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Puzzling together: Avenues for applying motivational interviewing to the transformation of

intractable, intergroup conflict (U.S. context).

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A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for a

Master of Arts in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

SIT Graduate Institute

Advisor: John Ungerleider, Ed.D.

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"Most of us can recognize oppression when it occurs or when we are being oppressed ourselves, but can we also recognize the complicity that each of us has in creating and sustaining oppression over others?" (Potts & Brown, 2005, p.258)

"People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered than by those which have come into the minds of others." - Blaise Pascal (from Miller and Rollnick, 2013)

"Here the clinician's task is more complex than compiling a prioritized list. It is a matter of listening to the client's story and puzzling together about a route out of the forest." (Miller and Rollnick, 2013 - Loc 2342)

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Abstract

This paper explores the current state of political left/right division in the United States and explores the use of Motivational Interviewing in "unfreezing" the two sides of this intractable conflict. The author interviewed four people (two conservatives and two liberals) as well as surveyed over one hundred and fifty respondents in an online survey exploring this theme. While the two sides differ in many ways, the evidence seems to show that both sides overwhelmingly admit that there is a problem, that both sides must get better, and that communication would be easier if both sides practiced more reflective listening. This attitude seems to suggest that Motivational Interviewing could be a useful tool in this context.

Keywords: Motivational Interviewing, intractable conflict, conflict transformation, conflict-supporting repertoire, instigating belief, mediating belief, liberal, conservative, United States

Contents

Introduction

I will be focusing on an exploration of the application of a health technique to intractable conflict, both interpersonal and international, but here with an emphasis on the current political intergroup conflicts within the United States "left" and "right" political spectrum. The health technique that I will look at is Motivational Interviewing (MI), which is a type of therapeutic conversational style that aims at eliciting a clients' own reasons, or motivations, for behavior change.

My question: Can Motivational Interviewing be used to surface value conflicts, validate emotions, affirm attitudes, and create personal motivations for positive change among members of a group, thereby transforming intractable, intergroup conflict from destructive to constructive?

Currently, MI is being used in health care settings to help people find their personal motivations to make positive changes in their life, such as: quitting problem drinking; eating healthier; attending appointments; improving medication adherence; or quitting smoking, among others. There has also been a push to explore the use of MI in other areas such as behavior change for perpetrators of intimate partner violence, and in using MI to guide mediation efforts. I have personally seen and felt the effects of MI being used as a successful de-escalation tool in the mental health field, while I worked for five years with adults struggling with major mental illness. MI is essentially about behavior change – though it is about a behavior change that comes from one's own internal reasons, not being pushed from the outside – and here is where we make the connection to using MI to deescalate and mediate intractable conflict.

Intractable conflict remains intractable often because of a "repertoire of beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and intentions of behaviors" (Bar-Tal, 2013, p.18). In this sense, we have gone beyond

the possibility of having clear and useful debates about social and political issues, and things have become much more personal. Because of this, we need a style of conversations that can allow for beliefs, attitudes, and emotions to surface safely, before any problem solving begins. The problem is, we humans are problem solvers by nature, and we despise sitting with a problem without at least an attempt at solving it. MI has a term for this, "the righting reflex" (McCarley, 2009), and it perfectly describes our innate desire to make things better for people when we see any kind of suffering. Trying to make things better is not a bad thing, to be sure, but when problem solving becomes our only response to a situation, our suggestions for people on how to "fix" their problems can become a tone-deaf source of resentment for them.

Importantly, MI is not to be used as a "trick" to "get people" to change in ways that you want them to. If approached in this way, it will almost certainly fail and possibly backfire to the detriment of all parties involved. Though the core techniques of MI – open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summarizing – can be used in a way to feign interest and friendship, the originators of the technique stress that there must be a spirit of "partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation" (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

The context for this paper is the current political context of the United States, between a polarized political "left" and "right". The signs of intractable intergroup conflict are there. Because I am looking for an opening of people's attitudes and emotions toward another group, I am not here defining any particular political issue (e.g. immigration, gun rights, etc.). The issue topics do not matter to the research as much as the deeper feelings and attitudes that drive behavior. That is not to say that these issues are not important, just that in the present research, whether we are talking about the economy, globalism versus nationalism, or transgender rights, does not matter as much as the way we are talking about it.

To investigate, I interviewed two conservatives, two liberals, one Motivational Interviewing trainer, and surveyed over 150 people with an online survey.

The present state of debate and political dialogue in this country.

There is a growing "values gap" between conservatives and liberals – wider perhaps than the gaps created by differences in gender or class or even race – that engenders a high level of political partisanship (Pew, 2012). In 2018, more than half (53%) of all respondents (liberal and conservative) reported that political conversations with those who differ from them are "stressful and frustrating" (Pew, 2018). Research suggests that one is less likely to get hired when they are of the opposite political affiliation as the one hiring (Gift and Gift, 2014) and that we tend to take politics into account when deciding whom to date (Huber and Mahotra, 2016). As most Americans encounter our political differences in our work environments (Najle and Jones, 2019), this growing lack of regular interaction could further "silo" the different political sides, with the implication that American political polarization is likely to continue. The question is, how far will it go?

Evidence from other contexts suggests that differences in values is one (though not the only) necessary precursor for wide-scale violence (Denoux and Carter, 2009):

> We need to recognize that many (violent extremists) are moved
> primarily by *an unshakable belief in the superiority of certain*
> *values*; by a perceived obligation to carry out God's command; or
> by an abiding commitment to destroy a system they view as evil
> and/or oppressive. In other words, variables located in the realm of
> *identity, faith, and spirituality* matter a great deal. (italics mine)

Is this too far off to begin to talk about violence? Kriesberg and Dayton (2017) state that differences in values are one of the underlying conditions necessary for the creation of, and the escalation of, social conflict.

Indeed, all interview participants reflected some measure of concern over the continuation of this polarization:

> *"We have to acknowledge that something is going wrong... there is this polarization and it has to be addressed in some way."*

> *"... it feels bad to even say this, but at a certain point, aren't we just going to split up?"*

> *"(it could be) very, very dangerous if the polarization of both parties continues and something needs to happen"*

> *"I know a lot of people keep saying civil war, and I don't want to think about that, I think we're still a ways from that, but, it could go there eventually."*

Americans are sensing a growing need to do something about this divide. According to a recent poll, 90% of Americans are worried enough about political polarization to call it a "serious problem" (Chinni and Bronston, 2018). While in that same poll, evidence suggests that each side *blames the other side* for the polarization (Chinni and Bronston, 2018). Even our polarization is polarized (and perhaps polarizing).

Conflict, however, is not violence. Conflict is simply a difference within an interaction, an "incompatibility of goals" (Galtung, 2009) that doesn't necessarily lead to violence. It is

through the transformation of that conflict that we can move from a destructive potential to a constructive reality (Lederach, 2003).

Theories that Explain this Present State

Vamik Volkan (1998) describes seven "threads" that, when they come together, create the backdrop of "large-group identity". To go deeper into these seven threads would require another paper, as there is not space enough here. But, as a short description, through the processes of the seven threads, large groups begin to define themselves as different from others, and they pass these definitions down through the generations, often using shared symbols and what are considered to each group to be collective traumas and shared glories (Volkan, 1998). These threads create the identity of in-groups and situate them as opposed to out-groups.

These in-group/out-group differences seem to be related to the deeper values of the group. Haidt (2012) explored the moral dimensions of conservatives and liberals in the United States and found some differences in the value we give to values – that is, while each side has similar morals, they differ in the amount of heed that one value should hold over another. For instance, he found that liberals tend to value caring for others and the idea of fairness over the values of loyalty, respect for authority, and sanctity (purity, or the sacredness of things); while conservatives, who also value caring for others and fairness, do not value them over loyalty, respect, or sanctity (Haidt, 2012). This suggests there may be different ways of interacting with each side that could be more productive by at least being aware of, and at most validating, the differing values of each group.

Conflict transformation requires deeper awareness of the values and needs of the parties to the conflict. Burton (1979) describes these deeper "basic" needs as, "individual needs that are as

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basic to harmonious social relationships as food and shelter are to the individual" (p. 60).

Burton's most basic human needs are: identity, recognition, security, and personal development

(Rubinstein, 2001). Johann Galtung (1996) describes a similar set of basic human needs: identity,

welfare, security, and freedom. Basic Human Needs Theory posits that there are several needs,

universal across cultures, that are at the root of all conflicts – that conflicts are themselves efforts

to secure needs for a group, needs that are perceived as lacking, and that the other group is an

impediment to attaining.

Could there be, within these values and needs, something that could bring conflicting groups

together? Bar-Tal and Halperin (2009) argue that there are certain psychological barriers to

transforming a conflict. They suggest an awareness of two variables: first, a psychological way

of being, which they call the "conflict-supporting repertoire", and second, a belief that a new

repertoire is necessary, which they term the "mediating belief" (Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2009).

The conflict-supporting repertoire is made up of all of the ways in which we stay in the conflict

and support its continuance. It is how we "freeze" (Bar-Tal, 2013) in the current conflictual

status quo.

> "Societies involved in intractable conflict very often make efforts
>
> to maintain the dominant societal beliefs of the conflict-supporting
>
> narrative and prevent penetration of alternative beliefs that may
>
> undermine this dominance." (Bar-Tal, 2013, p.283).
>
> "The reason for this closure before alternative information is
>
> *freezing* of the societal beliefs of the narrative... the state of
>
> freezing is reflected in continuous reliance on the held societal

beliefs that support the conflict, the reluctance to search for alternative information, and resistance to persuasive arguments that contradict held positions." (Bar-Tal, 2013, p. 289).

This conflict-supporting repertoire is illustrated by some of the following comments by interview participants and survey respondents:

"... it's almost dehumanizing sometimes. I don't want to go too far with saying that, but it does feel like you don't see the other side as your equal or as your counterpart in any way"

"there is this air when you're talking with these people that like, they're like your savior almost or something, like, 'if you stupid voters would stop voting for these bad people, you'd be better and you're too stupid to figure that out so I am here to save you'"

"they lack civility and are frequently bigoted"

"it's tiring because it feels like you're talking to a cold, uncaring wall that has no empathy for anyone"

"stop talking AT me. Put a period at the end of a sentence and have a dialogue rather than harassment."

(Note: the author does not argue that any claims within these statements are true or false, only that they seem to relate to ways of seeing "the other" or interpretations of how "the other" sees them)

Between the conflict-supporting narrative and the mediating belief is what Bar-Tal (2013) calls the "instigating belief".

> "We suggest that the idea that fuels the motivation to unfreeze is based upon the recognition in the incompatibility between the current state and/or the perceived past on the one hand, and the desired future, on the other hand" (Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2009, p.8).

From the information presented in this section, we are left with the idea that: there are deeper values and needs than the arguments that tend to stay at the surface; liberals and conservatives hold the same values, though *prioritize* those values differently; these values and needs can be reflected in the "chosen glories" and "chosen traumas" of different groups and passed down through generations by the creation of a "conflict-supporting repertoire" that continues to maintain the conflict in a "frozen" state.

Is this Conflict Intractable?

Does the present political divide in the United States really fit the definition of intractable conflict? Bar-Tal (2013) adds to Kriesberg (1993, 1998) to create seven characteristics that define intractable conflicts. Kriesberg (1993, 1998) maintains that they, "are protracted, involve violence, are perceived as unsolvable, and demand great investments". Bar-Tal (2013) adds that they are, "total, central, and viewed as a zero-sum contest".

The "totality" of the conflict refers to the sense that one, or both, conflict parties may have that they are fighting for their very survival. For the freedom to express who they are, govern themselves as they see fit, and live their lives according to their values. The

totality of the conflict suggests that what is at stake for the groups involved is their most closely held values and their right to exist as a group (Bar-Tal, 2013).

Centrality refers to the place that the conflict takes in the lives of the parties, that it is central to their everyday experience, and is evident in their everyday decisions (Bar-Tal, 2013). Centrality also refers to the saliency of the conflict in the lives of people who are not necessarily "victims" in any way of the conflict, yet still perceive themselves as conflict parties (Bar-Tal, 2013).

As for the length, Bar-Tal (2013) states that the protracted nature of the conflict is generally defined as having persisted for "at least a generation (about 25 years)" (p.51). Looking back on American politics over the last 25 years, certainly shows the existence of this liberal/conservative divide as early as the mid-1990s (25 years ago). Indeed, there seems to be evidence of the left/right divide dating back to the 1970s (Desilver, 2014).

Kriesberg and Dayton (2017) look at some of the necessary steps to move out of intractable or "protracted" conflicts:

> "One fundamental issue in protracted struggles is that at least one side feels that its basic interests, and worldview, or way of life are threatened, and it must fight to sustain them. A crucial step in turning away from such fears is for at least one side to undertake actions that counter those feelings. When such actions are made on a reciprocal basis, appear credible, and seem irreversible, the seemingly intractable conflict is in transition" (Kriesberg and Dayton, 2017, p. 204).

At least one side must take steps, which side will it be? And what steps will they take? In the next section, I will describe a "conversational technique", often used in the health field, that could be applied to the transformation of the current intractable political divide in the United States. It could be a first step.

Introduction to Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing is a conversational style used commonly in the health field to help people explore their motivations to make beneficial changes in their lives. The most complete definition of Motivational Interviewing (hereafter referred to as "MI") is offered by the founders of the technique, Miller and Rollnick (2013):

> "Motivational Interviewing is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion."

Though MI has been explored as a means to treat drinking, have a healthier diet, and make healthier lifestyle changes (Schumacher and Madson, 2015), it has not yet been explored as a method for conflict transformation. This paper seeks to fill that gap by exploring how and why MI could fit into the peacebuilder's toolbox, the ethical considerations of this, and leave the reader with a sense of where to go next.

The evidence on the effectiveness of MI is mixed. In completing a meta-analysis comparison study, Frost et al. (2018) found that the most promising evidence was found in the area of helping someone to cease "unhealthy behaviors" (as distinct from the use of MI to help people adopt healthy behaviors). So, why try MI?

Why Motivational Interviewing?

Motivational Interviewing is designed to be used in a brief manner – it can be effective in as little as one, short meeting (Black and Forsberg, 2014) – and can also be used with little preparation (by preparation, I do not mean training and practice in the method, but that it can be used spontaneously without planning). Often, we only have one, short opportunity to talk with someone who differs from us politically and that first political conversation can set the tone for all to follow.

The ability of MI to be used spontaneously is related to its focus on being "client-centered" (Black and Forsberg, 2014). This allows the MI trained user to engage with someone with little previous knowledge of that person, because they are not providing information, rather they are eliciting information from the other person, digging a little deeper each time, until they get to the deeper values of that person that could provide the motivation to make changes.

An important part of MI is not only the eliciting of the client's deeper motivations to make healthier or more productive decisions in their lives, but also the MI practitioner must respect and accept those motivations. This is referred to as the "spirit of motivational interviewing":

> 'MI requires practitioners to evoke the client's own reasons for and
> against change, and to understand and accept them. MI emphasises
> collaboration and power sharing in interactions between client and
> practitioner, requiring the latter to refrain from assuming an expert
> role, and accepting that the final decision in favour or against
> change rests with the former." (Black and Forsberg, 2014, p.63)

MI has uses among groups, adding relevancy to its potential applications in addressing intergroup conflict. In articulating the use of MI in group settings, Wagner and Ingersoll (2013) state:

> "Despite the small number of controlled studies, the emerging
> evidence suggests that MI groups may improve the recognition of
> ambivalence, support autonomy, increase commitment to change,
> and increase treatment engagement and participation" (p. 75)

> (Author's note: I do not want to pathologize the liberal or conservative
> political perspective. The present study is not investigating any sort of clinical
> "treatment" for political opinions or seeking to get people to think one way or
> another. The focus is rather on examining MI's use to help parties involved in
> conflict, and stuck in conflict-supporting repertoires, to "unfreeze" those
> repertoires, *if unfreezing those repertoires is reflected in that person's values
> and desires for a more peaceful future*.)

Schumacher and Madson (2015) even argue that MI is not limited in its application because it is "a communication style, not a type of psychotherapy".

How to do Motivational Interviewing

What follows is a quick explanation of how to practice MI, the spirit, the processes, and the skills of MI.

Black and Helgason (2018) identify two important aspects of MI: "Two components of MI are thought to be active in influencing behaviour: a relational component; and a technical component". The relational component is the "how" of the interaction, and it defines the spirit of the interaction: a person-centered interaction with the spirit of partnership, acceptance, and compassion (Black and Helgason, 2018). The practical nature of this MI spirit, when applied to political conversation, is that of an openness to differing ideas, an acceptance of the worth of the person in front of you, and the recognition that we are all in this together.

 Without this spirit, MI could backfire:

> "… grounded in the client-centered approach of Carl Rogers, this component includes an empathic, affirming, non-judgmental and autonomy-supportive counseling style intended to create a safe environment in which clients can explore their own wishes, fears, and concerns (Moos, 2007). In other words, the provider avoids imposing an agenda, basing acceptance on conditions, or arguing with or confronting clients, and instead actively listens to the client's spoken and unspoken messages in order to remain MI-consistent." (Schumacher and Madson, 2018)

Within that spirit, MI consists of four processes: engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning (Black and Helgason, 2018). These processes all take place during the MI interaction,

though they are not a strict order, there can be backtracking and jumping forward, all depending on the responses of the other. They refer to stages in which a relationship is established (engaging), a reason for the interaction is defined (focusing), an exploration of values and motivations takes place (evoking), and concrete ideas for change are verbalized (planning). The exploration of values that could give rise to the "unfreezing" of conflict parties would happen during the evoking stage.

Occurring within those four processes (along with the correct "spirit"), are the four skills of MI. Perhaps the easiest to understand, yet they are still very difficult to put into practice. Remembered using the mnemonic "OARS", they are: Open-ended questions, Affirmations, Reflections, and Summaries (Black and Helgason, 2018).

Open-ended questions are designed to probe for information in a way that lets the respondent talk at length about a subject, as distinct from closed-ended questions, which can generally be answered with one word (e.g. yes/no questions). In MI, open-ended questions serve a support function for the deeper reflections, with the suggested ratio being two reflections for every one open-ended question (Miller and Rollnick, 2013; Schumacher and Madson, 2015). Examples of some of the open-ended questions for the interviews of the present study are:

How would you describe the current liberal/conservative conflict?

What would a good relationship between the sides look like to you?

What have been your experiences interacting with the other side?

Affirmations are a way to validate and show that you recognize the other's worth (Miller and Rollnick, 2013). Affirmations are not compliments. Rosengren (2009) stresses that, "compliments typically have an evaluative judgment implicit within them". This judgment is

often combined with the use of "I" as in "I think you are a good person". This can create an uneven relationship in the interaction, in which the one doing the complimenting is "above" the person receiving the compliment (Miller and Rollnick, 2013).

Importantly, you do not have to agree with someone to affirm their worth and their strengths (Wagner and Ingersoll, 2013). This will be an even more important distinction when we get to having political conversations, where you don't have to agree with their opinions to see them as humans with worth and strengths. The focus of the affirmation must remain squarely with the client and not reflect back on the thoughts or opinions of the MI practitioner (Wagner and Ingersoll, 2013).

Offering reflections is really the core skill of MI and operates throughout the other skills and processes of MI technique (Miller and Rollnick, 2013, loc 1032). Reflections that deepen a conversation are more often complex reflections that add something to what the respondent is saying, rather than simply parroting back what they are saying word for word, as in a simple reflection (think of the difference between the simple reflection "you feel angry", to the more complex reflection "you feel angry and you don't know what to do with that feeling"). Rosengren (2009) refers to this as "hypothesis testing" – you think you know what the other person is saying (you have a hypothesis) but you want to make sure, so you reflect back to them to test that hypothesis. The other person is left to agree or disagree with the reflection and deepen their description of their perspective as now they see you are trying to understand. Now you are both "puzzling together" (Miller and Rollnick, 2013).

Rosengren (2009) offers the following advice on reflection:

"In general, the depth of reflection should match the situation.
Early and late in a session, surface-level reflections are typical. In
the heart of a session, depth should be increasing. However, with
someone struggling to control emotions, more surface-level
reflections might be more appropriate. A basic guideline is the less
you know what a person means, the shorter should be your jump in
levels." p.35

As with reflections, summaries offer more than simply summing up what the other has said.
Miller and Rollnick (2013) identify three main functions of summaries: collecting the
information previously stated, linking pieces of stated information that may not have been
linked before; and transitioning or shifting to a new task or topic. The MI practitioner is
actively organizing the information that has come up during the interaction and using
multiple reflections to bring to the fore that which has been unsaid, or unattended to, and
either move forward with the conversation or even bring the conversation to a close
(Rosengren, 2009).

"Rolling with Resistance"

What do we do when the other is resistant to the interaction? There is an idea in MI called
"rolling with resistance" and its closely related idea "resisting the righting reflex". Wagner and
Ingersoll (2013) state that "resistance is a pathway to change" and that resistance should be
"embraced" by the MI practitioner as it is a normal response (p. 255). Compare this to one of the
bedrock assumptions in the conflict transformation field, as stated by one of its founders:
"conflict is normal in human relationships, and conflict is a motor of change" (Lederach, 2003,
p. 5) and you can see the parallel themes.

Rolling with resistance goes beyond the mere normalcy of conflict however, it implies that we can work with that resistance, and its energy, to deepen the interaction. This is akin in the present study to taking the negative emotions that arise during political conversations, acknowledging the underlying feeling or value that may be threatened, and shifting the focus onto that for exploration of values and understanding the other's perspective.

When we do this however, we must restrain ourselves from attempts at "fixing" or "solving" the issues that arise. In political conversations, this is perhaps akin to attempting to "correct" the belief, perspective, or value of the other. We do this by:

Resisting the "Righting Reflex"

Resisting the righting reflex refers to the MI practitioners' attempts to stop themselves from offering solutions to the problems of another. MI is about supporting the respondent in finding their own reasons to change, not about suggesting how they should change or offering "expert" advice. Rosengren (2009) explains one of the pitfalls of "righting" another person:

> "Practitioner behavior that increases resistance includes (1) trying to convince clients that they have a problem, (2) arguing for the benefits of change, (3) telling clients how to change, and (4) warning them of the consequences of not changing. Arguments in favor of change increase resistance, which then reduces the likelihood that any change will occur." (p. 10)

Perhaps Schumacher and Madson (2015) sum this up the most succinctly: "In MI, the client should be the one who is making a case for change, not the provider."

For more on roadblocks to conversation, Thomas Gordon's 12 Roadblocks are maybe the most commonly cited roadblocks to listening in the MI literature (Miller and Rollnick, 2013; Rosengren, 2009; Wagner and Ingersoll, 2013).

Fidelity of MI Application

Finally, to ensure that practitioners are using MI correctly, there are a number of tools to assess the fidelity of the technique. The Motivational Interviewing Technique Integrity (MITI) is a tool that allows an observer to "score" an MI practitioner on how well they implement the technique (Moyers, 2010). While Schumacher and Madson (2015) point out that, when an individual has received training and practice in using the technique, along with observation and feedback using the MITI, "there is evidence that individuals from a variety of backgrounds and professions can achieve equal outcomes when delivering MI".

Change: What kind of change do we need?

Bar-Tal and Halperin (2009) describe the "most important psychological process involved in unfreezing is creating the motivation, first to reevaluate the held beliefs and attitudes, then to search for new information and ideas, and finally to accept the new alternatives". Here then is the change talk, the ambivalence, that Miller and Rollnick seek to find using MI. To "unfreeze" parties trapped in cycles of intractable conflict, we have to develop the motivations for people to change. What are these motivations and how do we expect or want people to change?

For political conversations, the

Bar-Tal and Halperin argue that the most (useful?) way to create this tension in a conflict party is to find the "incompatibility between the current state and/or the perceived past on the one hand, and the desired future, on the other hand" (2009, p.8). Finding the tension between the current status quo and the potential for future losses.

> "In such situations, the forces that push towards change (driving
>
> forces) must be stronger than the restraining ones (see Marcus,
>
> 2006 for elaboration)." (Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2009, p.9)

This fits nicely with the MI idea of "change talk" (reasons for change) versus "sustain talk" (reasons to stay the same).

Importantly, it must be stated that MI is not meant to be a way to brainwash another person or simply to manipulate them into agreeing with you in some way. This is clearly manipulation and not MI. Schumacher and Madson (2015) also argue that MI is not to be confused with reverse psychology as MI is not about deciding the change you want another person to make, but rather a way to help them open, or in this sense "unfreeze", to their own values and motivations. The MI practitioner cannot be distracted with their own end goal, the spirit of MI demands that the MI practitioner is accepting of whatever route that the other decides, gently guiding them to reflect on whether a change is right for them or not (Miller and Rollnick, 2013).

Instigating Belief

Since MI is a tool used to help people make changes, what kind of changes am I implying we should be making? Bar-Tal and Halperin (2009) propose the use of an "instigating belief" to help move conflicting parties from a frozen state to a more open, unfrozen state.

This is a belief that interrupts the status quo be creating tension between the way things are and the way things could be:

> "... of crucial importance is an appearance of a new belief which states that "time is not on our side" which means that the future may bring higher costs in comparison to benefits." (Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2009, p.16)

Importantly, this belief must be personal rather than mere "public conformity" (Kelman, 2015).

This instigating belief, related to the idea of "change talk" in MI, is reflected in the following responses from interview participants and survey respondents:

> *"we have to acknowledge that something is going wrong, and there is this polarization and it has to be addressed in some way... it would have to be built upon pre-existing trust and respect"*

> *"further division from each other is going to be an issue"*

The change here is that of "unfreezing". Of opening to alternative ways of being in the conflictual relationship and moving into a more creative and collaborative stage of conflict transformation. In MI, these instigating beliefs could be focused on as the change that the person feels is needed, their "change talk". That, to paraphrase Bar-Tal (2013), the desired future is threatened by the current state of being.

But is it ok to ask people to change? Who are we to say what is right?

What constitutes "change talk" in a political conversation?

In MI, "change talk" refers to "any speech that favors change… any self-expressed language that is an argument for change" (Miller and Rollnick, 2013, loc. 3168). In political conversations, Kelman (2015) describes the change that takes place as a matter of the reconciliation process:

> "I view reconciliation as a change in each party's identity, at least
> to the extent of removing negation of the other as a central
> component of each party's own identity and accommodating the
> identity of the other (Kelman, 2004a)."

And this "removing negation of the other" and "accommodating the identity of the other" is the main part of conflict transformation that I am interested in gauging the effectiveness of MI in serving. Lederach (2003) outlines his "change goals in conflict transformation", and along the relational domain are the following two goals:

> "Minimize poorly functioning communication and maximize
> understanding. Bring out and work with fears and hopes related to
> emotions and interdependence in the relationship." (p.27)

Developing Discrepancy

This inconsistency of ideas, beliefs, and/or attitudes is the heart of what MI seeks to find and develop in the other, so that they can live more closely according to their deeper values while simultaneously unfreezing themselves within the conflict, creating new opportunities for collaboration.

Ethics of asking for or eliciting change

There are ethical concerns about asking people to change. And several articles have weighed the ethics of using Motivational Interviewing for "good". Black and Forsberg (2014) look at the use of MI when asking for organ donation from families of the recently deceased. Their arguments fall into two main categories: one, MI is not strong enough to "override the will of others"; and two, the current non-MI way of asking for organ donation is potentially more problematic than using MI (Black and Forsberg, 2014). For the first concern:

> "... the influence MI has on behaviour might be ethically
> problematic if it could be used to overbear individual autonomy.
> Miller and Rollnick have argued that MI is not manipulative in an
> evaluative sense, since its causal role in behaviour change consists
> in highlighting the contrast between status quo behaviour(s) and
> deeply held values and beliefs; individual autonomy is not
> undermined as an incident of change. They write 'unless a current
> "problem" behaviour is in conflict with something that the person
> values more highly, there is no basis for [MI] to work'." (Black
> and Forsberg, 2014, p.65)

This maintains that MI can only work if the reasons for change already reside within a person's deepest values:

Yet the risk of manipulation cannot be overlooked. "MI interventions are designed bring about behaviour change. Miller writes 'we *hope* that our treatments are manipulative; that is, that they effectively alter behaviour [original emphasis]' (Black and Forsberg, 2014, p.65). But the authors

argue that, of course they are trying to alter behavior, or else they wouldn't attempt to use MI to increase organ donations.

Similar in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, the practitioner is seeking to alter behavior. Schirch (2004) states, "peacebuilding seeks to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms" (p.9).

Black and Helgason (2018) then looked at the use of MI in helping patients make end-of-life palliative care decisions, specifically, helping the patient to decide whether to disclose their illness to others. The stress is that, one cannot know what is best for the patient in this situation, that it is not as relatively simple as asking for an organ. Here, the authors argue that, rather than being biased towards the patient disclosing their illness to their loved ones, the bias must be "to utilise the MI skills in order to focus on and evoke talk that favours deciding whether to disclose, while taking care not to elicit talk that eschews taking a decision" (Black and Helgason, 2018, p. 4). In other words, the stress is on helping the patient make a decision in alignment with their deepest values, rather than waiting and not making a decision at all.

Can we say that not doing anything about the current political polarization in the US is potentially more unethical than trying to help people live according to their deeper values? (assuming that those values are peaceful – can we assume that no one values being violent?)

This though can be a slippery ethical slope… what if someone else uses this argument to advance their beliefs about what is "right" in the world?

Well, Black and Helgason (2018) also argue that attempting to be "neutral" can be more fraught with accidental manipulation than any attempt at directing the conversation. That, in a sense,

trying nothing can be arguable more unethical than trying something. As long as that "something" involves more deeply exploring and understanding the needs and values of all sides.

The ambivalences that MI is meant to surface often involve value-behavior conflicts. Miller and Rollnick (2013) paraphrase Rokeach in explaining:

> "It is a common human experience for day-to-day behavior to fall short of or even contradict longer-term values. Such value-behavior discrepancies become apparent precisely through reflection on life values, and perceiving such discrepancy can exert a powerful effect on behavior (Rokeach, 1973)" (loc. 1570)

MI seems applicable, in the present study, to surface such values conflicts in a way that allows us to acknowledge them, work with them and through them to get to understanding (rolling with resistance), and to find reasons (motivations) for both sides to unfreeze.

Assumptions

I am assuming that if two sides are leaning towards collaboration, that will lead to increased *actual* collaboration (this is a big assumption and could be wrong).

I am assuming high levels of support for a peaceful outcome and better relationships among fellow citizens who differ vastly in their views. I am also assuming that most individuals would want everyone to work together peacefully in this country rather than become more polarized.

Methodology

How I found my participants

Participants were located on the internet, through social media pages and groups, and through word-of-mouth. They were contacted initially by email, in which the study was explained according to Institutional Review Board recommendations (Purdue, 2014).

How I came up with questions

Questions were informed by the literature on motivational interviewing, Bar-Tal's (2013) "instigating" and "mediating" beliefs, along with his descriptions of a conflict-supporting repertoire. My semi-structured interview questions were adapted per interview and where the conversation took the participant and the interviewee. All questions are presented in the Appendix.

How I analyzed transcripts for my interviews

Transcripts were transcribed by me with no identifying information attached to them. They were then analyzed by picking out themes using both simple reading and highlighting in the software and creating theme tables.

Results

I complete four in-depth interviews (30 – 60 minutes each), with two liberals and two conservatives. And I sent out a survey (via Survey Monkey online) which got over 150 responses, however, only 15 of those respondents identified as conservatives. After

contacting ten different conservative groups, I was unable to get any responses to assemble a conservative focus group.

The themes that came from the interviews were: interactions (descriptions of interactions with the other side); escalation (of the interactions); values (as they are ascribed to one or the other group); ideal political talk; and thoughts about the future (if polarization continues).

(Author's note: In the quotes from interviews and the survey below, I have removed any labels of "liberal" or "conservative" so as not to add to the way the sides see each other or themselves, but to look objectively at how we are talking about each other.)

The <u>Interactions</u> theme seemed to be overwhelmingly negative and was evident in responses like the following:

The current polarization is *"almost dehumanizing sometimes"*

"People are really demeaning and attacking"

"there's this presumptive air that they're better than you"

"Yeah, my everyday experience is pretty scary, at work I have to pretty much hide completely almost completely."

"there's a lack of tolerance, that's what it is, on the (other) side"

"I think what's lacking now is a general disrespect on both sides of the aisle, you know, this person thinks that way, there's no way I'm going to talk to them or give them the time of day"

On ingroup interactions, proving yourself to the group: *"it kind of becomes a space that you have to really demonstrate that you know what you're talking about and you're educated on these things so therefore you have points to bring to the conversation... so I think there is this inclination to feel like you have to prove yourself"*

Escalation refers to the interactions moving into heightened states of emotion and personal feelings:

"invalidating a person's background in a sense, being like, 'we're the real Americans here', which is actually the one thing that we all have in common"

"(they) are creating to me what is a totally hostile environment"

"at least on some issues, we might agree on 75, 80, 90 percent of the time, but that ten percent can be really contentious"

"we just can't have the dialogue anymore because people who identify as (the other side) have a freak out in their brain... they can't process or comprehend it"

"I feel that these conversations we have between opposing political sides, they're never just about politics, I think it more fundamentally gets down to who we are as people and why these conversations often feel like a personal attack on you"

> *"I feel threatened like people are going to attack me, or I might lose my job, if for some reason they perceive that I am too this or that"*

The theme of <u>Values</u> showed up in the following examples:

> *"it's so hard to feel like you can respect someone whose values are inherently disrespecting you in some way"*

> *"your family and family values... that's a very real and important thing"*

> *"the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, we just see that as pillars of this country... the foundation that we kind of use as our navigating tool"*

> *"there is an inherent care for individuals that may not have the financial backing that some others might have"*

> *"they think that government should be shrunk and that social programs should be limited to a certain extent"*

> Following the rules: *"their perception is that they have played by the rules and people who are cheating the system are benefiting"*

<u>Ideal Political Talk</u>:

> *"trying to understand that person's position before you object to it."*

"take a deep breath and not let your emotions get in the way of just rational thought"

"some sort of gained understanding of where the other person is coming from"

"it's got to be a two-way street where, in order for them to have the respect of you for them to listen, you have to have that same respect for them and listen to their point of view"

"trying to find some middle ground"

"when you grow up with people and you know them and they know you, even if you have a political disagreement... since they actually know the other person, they can tell it's not coming from a bad place"

"it's probably the best, just knowing that it's not a personal attack, it's whatever their beliefs are"

"can we just have a logical conversation even if we do disagree or maybe in the conversation that we have, we'll find out, oh, we agree on a couple points and we find a common ground"

Future:

"We have to acknowledge that something is going wrong, and this polarization has to be addressed in some way"

"if people don't stop getting further and further apart then compromise is simply not going to happen"

"something needs to happen"

"people keep saying civil war, and I don't want to think about that, I think we're still a ways from that, but it could go there eventually"

"at a certain point, aren't we just going to split?"

Similar themes of interactions, escalation, and ideal political talk were examined in the online survey, which also showed additional themes of respect/disrespect; ideal political talk; and facts:

Respect/disrespect:

"Commit to an attitude of mutual respect"

"Respectfulness"

"Respectful language and 'I' statements should be the basis of these conversations"

"when in an argument, people fall back on disrespect"

"Respect for others"

"Mutual respect/compassion for the other"

"if we started from a place of mutual respect and validation"

"A foundation of trust and respect... respect for experiences, respect for space, respect for beliefs"

"Open":

>*"be more open to an honest exchange of ideas"*
>
>*"keep an open mind"*
>
>*"be more open minded"*
>
>*"both sides need to be open-minded enough to listen to new ideas"*
>
>*"be more open to another position"*
>
>*"all sides need to be more open to the other side"*
>
>*"Be open!!!!"* (emphasis theirs)

"Listen":

>*"Just listen."*
>
>*"Learn to listen."*
>
>*"Listen without trying to change my mind."*
>
>*"somehow make me feel like they are willing to listen"*
>
>*"listen attentively"*
>
>*"listening fully"*
>
>*"listen to comprehend rather than reply"*
>
>*"be open to listening"*
>
>*"truly listen"*

"Facts":

> *"Tell me why they don't agree with my facts or logic"*
>
> *"Help me see facts, not rhetoric to prove their point"*
>
> *"Do some research into the facts of the matter"*
>
> *"if there are facts out there to support a position, I wish both sides would stick with those facts"*
>
> *"Know the facts"*
>
> *"True facts... supporting claims with actual facts"*
>
> *"Embrace facts"*
>
> *"Stop ignoring facts"*
>
> *"Accept that facts, studies, and experiences that conflict with their world view are in fact real"*

In response to the question, "what could the other political side do to make it easier for you to have productive political conversations?" the most commonly used terms were: "listen" (21%); "open" (17%); and "fact(s)" (14%).

In response to the question, "what could make these interactions between political side better/more productive?" the most commonly used terms were: "understand(ing)" (15%); "fact(s)" (12%); "listen" (10%); and "open" (7%).

53% report they avoid having political conversations with the other side (46% do not avoid).

83% say that both liberals and conservatives have to get better at political communication.

The biggest impediment to conversations: 82% picked the option "it feels as if they don't listen".

82% of respondents said they would rather have political conversations that involves each side reflecting back what the other has said to ensure understanding.

Discussion

There is a notion a "post-fact world" (Fukuyama, 2017) in which all facts and "authoritative information sources" are called into question and clouded in doubt by "contrary facts of dubious quality and provenance". But, through the ways in which we are talking about issues currently, we are not even getting to the facts or the "truth" (if there is one). We don't seem to hear facts and then dispute them; we don't even hear the "facts" to begin with:

> *"It's difficult to maintain polite civil discourse when the topic is emotional for me."*

> *"I feel facts are not relevant to them."*

> *"(Conversations with the other side) generally turn into pointless arguments with people talking past each other and no real understanding."*

> *"I think there has to be that foundation of trust and respect – trust for other person and the relationship that you have and like respect for the reasons they might have for the different views that they do, but I think that's the part where it begins to get tricky*

> *because a lot of these ideas that you divide on can feel so personal,*
>
> *depending on who you are."*

It seems to be that facts, and the interpretations of them, have become very personal. Perhaps we are actually (or also) in a "pre-facts" world, in which we need to get the relationships in the right place first – and then we can discuss the facts and the "truth" after that foundation of relationship has been laid.

There are also "mirror images" in each sides' conflict-supporting narrative. Both sides claiming the other side does not have facts on their side, is quicker to anger, and are more closed than they are. Consider the following juxtapositions:

> *"In general, liberals don't know the facts"*
>
> *"I rarely find conservatives who deal in facts"*
>
> *"(Liberals cannot) emotionally handle a conversation"*
>
> *"(Conservatives) often lack civility"*
>
> *"I find (conservatives) are not open to alternative views"*
>
> *"It's partially that (liberals) just don't want to (have a*
>
> *conversation) - you know, 'you're a bad person and I'm not even*
>
> *going to speak with you'"*

Considering the present study is concerned with the use of Motivational Interviewing to develop that discrepancy between the current state and the desired future state, in other words, to develop the instigating belief that lead to unfreezing sides, it would seem that the results suggest there is a

general discontent with the current state, a fear about the future if the polarization continues, and deeply held values on both sides of listening in an open and respectful manner.

If this is the case, Motivational Interviewing, as it is meant to assist people in discovering their own deeply held values for positive change by moving from "sustain talk" (conflict-supporting repertoire) to "change talk" (instigating belief/unfreezing), would seem to be a powerful tool for the conflict transformer's toolbox.

It would also seem to show that there is a general bias in the sample towards more peaceful interactions between the sides:

> *"Trying to understand that person's position before you object to*
> *it"*
>
> *"Be more willing to give people the benefit of the doubt."*
>
> *"More listening, more inquisitiveness, more empathy."*
>
> *"Get to know each other on a personal level first."*
>
> *"A lot more reflection and consideration."*
>
> *"Develop deeper relationships with each other. If relationships are*
> *there, respect will be there."*
>
> *"Talk about your family. Talk about how laws and beliefs and*
> *policies impact your life and those you love."*

If that is the case, we may be justified in assuming that using MI to help people achieve that desired future is an avenue worthy of deeper exploration.

Limitations of this Study

This study only covered the opinions of a few liberals and conservatives and so cannot be generalized to the entire population of left and right politics in the United States. However, there are still some interesting take ways that should be explored in the future. Also, there were relatively few conservatives compared to liberals among the respondents of the online survey. This may be further evidence that the two communities of liberals and conservatives are really "siloed" in their respective in-groups and the author, being a liberal, in getting more liberal responses because of that. That the two groups interact so little is disconcerting.

We cannot say "liberals are more this way" or "conservatives are more that way" because of this study. Because of the small sample size, no valid and reliable characteristics of the groups can be ascertained. However, what we can find is the beginning of an inclination of what is happening in these relationships as regards the use of new conversational methods when talking politics.

Future Studies Needed

A further study looking at and analyzing more examples of what works in political discussion between liberals and conservatives. Perhaps an expert in MI could have political conversations from both sides that could be taped and coded to explore when MI works in "unfreezing" the sides, and what does not work. Future studies should seek to explore a more balanced ratio of liberals to conservatives.

Much has to be done. Potts and Brown (2005) states:

"finding "the question" is seldom that simple… Going from clarity to fuzziness can be okay. Questions usually change as the inquiry proceeds. And sometimes the question that was answered is not clearly revealed until the end of the process... The art of the question is in the re-researching, the willingness to look again." (p.267)

Is that vein, here are some questions stimulated by the present research perhaps suggesting future studies:

Why did I (a liberal-leaning researcher) have so much trouble recruiting conservatives for this study?

Why was there so much emphasis by respondents on making things better through being "open", "listening", and engaging with "facts"? Can we be both open to the other and insist on talking only in facts? Is there a contradiction here, where we possibly value openness more than facts, or vice versa? If we value openness more than facts, why do we put so much stress on the use of facts?

Can prior strong relationships be dehumanization-proof, or at least dehumanization-resistant?

One interesting thing that came up from someone who identified themselves as liberal, was the way that they felt judged by other liberals at times, as if they weren't liberal enough:

"I think for some people, I think they have to prove themselves

(unheard) being really far left – I think in far-left circles there's

almost like... going along with those ideas of like the right

language to use around social justice issues and it kind of becomes

a space that you have to really like demonstrate that you know

what you're talking about and you're educated on these things so

therefore you have points to bring to the conversation, because I

think it could very quickly become like, like "you're not

understanding this perspective" or something like that – even with

(unheard) - so I think that there is sort of this like inclination to

feel like you have to prove yourself as a liberal

And if you don't, what do you lose? What happens?

Like, I mean, I guess that would be different for different people, I

think like if I'm imagining it for myself, it feels like it's like... like

someone was sort of accusing me of not being liberal enough, that

feels like it's something that is pertinent to my identity, especially

in these times, so, it's like, again like being invalidated"

Future studies might explore the within-group relationships and how they create or maintain a "conflict-supporting repertoire" in the current left/right American political divide.

Conclusions

Participants in this study overwhelmingly see a need for something to be done. This represents the existence of an "instigating belief" on both sides of the conflict. This is also consistent with other research which shows a majority of Americans express a desire to end the continued political polarization in the United States.

Participants also were able to express a desired future. One in which political conversations can be used to learn and connect rather than to disregard and divide. One that is distinct from, and was expressed as better than, the current manner of political interaction.

Their descriptions of the current state of relationships were compared to a kind of "sustain talk" that keeps each side in its own conflict-supporting repertoire. The expressed desired future, more peaceful and with better relationships, was compared to the "change talk" of MI. And the instigating belief can be used to "develop discrepancy" between values and expressed desires for the future on the one hand, and the current conflict-supporting repertoires on the other.

The least hope for this paper is that it has convincingly assembled the puzzle pieces of a new avenue of research for the conflict transformation field and a new use for the Motivational Interviewing conversational style.

Appendix

<u>Semi-structured Interview Guide</u>

Introduction: What I am studying – why everyone is here

MI OARS – 2:1 ratio - types of reflections – spirit of MI – asking permission to give advice or share knowledge

I'm going to try out a few different types of reflections or MI components after each question to see if that helps us get a deeper meaning out of this interview:

Please tell me if at any point, these reflections or comments of mine are creating any negative feelings or discomfort:

How would you define today's "liberal"? What are their goals and values?

Reflecting to get at deeper needs

What is it like to hold liberal values in the world today?

How would you define today's "conservative"? What are their goals and values?

Reflecting to get at what how they perceive the deeper needs of the other

What is it like to hold conservative values today?

What do you like most about being a democrat/liberal//republican/conservative?

What do you like the least about it?

How are you the same as other liberals/conservatives?

How are you different?

What works in this relationship between conservatives and liberals?

What doesn't work so well? What could be different?

Open Conversation:

Are there problems in these relationships?

(Investigating the participants "conflict-supporting repertoire" (Bar-Tal p.323):)

What is this conflict between liberals and conservatives all about?

Do you have people in your family or friends, to whom you feel close, who are

"liberals"/"conservatives"?

Could you please share with me your experiences in talking with "liberals"/"conservatives" or

talking with people with differing political perspectives?

What occurred?

What else can you remember?

How often would you say this occurs?

When?

Who was involved?

How did they respond?

How was it resolved?

What did the other person do?

What did you do next?

Was there anything else you could have done?

Was this unique? Repeated?

When does a political conversation become a problem?

What else could you have done?

Why did you not do that?

Are there elements of the environment or context that make it harder?

What are the barriers to communication that arise when talking with the other side?

What are the things that help conversations with liberals/conservatives?

What do you think the problem is?

What is the current paradigm of this conflict? From both sides point of view?

What do you think should stay the same and what should change?

Do you feel like you are able to change your mind or be open to other perspectives in a

conversation?

What does that look like?

Do you feel like the "other side" will allow you to change your mind and be open, or do you feel

a need to be defensive?

What does that look like?

How does it make you feel when you see people calling either your side or the other side "crazy"

"un-American" "idiots" etc.? What about "patriots", "we the people", etc.?

Should people/one side be called "un-American"?

What drives you crazy when talking to the other side?

How about when they say, "listen to reason" or "listen to the facts" - what do you feel?

What other things might they say that make it hard to have a discussion?

What questions do you have for "conservatives" (if you're a "liberal") or "liberals" (if you're "conservative")?

What would you like them to know about you?

What would you like the relationship to be?

What would a good relationship "across the aisle" look like to you?

Is reconciliation between the groups possible?

What would have to change for you to see the (other side) as people that you can work with and talk with and figure out social problems with? - (question inspired by Bar-Tal and Halperin – see in that entry)

"what do conservatives (if conservative)/liberals (if liberal) lose by compromising (on some of these things)?"

What are your fears if this polarization between sides continues?

What could conservative (if conservative)/liberals (if liberal) lose if this polarization continues?

What do you think the US could look like if things continue or even get worse?

"is the status quo acceptable, or do things *have* to change?" "what would that look like if it had to change?" or, simply, "what are your desired goals?" "you feel like you couldn't go on if these desired goals aren't achieved *fully*"

What are your absolute sticking points – red-lines – things that are like, "I cannot even talk with this person if they say or believe _____"?

What would bring conservatives/liberals to a discussion table and what things would prevent this from happening?

If you know you are going to be talking to a liberal/conservative (the other), how would you prepare yourself for that? What steps would you take? What would you try to remember?

What about your interactions with other conservatives (if conservative)/liberals (if liberal)?

What are those like?

Is there anything that comes up that could make it harder to have meaningful relationships with (the other side)?

Is there anything that could make it easier to have meaningful relationships with (the other side)?

Cleanup Questions:

Do you have previous training with dialogue? Or had you heard of motivational interviewing before?

Wrap Up Questions:

What questions am I not asking here that I should be asking?

<u>Political Interactions Online Survey</u>

1. *When it comes to politics, would you more closely identify yourself as liberal or a conservative? (If you do not fit either label, please choose the side that more closely resembles your political views)*

   o   Very liberal

   o   Moderately liberal

   o   Slightly liberal

   o   Slightly conservative

   o   Moderately conservative

   o   Very conservative

   o   Prefer not to respond

2. How often, on average, do you have political conversations with someone from the opposite political side?

   o   Frequently

   o   Sometimes

   o   Rarely

   o   Never

   o   Prefer Not to Respond

3. *Do you avoid having political conversations with the other political side?*

   o   Yes

   o   No

   o   Prefer not to respond

4. *If you avoid political conversations with the other political side, why do you avoid them?*

   (open response)

5. *Which side has to get better at communication?*

   - o Conservatives

   - o Both liberals and conservatives

   - o Liberals

   - o Prefer not to respond

6. *What is the hardest thing about having political conversations with the other political*

   side? (Choose all that apply)

   - o I don't like them.

   - o I feel judged.

   - o Nothing they could say could change my mind anyway.

   - o They think they're better than me.

   - o It feels as it they don't listen.

   - o I don't have as much information as they do.

   - o Prefer not to respond.

   - o Other (please specify)

7. *What could the other political side do to make it easier for you to have productive*

   political conversations? (open response)

8. *Which of the following could be helpful in having better/more productive conversations*

   with the other political side?

   (Choose all that apply)

   - o They reflect back to me what they understand I am saying.

- o They only ask questions for deeper understanding of what I am saying.

- o They tell me their perspective.

- o They try to convince me with facts.

- o They point out where I may be wrong.

- o They summarize my main points back to me.

- o Prefer not to respond.

- o Other ideas:

9. *What would be your most preferred communication strategy with the other side? (Choose all that apply)*

- o I talk, they reflect back to me to ensure understanding.

- o They talk only, I only listen.

- o I talk only, they only listen.

- o They talk, I only ask questions.

- o I talk, they only ask questions.

- o They talk, I reflect back to let them know I understand.

- o We have a back and forth, each reflecting back what the other said to ensure understanding.

- o We have a back and forth debate, stating facts and trying to convince the other.

- o Prefer not to respond.

- o Please comment here if you would like:

10. *What could make these interactions between political sides better/more productive? (open response)*

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