

# MANY VIEW THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS KEY GOALS AS UNSUCCESSFUL

More adults view Afghanistan as an adversary than an ally, and two-thirds say the American war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting, according to a new Pearson Institute/AP-NORC Poll.

The poll is being released in conjunction with the [2023 Pearson Global Forum](#), an event that will bring together researchers and policymakers to develop strategies to prevent and resolve international conflicts.

While 46% of adults believe the U.S. was successful in apprehending or eliminating those responsible for the 9/11 attacks during the war, less than a quarter say the U.S. was successful in its mission to develop a functioning government or improve opportunities for women in Afghanistan.

Regarding current foreign policy goals in Afghanistan, majorities say it is at least somewhat important to eliminate the threat of Islamic extremists taking shelter (77%) and advance the rights of women and girls (74%). Majorities of adults report hearing at least some news about recent events in Afghanistan such as the 2021 U.S. troop withdrawal (68%) and the Taliban restricting the rights of Afghan women (64%).

When it comes to the broader U.S. role in international affairs, there is no public consensus on the right approach as 24% say the U.S. should be more active, 42% say its current role is about right, and 33% say it should be less active. Those who say the U.S. should take a more active role in solving the world's problems are more likely to rate U.S. foreign policy goals in Afghanistan as important.



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## Three Things You Should Know

About the Pearson Institute/AP-NORC Poll  
 Among all Adults:

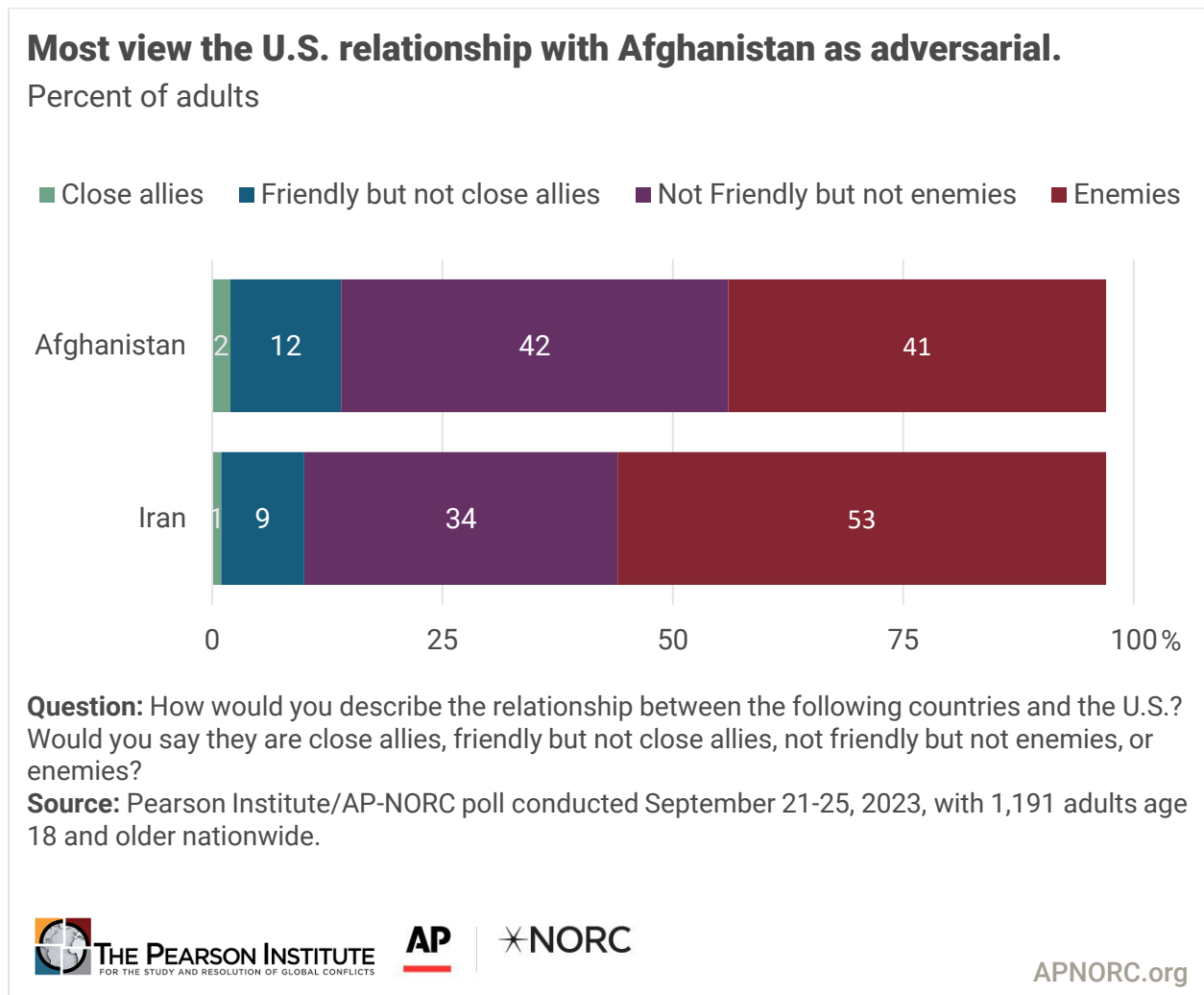
- 1) Only 22% say the U.S. was successful during the war in improving opportunities for Afghan women, but 74% still view advancing the rights of Afghan women as an important policy goal.
- 2) Less than a quarter say the U.S. was successful in achieving their other foreign policy goals, such as helping develop a functioning Afghan government (16%) and eliminating the threat posed by Islamic extremists (22%).
- 3) 41% view Afghanistan as an enemy and another 42% say it is unfriendly, while only 14% say it is an ally or friendly nation.

Adults who view the war in Afghanistan as worthwhile are more likely to feel the U.S. successfully achieved key policy objectives during the war and to say foreign policy goals in Afghanistan are important.

The nationwide poll was conducted by the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from September 21 to 25, 2023, using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,191 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3.8 percentage points.

### A LARGE MAJORITY VIEW AFGHANISTAN AS AN ADVERSARY.

Most adults perceive Afghanistan as an adversary of the U.S rather than an ally. Public attitudes toward the U.S. relationship with Afghanistan are comparable to views of Iran, which has a long-standing adversarial relationship with the U.S.



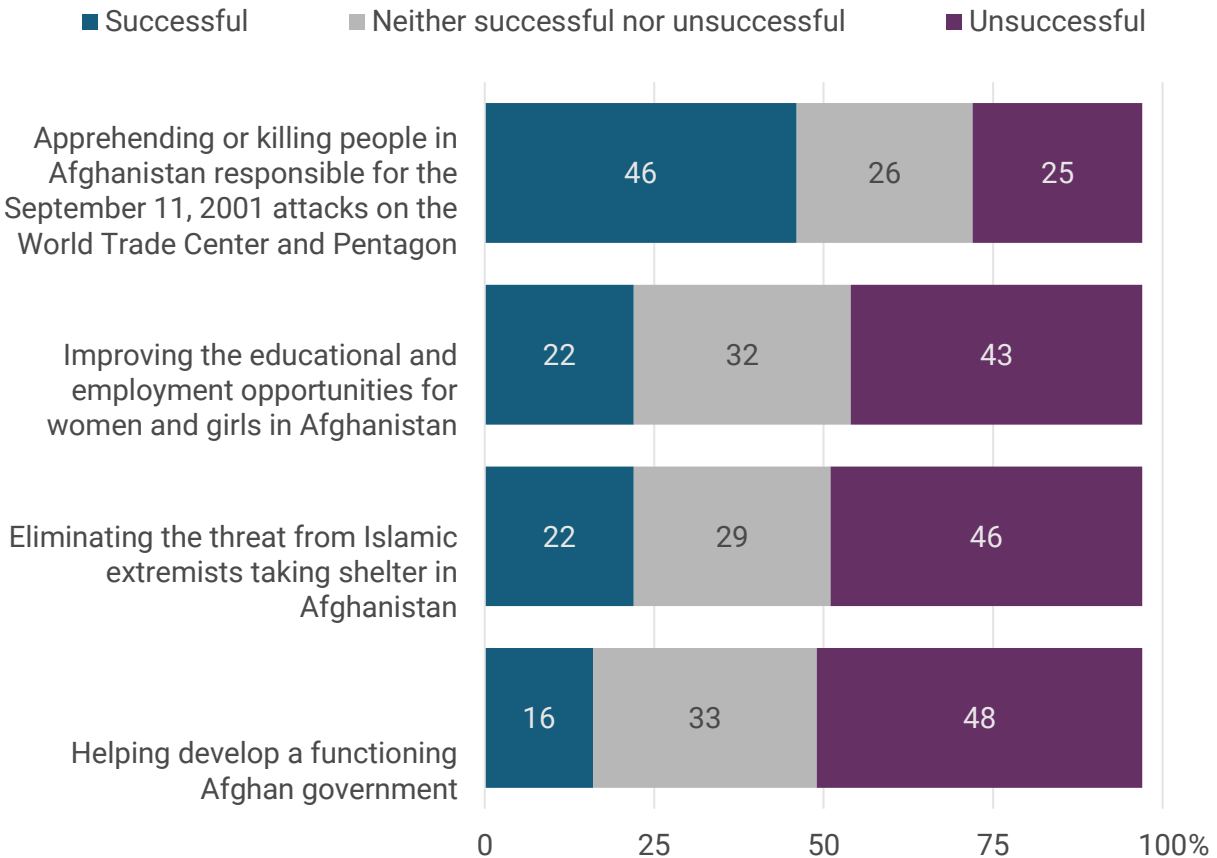
### MOST ADULTS SAY THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN WAS NOT WORTH FIGHTING, AND FEW BELIEVE THE U.S. SUCCESSFULLY ACCOMPLISHED KEY GOALS OF THE WAR.

Sixty-six percent of adults agree the war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting while 32% say it was worth it. Opinions have not significantly changed since the U.S. first withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021.

In terms of policy goals associated with the war in Afghanistan, 46% of adults say the U.S. successfully sought justice for the 9/11 attacks by apprehending or killing people in Afghanistan who were responsible. Nearly half say the U.S. was unsuccessful in other foreign policy goals such as improving educational opportunities for women, helping develop a functioning Afghan government, and eliminating the threat posed by Islamic extremists.

### Few perceive U.S. foreign policy goals were achieved in Afghanistan.

Percent of adults



**Question:** How successful do you believe the U.S. and its allies were in achieving the following policy goals during the war in Afghanistan?

**Source:** Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll conducted September 21-25, 2023, with 1,191 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



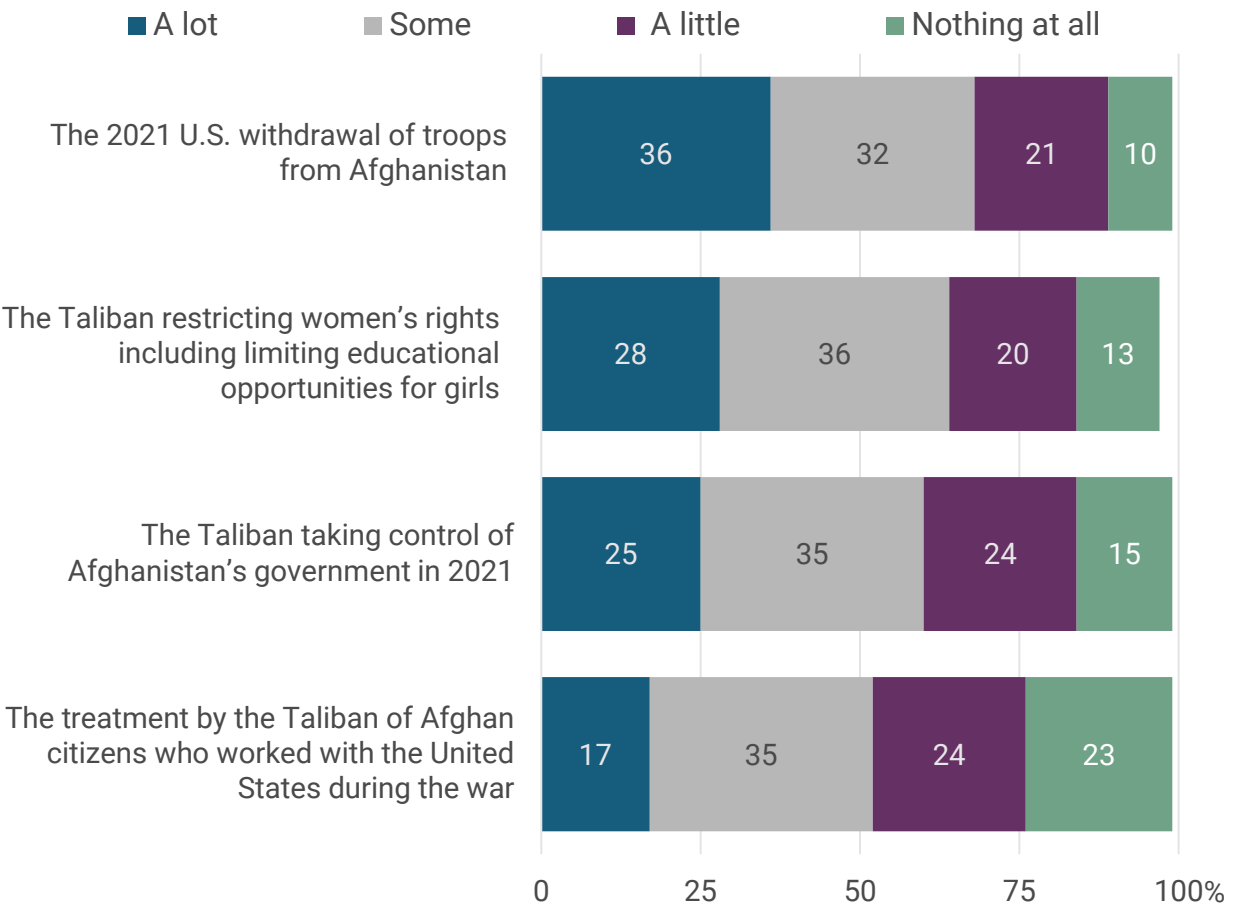
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### MOST AMERICANS HAVE HEARD AT LEAST SOME NEWS RELATED TO CURRENT EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN.

Majorities of adults have heard at least some news about the 2021 U.S. withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, as well as the Taliban’s restrictions placed on women, their control of the government, and their treatment of Afghan citizens who worked with the U.S. during the war.

## Many Americans report hearing at least something about ongoing events in Afghanistan.

Percent of adults



**Question:** How much, if anything, have you heard about the following events that have happened in Afghanistan?

**Source:** Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll conducted September 21-25, 2023, with 1,191 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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College educated adults are more likely to have heard at least something about these current events. For example, 77% of college educated adults have heard about the Taliban restricting women's rights compared with 57% of those without a college degree.

## COMBATTING TERRORISM AND PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF AFGHAN WOMEN ARE SEEN AS IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY GOALS FOR THE U.S. IN AFGHANISTAN.

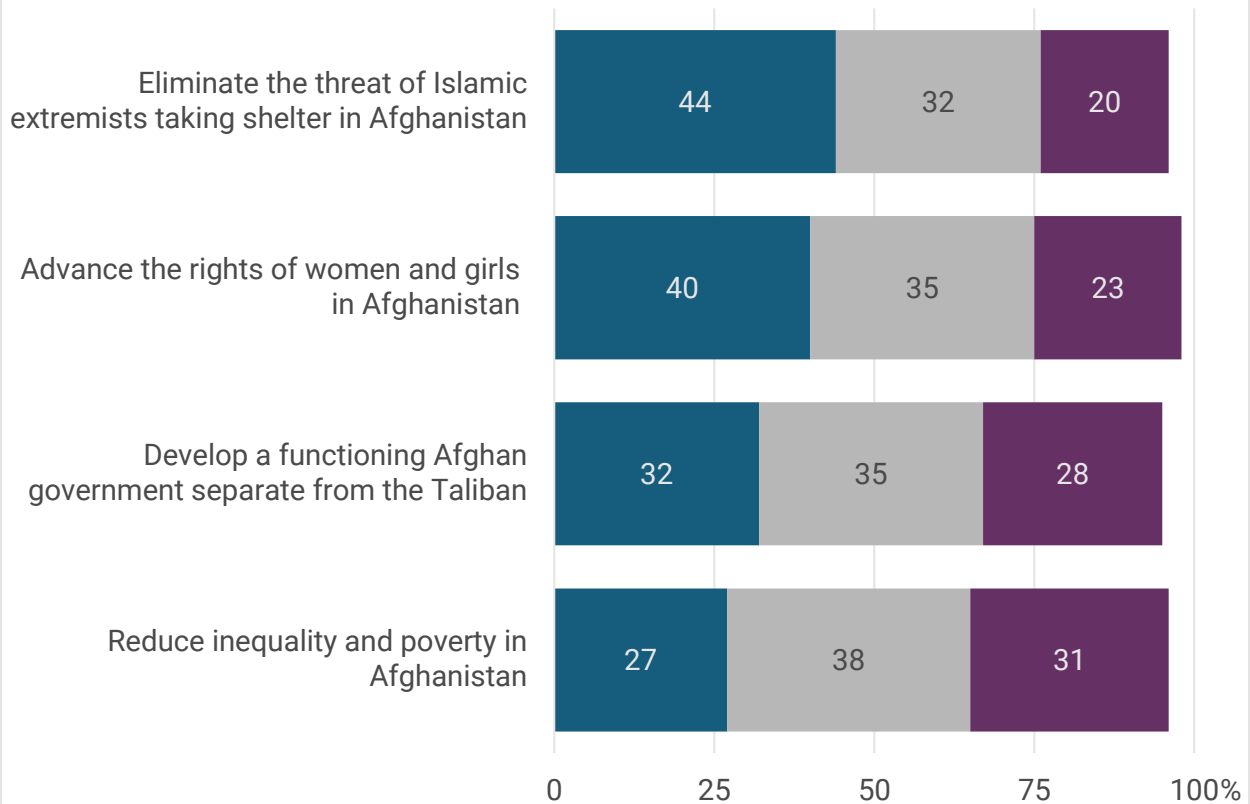
In terms of current U.S. foreign policy goals, 77% say it is at least somewhat important to eliminate the threat of Islamic extremists taking shelter in Afghanistan, and 74% believe it is at least somewhat important to advance the

rights of women and girls. Fewer say the same for reducing inequality and developing a functioning government in Afghanistan.

## Combating terrorism and advancing the rights of women in Afghanistan are the public's top foreign policy goals.

Percent of adults

■ Extremely/Very important   ■ Somewhat important   ■ Not at all/Not too important



**Question:** Thinking about the foreign policy goals of the U.S., please tell me how important it is for the U.S. to do each the following:

**Source:** Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll conducted September 21-25, 2023, with 1,191 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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## ADVOCATES FOR INCREASED U.S. GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT HAVE MORE POSITIVE VIEWS OF WAR IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS RELATED U.S. POLICY GOALS.

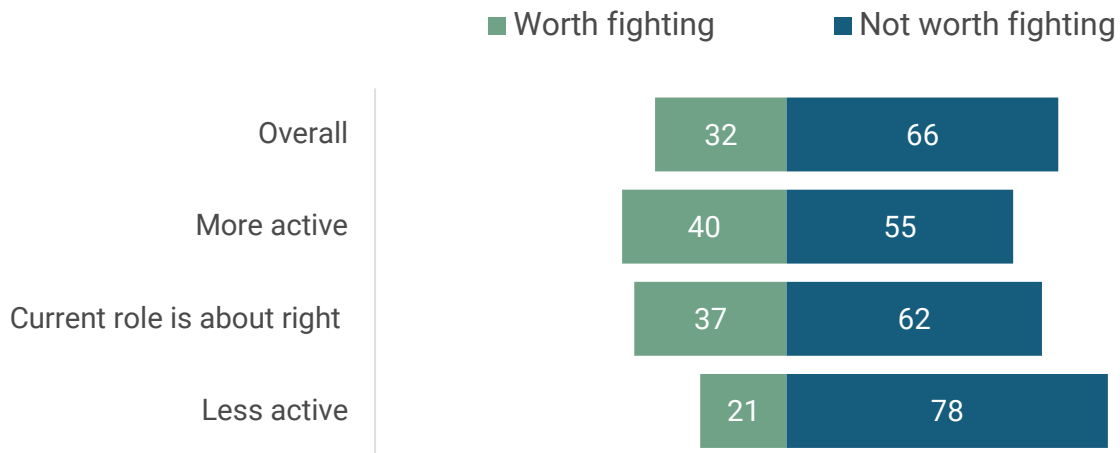
The public is divided on the role of the U.S. in solving the world's problems, with 24% saying the U.S. should take a more active role, 42% saying its current role is about right, and 33% saying the U.S. should take a less active role.

Those who believe the U.S. should take a more active role in solving the world's problems are about twice as likely to say the war in Afghanistan was worth fighting compared to those who believe the U.S. should take a less active

role. Although, even among those who feel the U.S. should be more engaged globally, only 40% feel the war in Afghanistan was worthwhile.

### Proponents of U.S. global involvement are more likely to view the war in Afghanistan as worthwhile.

Percent of adults



**Questions:** Overall, would you say the war in Afghanistan was worth fighting or not worth fighting? Do you think the United States should take a more or less active role in solving the world's problems or is its current role about right?

**Source:** Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll conducted September 21-25, 2023, with 1,191 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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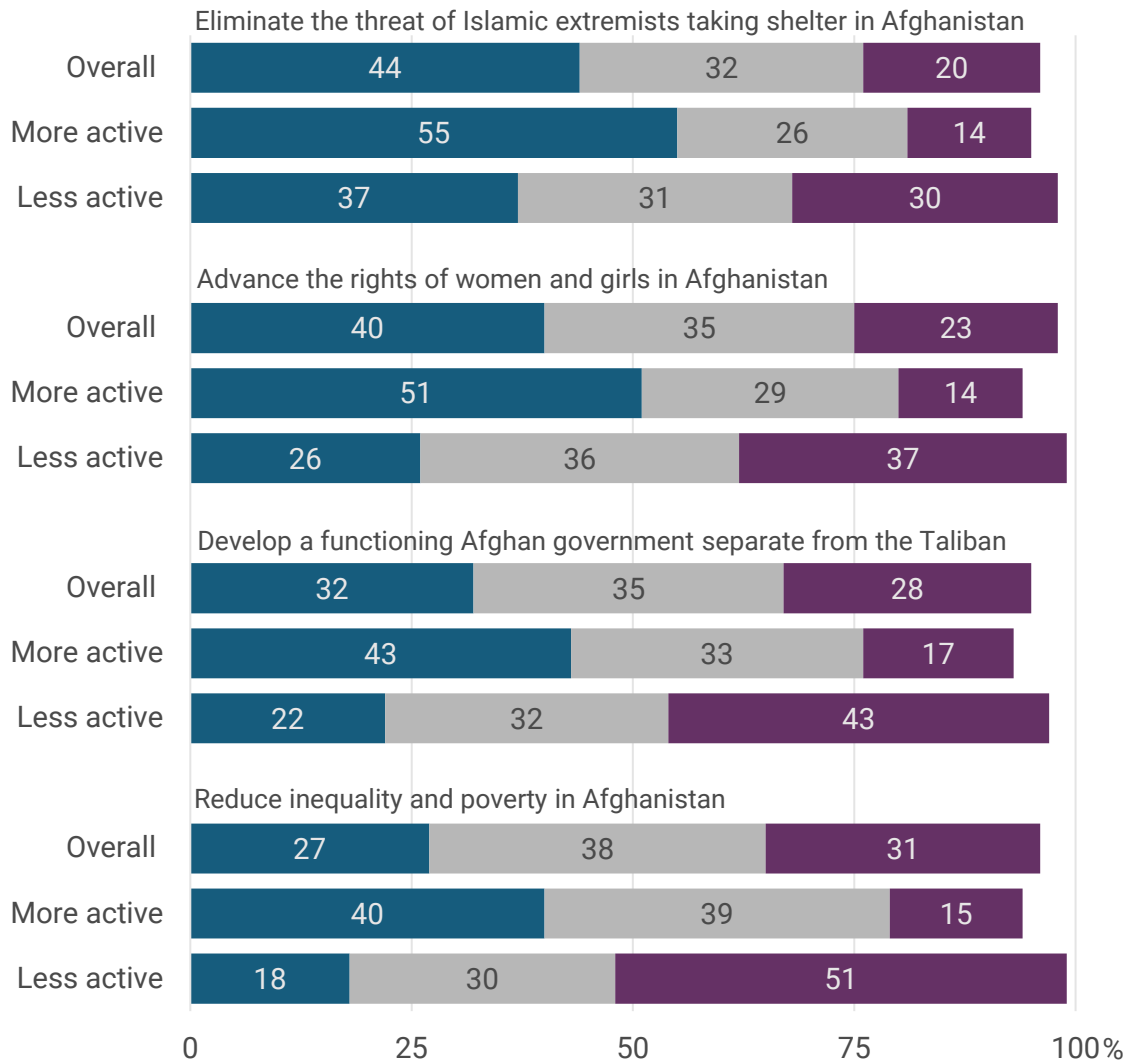
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Additionally, proponents of greater U.S. global involvement are more likely to evaluate U.S. foreign policy goals in Afghanistan as important.

## Advocates for U.S global engagement are more likely to rate foreign policy goals in Afghanistan as important.

Percent of adults

■ Extremely/very important   ■ Somewhat important   ■ Not too/Not at all important



**Questions:** Thinking about the foreign policy goals of the United States, please tell me how important it is for the United States to do each of the following. Do you think the United States should take a more or less active role in solving the world's problems or is its current role about right?

**Source:** Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll conducted September 21-25, 2023, with 1,191 adults age 18 and older nationwide.



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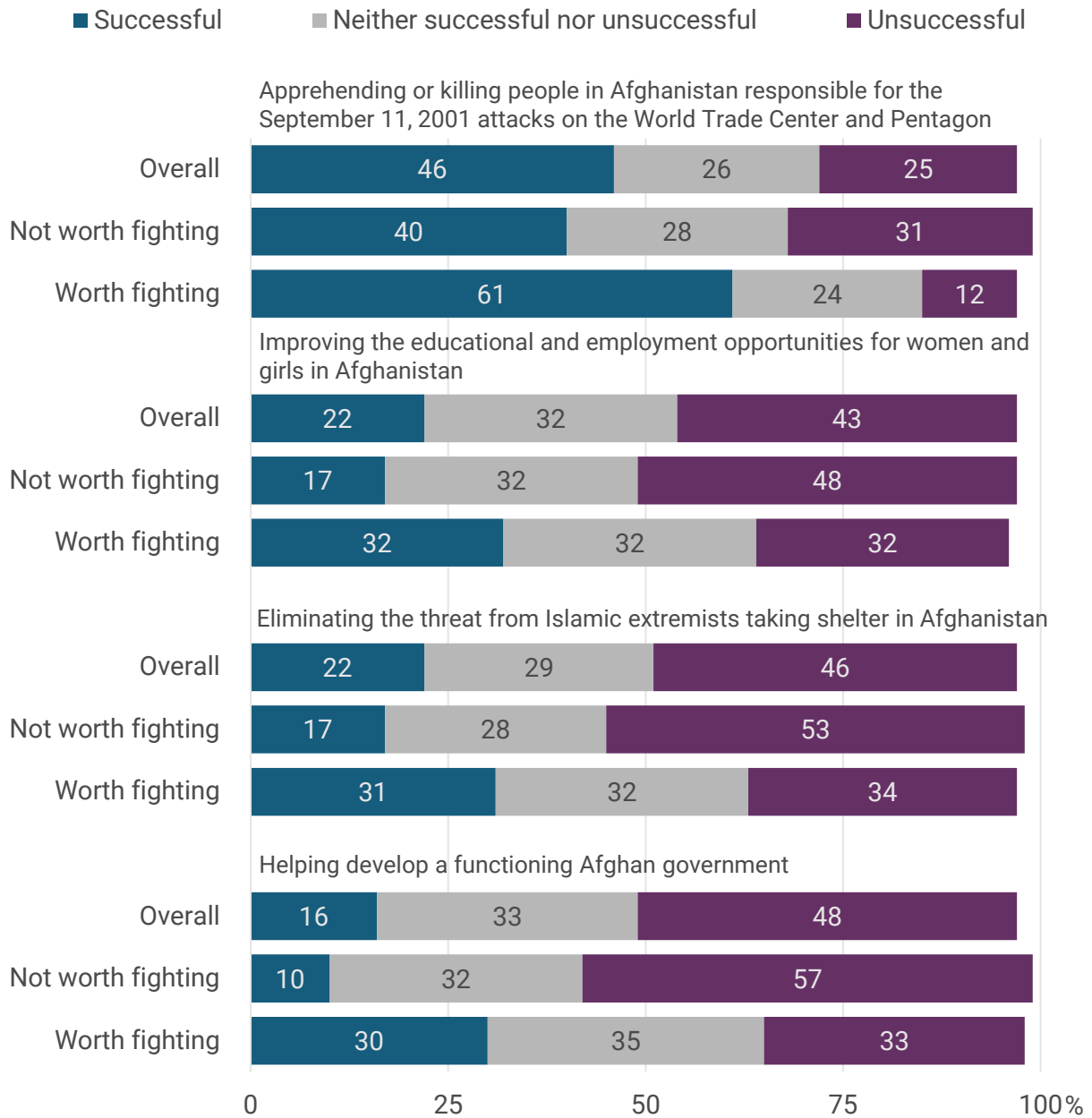
## **PUBLIC OPINION ON FOREIGN POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN IS RELATED TO THE PERCEIVED WORTH OF FIGHTING THE WAR.**

Adults who view the Afghanistan war as worthwhile are more likely than those who say it was not worth it to believe that the U.S. successfully achieved key foreign policy objectives such as apprehending those accountable for the 9/11 attacks, advancing opportunities for women, eliminating the threats posed by extremists, and aiding in the establishment of a functional government.



## Those who consider the war in Afghanistan worthwhile are more likely to see the U.S. foreign policy goals as accomplished.

Percent of adults



**Questions:** Overall, would you say the war in Afghanistan was worth fighting or not worth fighting? How successful do you believe the U.S. and its allies were in achieving the following policy goals during the war in Afghanistan?

**Source:** Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll conducted September 21-25, 2023, with 1,191 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

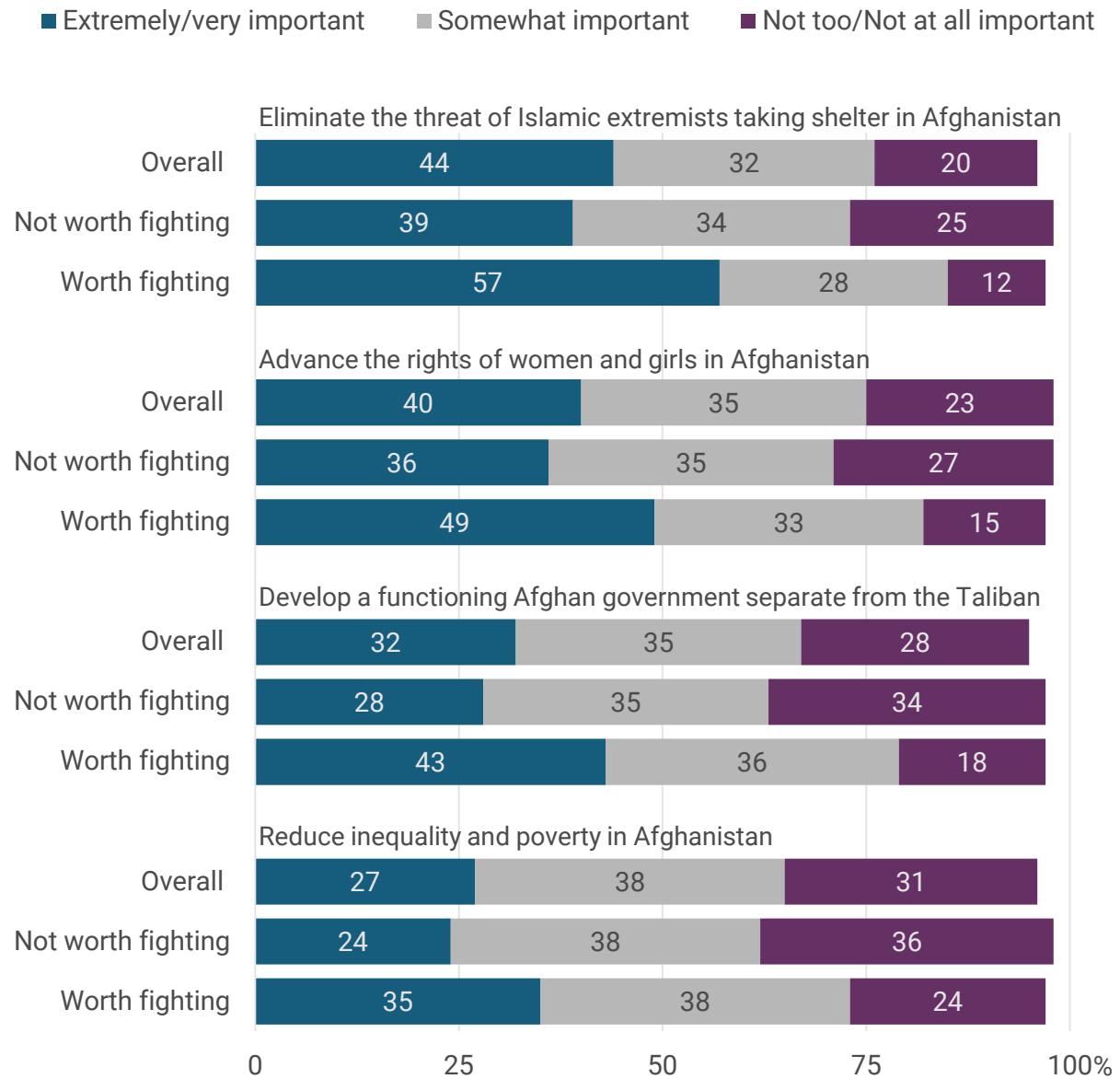


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Adults who find the Afghanistan war was worth fighting are more likely to report the U.S. foreign policy goals in Afghanistan are important than those who do not believe it was worth it.

## Those who say the war in Afghanistan was worthwhile are more likely to rate foreign policy goals in Afghanistan as important.

Percent of adults



**Questions:** Thinking about the foreign policy goals of the United States, please tell me how important it is for the United States to do each of the following. Overall, would you say the war in Afghanistan was worth fighting or not worth fighting?

**Source:** Pearson Institute/AP-NORC poll conducted September 21-25, 2023, with 1,191 adults age 18 and older nationwide.

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study was funded by the Pearson Institute and conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from the Pearson Institute and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between September 21 and 25, 2023 with adults aged 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,191 completed the survey—1,130 via the web and 61 by telephone. Panel members were invited by email or by phone from an NORC telephone interviewer. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. The final stage completion rate is 16.8 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 21.1 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 78.7 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 2.8 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.8 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other survey.

Quality assurance checks were conducted to ensure data quality. In total, 38 interviews were removed for nonresponse to at least 50% of the questions asked of them, for completing the survey in less than one-third the median interview time for the full sample, or for straight-lining all grid questions asked of them. These interviews were excluded from the data file prior to weighting.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2023 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

Complete questions and results are available at: [apnorc.org](https://apnorc.org).

Additional information on the AmeriSpeak Panel methodology is available at: <https://amerispeak.norc.org/about-amerispeak/Pages/Panel-Design.aspx>.

For more information, email [info@apnorc.org](mailto:info@apnorc.org).

## ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

- The Associated Press (AP) is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting. Founded in 1846, AP today remains the most trusted source of fast, accurate, unbiased news in all formats and the essential provider of the technology and services vital to the news business. More than half the world's population sees AP journalism every day. [www.ap.org](http://www.ap.org)
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and nonpartisan research institutions in the world. [www.norc.org](http://www.norc.org)

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more. Learn more at [www.apnorc.org](http://www.apnorc.org).

## ABOUT THE PEARSON INSTITUTE

The Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts at the University of Chicago promotes the ongoing discussion, understanding and resolution of global conflicts, and contributes to the advancement of a global society more at peace. Established through a grant from The Thomas L. Pearson and The Pearson Family Members Foundation, and led by Institute Director James Robinson, co-author of *Why Nations Fail* and *The Narrow Corridor*, the Institute achieves this by employing an analytically rigorous, data-driven approach and global perspective to understanding violent conflict. It is global in its scope, activities and footprint. Attracting students and scholars from around the world, its faculty is in the field studying conflicts – and approaches to conflict resolution – in Nigeria, Colombia and Afghanistan, to name just a few. 2023 marks the sixth consecutive year of the Pearson Global Forum.