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Pearson Institute/AP-NORC Poll: Most view the war in Afghanistan and its key goals as unsuccessful

Less than a quarter of adults say the U.S. was successful in developing a functioning government or improving opportunities for women in Afghanistan

CHICAGO, October 18, 2023 – Two-thirds of adults say the American war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting, and more adults view Afghanistan as an adversary than an ally.

These are among the findings of a new study from [The Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts at the University of Chicago](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) released today ahead of the [2023 Pearson Global Forum](#). The Forum on October 20th will bring together researchers and policymakers to address these issues and develop strategies to prevent and resolve international conflicts.

The survey shows 41% think Afghanistan is an enemy and another 42% say it is unfriendly, while only 14% report it is an ally or friendly nation.

Although 46% of adults believe the U.S. was successful in apprehending or eliminating those responsible for the 9/11 attacks during the war, only 16% say the U.S. was successful in its mission to develop a functioning government and only 22% say the same about improving opportunities for women in Afghanistan.

In terms of current foreign policy goals in Afghanistan, majorities say it is at least somewhat important to eliminate the threat of Islamic extremists taking shelter in the country (77%) and advance the rights of women and girls (74%).

“The findings show that few think the U.S. succeeded during the war in improving opportunities for Afghan women, but most still view advancing the rights of Afghan women as an important foreign policy goal,” said Sheila Kohanteb, Forum Executive Director at The Pearson Institute for Study and Resolution of Global Conflict. “The public clearly believes the U.S. should try to help improve the situation of Afghan women, and many continue to hear about the restrictions being placed on women in Afghanistan.”

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, 24% say the U.S. should be more active, 42% believe 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. For example, 80% of those who say the U.S. should take a more active role in the world report it is important to advance the rights of women in Afghanistan compared with 61% who believe the U.S. should take a less active role.

“There is no clear public consensus on the role the U.S. should play in international affairs as about a quarter say more active, a third say less active, and the rest want to keep its current role,” said David Sterrett, a senior research scientist with The AP-NORC Center. “This study highlights how these views about the broader role of the U.S. in international affairs are closely related to attitudes about Afghanistan.”

About the Study

This study was funded by The Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts at the University of Chicago and conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from The Pearson Institute, at Harris Public Policy, and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study. Interviews for this survey were conducted between September 21 and September 25, 2023, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,191 completed the survey. Interviews were conducted in English. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.8 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

A full description of the study methodology for the survey can be found at the end of the report on www.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
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and nonpartisan research institutions in the world. 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.

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.

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