry someone in the other party, MADA participants were still more likely than the general population to say they would be unhappy about that. This might seem unexpected, considering their willingness to engage with members of the other party through MADA, but we also know that people who are more politically active have stronger feelings about politics and political parties, so these strong negative feelings might be a result of their deep investment in politics. In fact, strong emotion, especially emotions like anger or fear (from feeling threatened), are often a key factor in driving people to take action, including political action. The general consensus in research on emotion is that the emotion of anger leads to an attack response, and the emotion of fear leads to a fight or flight response, to try to eliminate or escape the threat (Oatley, 1992; Matsumoto, 2001). This obviously looks different in today's

political world than it did for our hunter-gatherer ancestors, but it's still clear that those who feel threatened by the political context, as MADA participants seem to feel, are likely to want to do something to neutralize whatever they find threatening. The strong negative emotions MADA participants were feeling were likely key in driving them to be politically active, including being involved in MADA.

However, the interviews revealed that concern participants were feeling went beyond distaste for the opposite party. Although MADA participants were more likely than the general population to say that the other party is a threat to the nation, the interview participants assessed the threat differently. In the interviews, people talked about feeling threatened by the incivility they see in political discourse and the growing divide or lack of common ground between the two sides. While some participants said they thought one side or the other was more to blame for these issues, even those participants said both sides contributed to these issues, and overall, the focus wasn't usually on what a particular group or party was doing. It seems that when asked if the other party is a threat, many MADA participants said yes, but when given the chance to talk freely about what problems they saw in current politics, the focus wasn't usually on a political *party*—the *conflict* between the parties was the larger threat. Ultimately, this may indicate that while anger and feeling threatened is likely motivating MADA participants to take action, the way they're appraising the threat may be why they choose to act through intergroup contact rather than avoiding or trying to beat the other side. This corresponds with Lazarus and colleagues' Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991), which suggests that a person's cognitive evaluation of their environment influences that person's emotional response and the action they take in response. MADA participants were evaluating the political environment in particular ways that led them to take action by wanting to bridge divides because they were

concerned with fighting the threat of civil discord, rather than the threat of the other party. Clearly, how people are appraising a threat in an intergroup contact situation is an important part of whether they decide to engage in intergroup contact.

Specifically, MADA participants talked about elements of the political environment that motivated them to seek out an opportunity like MADA. They focused mainly on the breakdown in political discourse and the general lack of common ground or understanding between the differing sides. For some interview participants, this included being concerned about political homogeneity in their communities, which is not unfounded considering the fact that over half of the MADA survey respondents live in congressional districts where one presidential candidate beat the other by 50 points or more in 2016. A few focused on Trump's rhetoric and actions specifically, but those that didn't focus on Trump himself still talked about the 2016 election, seeing it as a moment that woke them up to issues with partisan conflict that they hadn't been paying as much attention to before. For many participants, this increased awareness came when partisan conflict began to affect them personally—people talked about being insulted for having a different point of view, losing friends over political differences, or feeling silenced because they could face serious social consequences for voicing a divergent opinion. Although participants acknowledged that partisan conflict didn't begin in 2016, for many that was a time when they began to experience it on a more personal level—it made them concerned about partisanship and polarization, even though it didn't create those problems. This illustrates that contextual factors, or the intergroup conflict as a whole, may be more likely to drive someone to intergroup contact if the conflict is personally affecting them. Seeing the consequences of a conflict in their own lives drove these folks to take action in new ways, specifically by seeking out intergroup contact through MADA.

Of course, action can take many forms, so in addition to being concerned about political conflict and seeing the conflict (not the other side) as the main issues, MADA participants may have also been motivated by different ideas about how to solve political problems. The survey suggested that MADA participants want a greater degree of compromise between the two parties than the average American. The interviews reinforced this idea, with many participants who talked about wanting to join MADA because they believe that the best way to approach the political problems they were seeing was for the two sides to work together more. Often this belief was accompanied by a belief that conservatives and liberals have a shared future, so preserving the nation was dependent on building a community together—one that works for all sides. This has important implications for intergroup contact as a whole because it suggests that even when people have negative views of political others, if they believe that the future requires collaboration between the two sides (rather than thinking their side should just defeat or avoid the other), then they might be open to intergroup contact, which can lead to better attitudes about the other side and possibilities for collaboration. Reaching out to those who have this belief, or trying to foster this belief, could lead to an increase in people taking advantage of intergroup contact opportunities.

Another important belief that emerged in both methods was the idea of shared values across political lines. The survey revealed that MADA participants are more likely than the general population to believe that people who disagree with them politically still share many of their values. In the interviews, participants expressed similar beliefs, often talking about how they believe that people have a lot in common that supersede our political differences. The most powerful commonality for many people was that they knew people on both sides of the political aisle love their families and want the best possible lives for their children and future generations,

even if they have different views of how to get there. Interview participants also expressed a similar belief that people generally have good intentions and are reasonable in their beliefs, even if their reasoning isn't obvious to someone with a different point of view. These beliefs fueled participants' willingness to engage with people from the other party—they could see the humanity in people on the other side, even if they didn't always like what they had to say. This finding is consistent with other research that suggests that when someone has at least some positive associations with the outgroup, they are more likely to be interested in intergroup contact (Turner et al., 2013). This study showed that sometimes, those positive associations stem not from specific beliefs about the other side, but rather from deeply held beliefs about humanity: that humans are generally capable of goodness and reason, and that we all have a lot in common because of that.

When it comes to MADA participants' past experiences, both the surveys and interviews showed that MADA participants have often had positive experiences interacting with people who are different from themselves. On the survey, MADA participants were more likely than the general population to say that when they had conversations with people who have different political perspectives, they had "more in common" than they expected. MADA participants were also more likely than the general population to say they had at least "a few" friends from the other political party (though the difference from the general population was larger in those who were active in MADA, so these friendships may have come from participating in MADA, rather than being an antecedent to their involvement). In the interviews, participants also often mentioned the good experiences they've had talking to friends and family members who have different perspectives but have always been able to remain respectful in their disagreements. However, the interviews also showed that relevant positive experiences included interacting with

many types of diversity, not just political diversity. Many interview participants talked about friends who have different racial or religious backgrounds or experiences interacting with many types of cultural diversity, and they said these experiences made them more interested in MADA. For these participants, interacting with any type of diversity made them more interested in and open to the type of diversity they expected to find in MADA. This finding is quite promising because it suggests the possibility that reminding people about positive experiences with diversity of any type could make them more open to intergroup contact with a particular group, even if they haven't yet had any positive experiences interacting with members of that particular group.

Finally, although the survey didn't ask any questions about a person's self-concept, this emerged as an important theme in the interviews. Specifically, the participants whom I interviewed commonly articulated self-concepts that included being deeply curious about people and their beliefs, being a person who takes action, and fulfilling the role of a bridge between different groups in their personal and professional lives. These characteristics were described by participants as being part of who they are, not just a temporary interest or commitment. Many of these characteristics relate to what may be another important factor in someone's decision to join MADA: self-efficacy, or someone's belief that they are capable of taking meaningful action that will influence "events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994). Although interview participants didn't specifically express this belief, they did talk about seeing themselves as someone who doesn't just sit on the sidelines and seeing themselves as someone who is particularly capable of creating change in this arena because of their natural ability to bridge divides. Seeing themselves this way likely indicates a high level of self-efficacy, which allowed them to believe that their actions could actually make a difference. Because of this belief and their general self-concept,

engaging in intergroup contact fit with the picture of themselves that participants had, so it wasn't much of a stretch for them to make the decision to sign up.

Besides allowing participants to believe in the effectiveness of their choices, the focus on how they see themselves indicated that the decision to join MADA was deeply personal for many participants, which could be the case for other types of intergroup contact as well. These interviews likely only scratched the surface of the kind of self-concept that is associated with a desire to engage in intergroup contact; future research should further investigate the importance of the personal characteristic found in this study, but research should also explore a wider range of identity factors that may be associated with the decision to engage with those from different social groups. Overall, those who expressed their decision to join MADA as being driven by some part of who they are were often deeply committed to the work, with some even creating opportunities to bridge divides outside of their participation in MADA. While these personal factors were not present for everyone, they were of significant importance for those who expressed them, making the relationship between self-concept and intergroup contact an important topic for future research.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations of this study which provide opportunities for additional research. First of all, this study focuses on intergroup contact in the context of partisan conflict, and it also focuses on members of a specific organization. This focus can be a strength because there aren't as many studies that focus on contact between opposing partisans, but it also means the findings only directly apply to the MADA population and the U.S. political context. There are many findings that might also apply in other types of intergroup contact, but further research is needed to determine how those who are interested in other types of intergroup contact are

similar or different from this study's population. Additionally, because this study focused only on MADA, and there are many demographic groups that are underrepresented in the MADA population, future research needs to expand its population of interest to include greater diversity. Looking at those who engage in cross-partisan contact in a broader sense, not just through organizations like MADA, could help expand the range of people represented, which would ultimately lead to a more accurate and more complete picture of who engages in intergroup contact and why. This study provides an important exploration of who is involved in cross-partisan contact and why, but future research is needed to expand and confirm these findings.

Additionally, future surveys can build on this one by collecting from the national population and those engaging in intergroup contact at the same time, using additional questions that expand on findings from this study. Because the national surveys were done at different times than the MADA survey, there is a chance that world events that happened in between the surveys made respondents answer the MADA survey differently than they would have if it were done at the same time as the national surveys. Additionally, although I reached out to the whole MADA population, those who responded basically represented a voluntary sample. While this can be difficult to avoid in a survey like this, it's still important to acknowledge the possibility that those who answered the survey differed in significant ways from those who didn't. The same applies for the national surveys, which had an even lower response rate than the MADA survey (6-7% compared to the MADA survey's 13-16%). Future research can try to reach out to people using different collection methods or targeting different populations in order to try to get a more accurate picture, despite the constant possibility of non-response bias.

I also learned while conducting the survey that some of those who are interested in MADA were turned off by the question phrasing that seemed to force people into political

parties, and I know that at least one person who considers herself a true independent (without any leaning towards one party or the other) didn't complete the survey for that reason. This needs to be investigated further to see if it is a common pattern, but it would be interesting to see what would happen if questions about polarization focused more on a conservative-liberal scale or some other measurement, rather than comparing Republicans and Democrats or asking people how they feel about those parties. Perhaps those who find themselves without a real party loyalty would be better represented in a survey that speaks in terms of ideology. For this study, the Republican/ Democrat distinction worked to answer the research questions I had. However, for some questions, those who didn't mark a preference had to be excluded from the analysis, and in a group where many participants might have strong feelings about those labels, future researchers would be wise to consider the effect of using questions that rely on dividing into political parties.

Finally, the findings from the interviews should be explored further through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Because very few studies use qualitative methods to investigate what drives people to engage in intergroup contact, this study took a very open, exploratory approach that allowed for a wide range of responses from participants. Many findings, like the elements of someone's self-concept and the importance of experiences with any type of diversity, have not been explored by other studies, so quantitative research with a larger sample will need to be conducted to see if these factors make a difference in a larger population. We can't know how common each of these factors are from the 27 interview participants alone, but the findings provide new avenues for scholars to research and discover what motivates someone to engage in intergroup contact in various contexts. Additionally, the interviews asked open questions and covered a wide range of topics, which means some of the findings could

benefit from more targeted qualitative research that focuses more on specific motivational factors. Finally, full demographic information wasn't collected for the interview respondents (the interview sign-ups were disconnected from the larger survey), but based on the MADA population as a whole and the information participants shared with me in the interviews, certain racial and socio-economic groups were underrepresented in the interviews as well. The interviewees were politically diverse, which was my top priority because the topic focused on political intergroup contact. However, political ideologies and other aspects of someone's identity are often intertwined, and future qualitative research should make an effort to include people from a wider variety of backgrounds.

Main Implications

This study provided a range of interesting insights, and I will conclude by summarizing several that I think are most worth considering for both future research and for practitioners who are trying to organize and encourage intergroup contact. First, when people see the intergroup conflict as personally affecting them—because it's part of their identity (they're politically active) and they've had experiences that made them worried about the conflict—they're more motivated to take action. But this alone could motivate a variety of types of action, including avoiding the other group or trying to defeat them somehow, so it matters how people are assessing the threat in the conflict. When the conflict itself is threatening, rather than just the people on the other side, and they believe resolution to the conflict has to come through compromise, that combination of beliefs and threat assessments draws people to intergroup contact. In summary, being personally affected by the conflict, finding the conflict itself threatening (not the other side), and believing resolution has to come through compromise are all important, but it's unclear whether any one of those things alone would bring people to

voluntarily engage in intergroup contact. In the narratives participants told in the interviews, these ideas were often combined and built on each other, but further research is needed to understand when a combination of beliefs is needed or when individual factors on their own can motivate engagement in intergroup contact. In other words, each of these three factors deserves further consideration because each proved to be important in this study, but the combination of factors should also be a focus of future research.

Also, having positive experiences with diversity seems to be a key motivator for engaging in cross-partisan contact, and positive experiences with any kind of diversity seem to help—it doesn't have to be positive experiences with cross-partisan contact. This finding is particularly important because we know that people are often anxious to interact with someone from a different social group when they haven't had other experiences doing so (or at least not experiences that were memorably positive) and they're uncertain about what will happen (Paolini, Harris, & Griffin, 2016). It can be difficult to get people to take a chance on that first meaningful contact experience with a particular group, but it's promising that the positive experiences with other types of diversity might make someone more open to cross partisan diversity. It's, of course, more likely that someone has had a positive experience with some type of diversity than with a particular type, so this finding could be a powerful way to get a larger pool of people open to a new type of intergroup contact. Perhaps if we can remind people of when they traveled and experienced a different culture, or when they attended an interfaith gathering, or when they became friends with a coworker from a different race, the memory of those experiences can make people more open to cross-partisan contact. Because of the positive potential of this motivating factor, future research and practice should focus on learning more

about the effect of positive experiences with diversity on someone's willingness to engage in intergroup contact.

Overall, this study showed that people who voluntarily engage in cross-partisan contact have a variety of beliefs and attitudes, experience, and contextual factors that influence their decision to reach across the political aisle. Because of the potential for such contact to decrease prejudice and foster cooperation within communities in America, it is crucial that these findings be both further investigated and used to inform how bridging organizations like MADA recruit and address voluntary participants. While there is much left to learn about why people seek out intergroup contact, this study can begin to be applied to increase participation and enable groups like MADA achieve their goal of helping politically diverse people "build understanding and move forward together."

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Appendix A: Recruiting Materials

Gmail

Lauren Fine <finelauren1@gmail.com>

[Test] Survey from Make America Dinner Again

4 messages

Make America Dinner Again <makeamericadinner@gmail.com> Wed, Oct 2, 2019 at 1:32 AM
Reply-To: us4-6c38f1bb04-7228f519f0@inbound.mailchimp.com
To: "<< Test First Name >>" <finelauren1@gmail.com>

Take the survey

Hello! We are conducting this anonymous survey to better understand (1) MADA participants' attitudes about politics, and (2) why people get involved in MADA. The research will be used to improve MADA and help scholars understand what motivates people to reach across political divides. Whether or not you have had the chance to attend a MADA event, we want to hear from you—the experience of

both seasoned and new members is important to us. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at finel@uw.edu.

We hope you'll take the time to participate. Here's the link one more time (click on it or paste it in your web browser):
https://survey.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8q2KXOhmYY8sPc1

Thank you!
Justine and Tria

Appendix B: Survey

Q1 **CONSENT FORM**

Researcher: Lauren Fine, PhD Candidate, University of Washington, finel@uw.edu

The following survey is part of a research study. Being in the study is voluntary—you may exit the survey at any time. You may ask questions about the study by contacting the researcher at finel@uw.edu. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY The purpose of this portion of the study is to understand the attitudes and experiences of the people who have volunteered to engage with politically diverse strangers through Make America Dinner Again. STUDY PROCEDURES This part of the study involves completing a survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you would be interested in participating in one-hour interviews for the second part of the study. If you express interest, you will be contacted with further information. Otherwise, your involvement will end after you complete the survey. The survey will ask you questions about your political attitudes, your involvement in MADA, and your demographic information. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer. CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION The survey will be anonymous, meaning it will not collect any identifying information, so your answers will not be linked to your name. --

Subject's statement This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can contact the researcher listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940.

- Yes, I volunteer to take part in this research—take me to the survey (4)
- No, I do not want to be part of this research (5)

Skip To: End of Survey If CONSENT FORM Researcher: Lauren Fine, PhD Candidate, University of Washington, finel@uw.edu The fo... = No, I do not want to be part of this research

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Screener

Q2 To take this survey, you must be 18 years old or older. Are you 18 or older?

- Yes (4)
- No (5)

Skip To: End of Survey If To take this survey, you must be 18 years old or older. Are you 18 or older? = No

End of Block: Screener

Start of Block: Political Attitudes

Q3 Thanks for taking this survey! The first set of questions asks you about your political attitudes and your feelings about political parties. We want to understand your general attitude, so please be as honest as possible.

Q4 In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied by the way things are going in the United States at this time?

- Satisfied (1)
- Dissatisfied (2)

Q5 In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

(Note: We realize that ideology is more complicated than Republican or Democrat. Some questions in this

survey follow the formatting of national surveys so we can compare MADA participants to the national population. The next question will ask you to describe your political ideology more fully.)

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)

Q6 Tell us in a few words how you would describe your political ideology. Anything beyond Republican, Democrat, or Independent that you would add?

_____

Display This Question:
If In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent? (Note: We re... = Independent

Q7 As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)

Display This Question:
If In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent? (Note: We re... = Republican

Q8 Do you consider yourself a strong Republican or not a strong Republican?

- Strong (1)
- Not strong (2)

Display This Question:
If In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent? (Note: We re... = Democrat

Q9 Do you consider yourself a strong Democrat or not a strong Democrat?

- Strong (1)
- Not strong (2)

Q10 Looking at the following scale, how would you rate your feelings about each of the following groups?

	Very cold or unfavorable feeling				Neutral or no feeling at all				Very warm or favorable feeling		
	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Republican Party ()											
Democratic Party ()											

End of Block: Political Attitudes

Start of Block: Block 12

Display This Question:
If Looking at the following scale, how would you rate your feelings about each of the following grou... [Republican Party] < 40

Q11 Would you say the Republican Party's policies are so misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being, or wouldn't you go that far?

- Yes, Republican Party's policies pose a threat to the nation's well-being (1)
- No, wouldn't go that far (2)

Display This Question:
If Looking at the following scale, how would you rate your feelings about each of the following grou... [Democratic Party] < 40

Q12 Would you say the Democratic Party's policies are so misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being, or would you not go that far?

- Yes, Democratic Party's policies pose a threat to the nation's well-being (1)
- No, wouldn't go that far (2)

End of Block: Block 12

Start of Block: Feeling 1

Q13 How does the Republican Party make you feel? (Check all that apply.)

- Frustrated (1)
- Angry (2)
- Afraid (3)
- Hopeful (4)
- Enthusiastic (5)
- Proud (6)
- ⊗ None of these (7)

Q14 How does the Democratic Party make you feel? (Check all that apply.)

- Frustrated (1)
- Angry (2)
- Afraid (3)
- Hopeful (4)
- Enthusiastic (5)
- Proud (6)
- ⊗ None of these (7)

End of Block: Feeling 1

Start of Block: feeling 2

Q15 How does the Republican Party make you feel? (Check all that apply.)

- Hopeful (1)
- Enthusiastic (2)
- Proud (3)
- Frustrated (4)
- Angry (5)
- Afraid (6)
- ⊗ None of these (7)

Q16 How does the Democratic Party make you feel? (Check all that apply.)

- Hopeful (1)
- Enthusiastic (2)
- Proud (3)
- Frustrated (4)
- Angry (5)
- Afraid (6)
- ⊗ None of these (7)

End of Block: feeling 2

Start of Block: Political attitudes 3

Q17a How do you think you would react if a member of your immediate family told you they were going to marry a Republican? Would you be generally happy about this, generally unhappy, or wouldn't it matter to you at all?

- Happy (1)
- Unhappy (2)
- Wouldn't matter to you at all (3)

Q17b How do you think you would react if a member of your immediate family told you they were going to marry a Democrat? Would you be generally happy about this, generally unhappy, or wouldn't it matter to you at all?

- Happy (1)
- Unhappy (2)
- Wouldn't matter to you at all (3)

End of Block: Political attitudes 3

Start of Block: Block 11

Q18 Think about how Democrats and Republicans SHOULD address the most important issues facing the country. On a scale from zero to 10, where 10 means Democrats get everything they want (and Republicans

get nothing), and zero means Republicans get everything (Democrats get nothing). Where on this scale from zero to 10 do you think they should end up?

Republicans get everything and Democrats nothing — Democrats get everything and Republicans nothing

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 ()

Q19 Think about how Democrats and Republicans SHOULD address the most important issues facing the country. On a scale from zero to 10, where 10 means Republicans get everything they want (and Democrats get nothing), and zero means Democrats get everything (Republicans get nothing). Where on this scale from zero to 10 do you think they should end up?

Democrats get everything and Republicans nothing — Republicans get everything and Democrats nothing

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 ()

End of Block: Block 11

Start of Block: Political attitudes 5

Display This Question:
If In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent? (Note: We re... = Republican
Or As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party? = Republican

Q20 Overall, would you say the Democratic Party has…

- A lot of good ideas (1)
- Some good ideas (2)
- A few good ideas (3)
- Almost no good ideas (4)

Display This Question:
If In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent? (Note: We re... = Democrat
Or As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party? = Democrat

Q21 Overall, would you say the Republican Party has…

- A lot of good ideas (1)
- Some good ideas (2)
- A few good ideas (3)
- Almost no good ideas (4)

Display This Question:
If In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent? (Note: We re... = Republican
Or As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party? = Republican

Q22 Thinking for a moment about people who consider themselves Democrats, which of these comes closer to your views about them?

- They feel differently than I do about politics, but they probably share many of my other values and goals (1)
- They feel differently than I do about politics, and they probably don't share many of my other values and goals, either (2)

Display This Question:
If In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent? (Note: We re... = Democrat
Or As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party? = Democrat

Q23 Thinking for a moment about people who consider themselves Republicans, which of these comes closer to your views about them?

- They feel differently than I do about politics, but they probably share many of my other values and goals (1)
- They feel differently than I do about politics, and they probably don't share many of my other values and goals either (2)

Q24 How many of your close friends, if any, are...

	A lot (1)	Some (2)	Just a few (3)	None (4)
Republicans (1)	○	○	○	○
Democrats (2)	○	○	○	○
Independents (3)	○	○	○	○

Q25 When you talk about politics with people who have a different opinion of politics than you do, would you say you generally find it to be... ?

- Interesting and Informative (1)
- Stressful and Frustrating (2)

Q26 In your experience, when you talk about politics with people who you DISAGREE with, do you usually find that…

- You have more in common politically than you thought (1)
- You have less in common politically than you thought (2)

End of Block: Political attitudes 5

Start of Block: MADA participation

Q27 Next, we want to know about your participation in MADA. Please answer the following questions:

Q28 How long has it been since you first signed up for MADA (joined the Facebook group or filled out the form to attend a dinner)? You might not remember exactly, so give us your best approximation in terms of months or years.

_____

Q29 There are many factors that can motivate someone to participate in something like MADA, including events in the world, events in our personal lives, and personal beliefs or goals. Which of the following best describe the MOST IMPORTANT reasons you signed up to participate in MADA? Please select up to 3 total (from any category).

- Increasing polarization in the country (1)
- Increasing polarization in my local community (2)
- Government gridlock stalling real action (4)
- A particular event in the news (please specify) (5) _____
- A personal relationship had become strained because of political differences (8)
- I had bad experiences sharing my perspective in other settings (9)
- My friends usually want to avoid or change the subject when discussing politics (10)
- My friends/family got involved in MADA and wanted me to participate (11)
- I wanted to become more educated about political issues (14)
- I wanted to develop more empathy for people with different viewpoints (17)
- I wanted to share my unique perspective (16)
- I wanted to see a wider variety of perspectives than the media generally portray (18)
- Please specify: (19) _____

Q30 Are you a member of the MADA discussion group on Facebook?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q41 If Are you a member of the MADA discussion group on Facebook? = No

Q31 In the past month, how often did you read content (posts and/or comments) from the MADA Facebook group?

- 5-7 days per week (1)
- 3-4 days per week (2)
- 1-2 days per week (3)
- Less than once a week (1-3 times during the month) (4)
- Never (5)

Q32 In the last month, how many times have you made an original post (not a comment on someone else's post) on the MADA Facebook group? If you don't remember exactly, give an approximate number. If you haven't made any posts, answer 0.

▼ 0 (1) ... 30+ (31)

Q33 In the last month, how many different posts have you commented on in the MADA Facebook group? If you don't remember exactly, give an approximate number. If you didn't comment in the past month, answer 0.

▼ 0 (1) ... 30+ (31)

Q34 How many MADA Dinners have you attended? If you haven't attended any, answer 0.

▼ 0 (1) ... 5+ (6)

Skip To: Q58 If How many MADA Dinners have you attended? If you haven't attended any, answer 0. = 0

Q35 Have you ever acted as a discussion leader or moderator at a MADA Dinner?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q36 At the most recent dinner you attended, how much did you participate in the group discussion compared to the average participant?

- Much less than average--I hardly spoke (1)
- A bit less than average--I spoke a few times (2)
- About average--I spoke as much as most others (3)
- Above average--I spoke a bit more than most (4)
- Much more than average--I spoke quite a bit (5)

Q37 Do you follow Make America Dinner Again on Facebook (meaning you "like" or "follow" their page, which is separate from the discussion group).

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q38 There are several other organizations with the goal of bringing people of diverse political perspectives together to bridge political divides. Which other bridging organizations have you been involved in (participated in a discussion online or in person, etc.), if any? Check all that apply.

- Better Angels (1)
- Living Room Conversations (2)
- One America Movement (3)
- Crossing Party Lines (4)
- The Village Square (5)
- Cortico (6)
- Other (please specify): (7) _____
- None of the above (8)

Q39 There are many ways to format a MADA dinner discussion, including general discussions about multiple topics or tailored discussion about a more specific topic area. Even if you have not yet been to one, which discussion format do you prefer (or think you would prefer)?

- I prefer mostly more general discussions that cover a wide range of issues (1)
- I prefer mostly tailored discussions where we can go in depth on a single topic area (2)
- I prefer to go to multiple events that have an even mixture of both formats (3)

Display This Question:
If Are you a member of the MADA discussion group on Facebook? = No
And How many MADA Dinners have you attended? If you haven't attended any, answer 0. = 0

Q40 Based on your previous answers, it seems you have expressed interest in participating in MADA, but have not yet been able to attend an event or be involved in the facebook group. Which of the following best describes why you haven't participated in an event?

- I am interested in attending an event, but haven't been invited to one (1)
- I have been invited to events I was interested in, but didn't go because the timing or location was inconvenient (2)
- I have been invited to events, but didn't go because I wasn't interested in the specific discussion topic
- I have lost interest in attending MADA events (4)
- Other: (5) _____

End of Block: MADA participation

Start of Block: MADA Satisfaction

Q41 Make America Dinner Again's goal is to be an avenue to listen and have respectful conversation with people who have different political views. The following questions ask about how well you feel MADA is accomplishing that goal.

Display This Question:
If Are you a member of the MADA discussion group on Facebook? = Yes

Q42 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the MADA facebook group? (Mark one in each row)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does not apply/Don't know
I am more comfortable expressing my views in the MADA facebook than other places online. (1)						
I usually feel listened to when I express my views on the MADA Facebook group (2)						
I am satisfied with the way the moderators moderate conversations in the MADA Facebook group. (3)						
There are people in the MADA Facebook group that I would want to keep in touch with, even if the group no longer existed. (4)						
I would recommend the MADA Facebook group to a friend. (5)						

Display This Question:
If How many MADA Dinners have you attended? If you haven't attended any, answer 0. != 0

Q43 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the MADA dinners you've attended? (Mark one in each row)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does not apply/Don't know
I was more comfortable expressing my views at MADA dinners than among other groups of acquaintances (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I usually felt listened to when I expressed my views at MADA dinners (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I was satisfied with the way the facilitators led discussions at the MADA dinners I've attended. (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
There are people I met at MADA dinners that I want to keep in touch with. (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend MADA dinners to a friend. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q44 If you would like to provide a bit more detail about your MADA experience, please tell us about what you expected to get from MADA, and how your experience has compared to those expectations.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

End of Block: MADA Satisfaction
Start of Block: Demographics

Q45 Finally, we'd like to know a little about you. Please answer the following questions.

Q46 What is your age in years?

_____

Q47 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)

Q48 Which of the following describes your race? You can select as many as apply.

- White (e.g., Caucasian, European, Irish, Italian, Arab, Middle Eastern) (1)
- Black or African-American (e.g., Negro, Kenyan, Nigerian, Haitian) (2)
- Asian or Asian-American (e.g., Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese or other Asian origin groups) (3)
- Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native (4)
- Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (5)
- Hispanic/Latino (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban) (6)
- Other (7) _____

Q49 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school (Grades 1-8 or no formal schooling) (1)
- High school incomplete (Grades 9-11 or Grade 12 with NO diploma) (2)
- High school graduate (Grade 12 with diploma or GED certificate) (3)
- Some college, no degree (includes some community college) (4)
- Two year associate degree from a college or university (5)
- Four year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA, AB) (6)
- Some postgraduate or professional schooling, no postgraduate degree (e.g. some graduate school) (7)
- Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD, graduate school) (8)

Q50 What is your present religion, if any?

- Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witness, etc.) (1)
- Roman Catholic (Catholic) (2)
- Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints/LDS) (3)
- Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church) (4)
- Jewish (Judaism) (5)
- Muslim (Islam) (6)
- Buddhist (7)
- Hindu (8)
- Atheist (do not believe in God) (9)
- Agnostic (not sure if there is a God) (10)
- Something else (SPECIFY:) (11) _____
- Nothing in particular (12)

Q51 Last year, that is in 2018, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?

- Less than $10,000 (1)
- $10,000 to under $20,000 (2)
- $20,000 to under $30,000 (3)
- $30,000 to under $40,000 (4)
- $40,000 to under $50,000 (5)
- $50,000 to under $75,000 (6)
- $75,000 to under $100,000 (7)
- $100,000 to under $150,000 [OR] (8)
- $150,000 to under $250,000 (9)
- $250,000 or more (10)

Q52 How often would you say you vote?

- Always (1)
- Nearly always (2)
- Part of the time (3)
- Seldom (4)

Q53 Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?

- Most of the time (1)
- Some of the time (2)
- Only now and then (3)
- Hardly at all (4)

Q54 Here's a list of activities some people do and others do not. Please indicate if you have done each of the following activities in the PAST YEAR.

	Yes	No
Attended a political rally, speech, or campaign event (1)	○	○
Worked or volunteered for a political party, candidate, or campaign (2)	○	○
Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, not including a political party (3)	○	○
Contacted any elected official (4)	○	○
Contributed money to a candidate running for public office or to a group working to elect a candidate (5)	○	○
Displayed a poster or bumper-sticker or worn clothing or a button related to a political campaign (6)	○	○
Publicly expressed your support for a political campaign on Facebook, Twitter or other social media (7)	○	○

Q55 Do you currently live in the United States?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Do you currently live in the United States? = No

Q56 Which state or territory do you live in?

▼ Alabama - AL (1) ... Virgin Islands - VI (59)

Q57 Please enter your zipcode

_____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Block 10

Q58 You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your perspective! Which of the following nonprofits would you like your $5 to go to. If you don't select one from the list, the $5 will go to the MADA go-fund-me page.

- MADA go-fund-me (1)
- Doctors without Borders (2)
- The American Red Cross (3)
- Save the Children (4)
- Wounded Warriors Family Support (5)
- Donors Choice (for teachers) (6)
- Charity: Water (7)

Q59 We would love to hear more from you. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experience with Make America Dinner Again? The interviews will take place over video calling through a computer application and will be approximately 1 hour (you will be given a $20 gift card to compensate you for your time).
If you select Yes, you will be taken to a different form, where you will put in your contact information so we can follow up.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If We would love to hear more from you. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experience... = No

Q60 Please go to this link to enter your name and contact info (don't worry, this form isn't connected to this survey, so your answers to the survey will remain anonymous). If you are selected for an interview, you will be contacted by Lauren Fine (finel@uw.edu) at the email address you provide.
https://forms.gle/NVAkE4A6Xd6U9AbY8

End of Block: Block 10

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Date of Interview:	Pseudonym:
Politics of person:	Involvement in MADA:
City they're from:	2016 votes for their city:

Research Questions for interviews

1. What are the important themes in participants' stories about how they became interested in MADA?

Intro (5 minutes)

1. Make sure they signed consent form
2. Would you mind if I audio recorded this interview and took brief notes? Great, I'll be looking at and taking notes on a document on my computer, so if you see me look to the side, that's what's happening.

3. Ok, to get started, I just wanted to introduce myself. I'm Lauren, PhD student at University of Washington—I'm the one who created and distributed the survey you took a few months ago. I have been involved in MADA for about a year, attending events in my local chapter. I got interested in doing this research because I learned that some research has shown that programs like MADA can have a positive impact on relationships between social groups, but a lot of people tend to avoid such interactions, so I wanted to learn about the people who do seek out interactions like this.
4. Before we get into asking questions, why don't you introduce yourself and tell me in what ways you have been involved in MADA or have tried to be involved? (FB, events, both, neither)

5. Great, now some background about this project before we jump in. I am conducting these interviews as part of my dissertation, in collaboration with the MADA leadership. Today, I am primarily interested in learning about how you came to join MADA and what motivated you to join. The interview will be about 60 minutes, so we should wrap up by _____.
6. Remember that you do not have to answer any question(s) that you are not comfortable answering and you can stop this interview at any time if you so choose. Also, please know that all information shared in this interview is confidential—in all reports I make about the interviews, I will use pseudonyms so you identifying info won't be shared.
7. Do you have any questions before we begin?

How they joined

Ok, I'm going to start by asking you to tell your story of how you learned about MADA and decided to join. There's no right way to tell your story but I am interested in hearing about it in a lot of detail—I want to hear about the moment you learned about MADA, but also what happened before or after that moment that might have made you interested in the kind of conversation that MADA provides. Think of all of the different experiences that influenced your decision to join as different chapters in a novel about your MADA story. Like any novelist, you can edit the chapters you have already written, either adding more or retelling certain sections,

whenever and however you would like. I'm also interested in the cast of characters—the people who may have influenced your decision for better or worse. You're the author, so you can write your story however you'd like.

So let's jump into the central question, and we'll get a chance to go into more details from there:

1. Tell me the backstory about how you got interested in MADA, not just how you joined but what prepared you to be interested in the opportunity when it came?

Possible follow up questions

If they mention beliefs that they have that relate to this experience, ask them:

1. Why do you think you have this belief? When do you think you developed that?

If they mention people:

2. Tell me more about this person. What is your relationship like? How did that influence your decision to join?

If they mention something about the news:

3. Why did this particular event have an impact? Was there something different about it compared to other events?

*When they talk about **experiences** they've had with political conversations outside of MADA:*

4. Tell me more about that experience—why did you feel that way? How did you respond?
    a. How do you think that influenced your perception of MADA?
5. Have you had other notable experiences talking about politics?
    a. in other settings/with other groups?
    b. Were these better/worse? How did they influence your perception of MADA?
6. Did you think MADA would be similar? Different? Why?

If they talk about their community, where they live:

7. How does your community relate to your interest in MADA?
    a. What is the political dynamic of your community?
    b. How does it feel to be in the majority/minority in your community?

Experience within MADA—10 min max

You've told the story about joining MADA and what led up to that—I want to use the last part of our time to hear your story about what your experience has been like since you joined.

1. What did you hope to get from MADA? What kind of conversations were you hoping to have?
    a. Why do you want that?
    b. How does that type of conversation compare to other conversations you've had?
        i. Tell me about some of those.
    c. Are you able to have such conversations in any of your social groups? If so, why the need for MADA?
2. Tell me about the experiences you've had with MADA since signing up?
3. Have you talked to others about MADA? What have their reactions been?
    a. Why do you think they had this reaction?
4. What would you like to see change in MADA? Something you want more or less of?