



How Americans View America's Role in the World

A Comprehensive Public Opinion Study
Q4 2024

Survey by

YouGov[®]

Analysis by

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Introduction

As the world continues to face increasing global challenges, understanding and harnessing the power of the American people in support of US national security is crucial.

Spirit of America, a national security nonprofit that unites the American people in support of US troops and diplomats in their missions overseas, conducted comprehensive research to assess public support for America's international role and identify the actions Americans favor the most.

This study offers an insightful and hopeful perspective: the American public is largely united in its desire for the US to play a major or leading role in the world to foster safety, stability, and prosperity. It reveals broad consensus on key priorities, including supporting our troops, supporting allies to prevent conflicts, and fostering a more personal commitment to helping people worldwide.

Research Approach

YouGov fielded an online survey among n=2,500 US registered voters in October 2024. The data were weighted to represent a broad cross-section of geographies, political ideologies, and demographics. Of note is that the study was fielded during the 2024 presidential election season.

The online survey was the final portion of a multi-phase, mixed-methods study. In advance of the online survey, qualitative research was conducted, including a five-day panel discussion with n=64 registered voters representing 31 states and a mix of ages and ideologies, and a quantitative social listening analysis based on Americans' social media activity. The earlier phases of research investigated Americans' shared identity, whether they are proud to be American and why, and the language Americans use when describing America's role in the world.

Insights guided the development of the questionnaire used in the quantitative online study, ensuring that we measured attitudes in ways that were relevant and understandable for the American public.

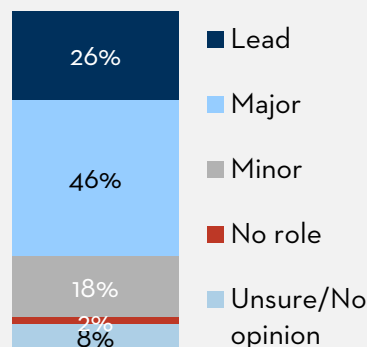
Research Highlights

1. A strong majority of Americans (72%) believe that the US should play a leading or major role in world affairs (Figure 1), with support spanning ideological and demographic groups. Nearly 9 in 10 Americans (86%) agree that America should work with its allies to prevent military conflicts (Figure 4).
2. In addition to defense, Americans would like to see our troops foster goodwill and build positive relationships with local communities wherever they are stationed (Figure 7).
3. Americans are most concerned about threats from abroad that could create instability at home, with the rising cost of living and cyber-attacks being the top concerns (Figure 8).

Figure 1

America's Preferred Role in World Affairs

Sum of % Lead + Major 72%



Q: We would like you to think about all the ways the US plays a role in the world. Generally, which best reflects the role you think the US should play in world affairs? Base n=2,500

Key Findings

72%

A strong majority of Americans believe the US should play a lead or major role in world affairs.



Top priorities for how America participates in world affairs

- Work with allies to prevent military conflicts
- Lead the world in science and technology
- Provide for domestic needs as well as assistance outside the US

86%

An overwhelming majority of Americans believe the US should work with allies to prevent military conflicts.

Less than half of Americans understand the full scope of US troops' roles abroad, but the majority agree that troops have important roles in addition to their main mission of defense.



Attitudes around military presence abroad

81%

believe US troops stationed overseas should foster goodwill with local populations

72%

believe it's important that other countries have a positive view of America

> 60%

Americans are concerned about how international threats and instability can impact their own lives.



Americans link threats and instability abroad to concerns at home

Rising price of groceries **(65%)**

Rising price of gas and energy **(61%)**

Cyberattacks **(61%)**



Detailed Findings

Strong Support for American Global Leadership

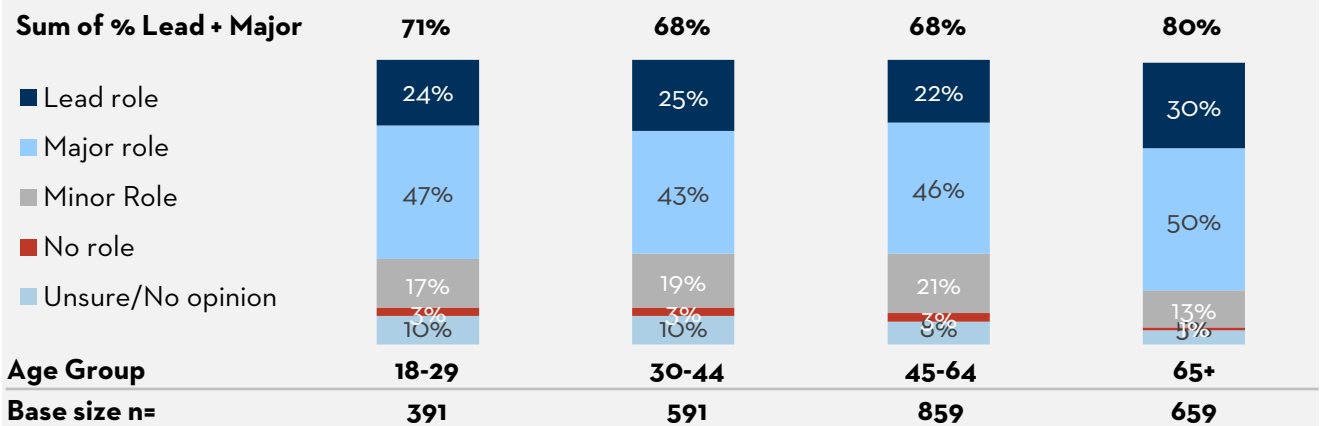
Finding

There is strong agreement among Americans (72%) that the US should take a lead or major role in the world, across age groups and ideologies. Americans overwhelmingly (86%) favor working with international allies to prevent military conflict.

One of the most striking study findings is the American people's robust support for America's engagement in the world. In fact, most Americans (72%) believe that the United States should play a lead or major role on the global stage.

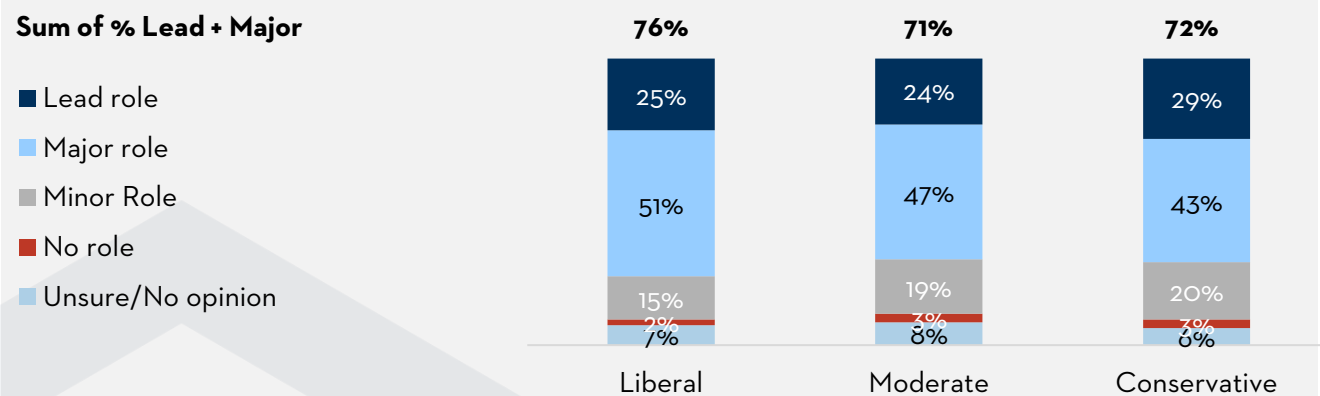
This sentiment is consistent across age groups, with even stronger support (80%) from those aged 65 and above (Figure 2). Notably, this support spans ideologies, from liberal to conservative, indicating a point of consensus in today's seemingly polarized landscape (Figure 3).

Figure 2 America's Preferred Role in World Affairs By Age Group



Q: We would like you to think about all the ways the US plays a role in the world. Generally, which best reflects the role you think the US should play in world affairs?

Figure 3 America's Preferred Role in World Affairs By Ideology



Q: We would like you to think about all the ways the US plays a role in the world. Generally, which best reflects the role you think the US should play in world affairs? Base sizes: Liberal n=786, Moderate n=819, Conservative n=804

America Working with its Allies is Top Priority for International Engagement

Several studies have previously reported on Americans' attitudes toward America's role in the world. This study builds on that research by examining Americans' preferences for how the US should express its role.

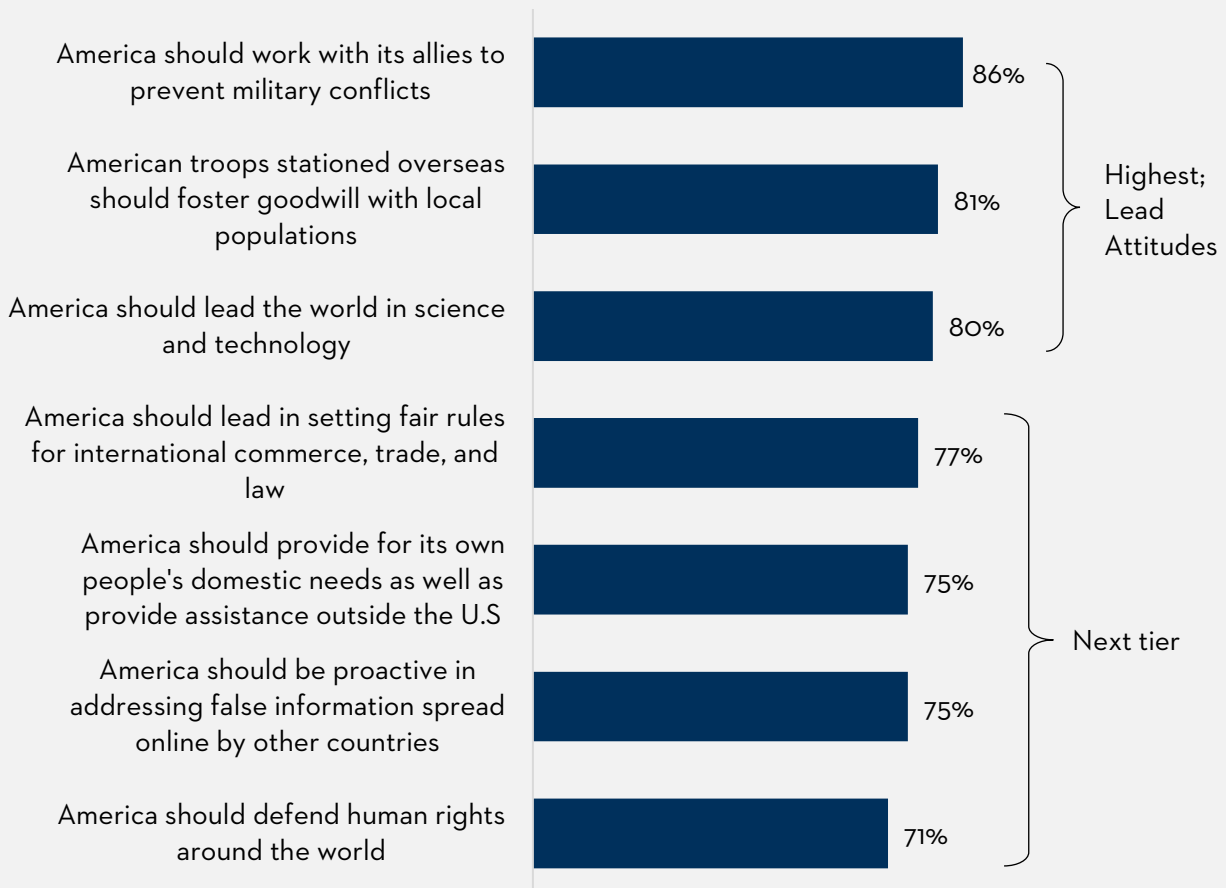
Americans overwhelmingly (86%) favor working with international allies to prevent military conflict (Figure 4). This preference for collaborative international efforts is further demonstrated by Americans' agreement (81%) that US troops stationed overseas should also foster goodwill with local populations.

A large majority of Americans also want the US to lead the world in science and technology (80%).

In addition, a strong majority supports a range of other leadership priorities: that America should lead in setting fair rules for international commerce, trade, and law (77%), provide for its own people's domestic needs as well as provide assistance outside of the US (75%), be proactive in addressing false information spread online by other countries (75%), and defend human rights around the world (71%).

Figure 4

Perceptions: Priority Areas for America's Involvement in World Affairs (excerpts) % Strongly or Somewhat Agree



Q: Please select your level of agreement with the following statements about America's participation in world affairs: [Strongly agree - Strongly disagree] Base n=2,500

Pride in America and Support for US Troops are Among Strongest Attitudes

Finding

In addition to US troops' primary mission of defense, Americans would like to see them foster goodwill and friendly relationships with local communities wherever they are stationed. The public's understanding of the role of troops stationed abroad is low, indicating an opportunity for education.

Pride in America is one of the strongest attitudes reported (80%) (Figure 5). From our qualitative phase of research, we gained insights into why this sense of pride runs so deep. For many, it is rooted in their appreciation for their freedoms, the opportunities available to them, the potential and right to work as hard as they want to get ahead, and to live the life they want. Parents, in particular, emphasized their appreciation for living in a country where their children have the opportunity to live a good life.

When discussing their pride in America, several themes emerged in the qualitative research. Participants acknowledged that while America is not perfect, it's a country that learns from its mistakes and grows. They used phrases like "American grit," "can-do optimism," and the "will and fight to do better." Americans also take pride in the country's legacy of helping their neighbors and caring about people worldwide. That's because Americans want people around the world to be empowered to experience the same freedoms they themselves enjoy. Americans are aware of the struggles faced by global neighbors, particularly women and children, living under oppressive regimes.

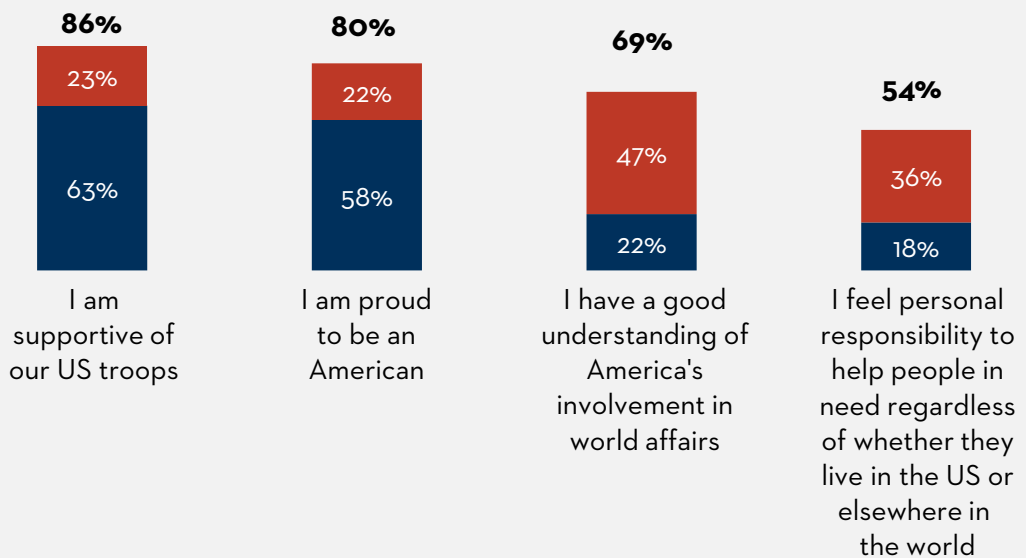
In fact, 82% of Americans support providing aid to children abroad (Figure 9). And, more than half (54%) agree they feel personal responsibility to help people in need no matter where they are in the world (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Top American Attitudes

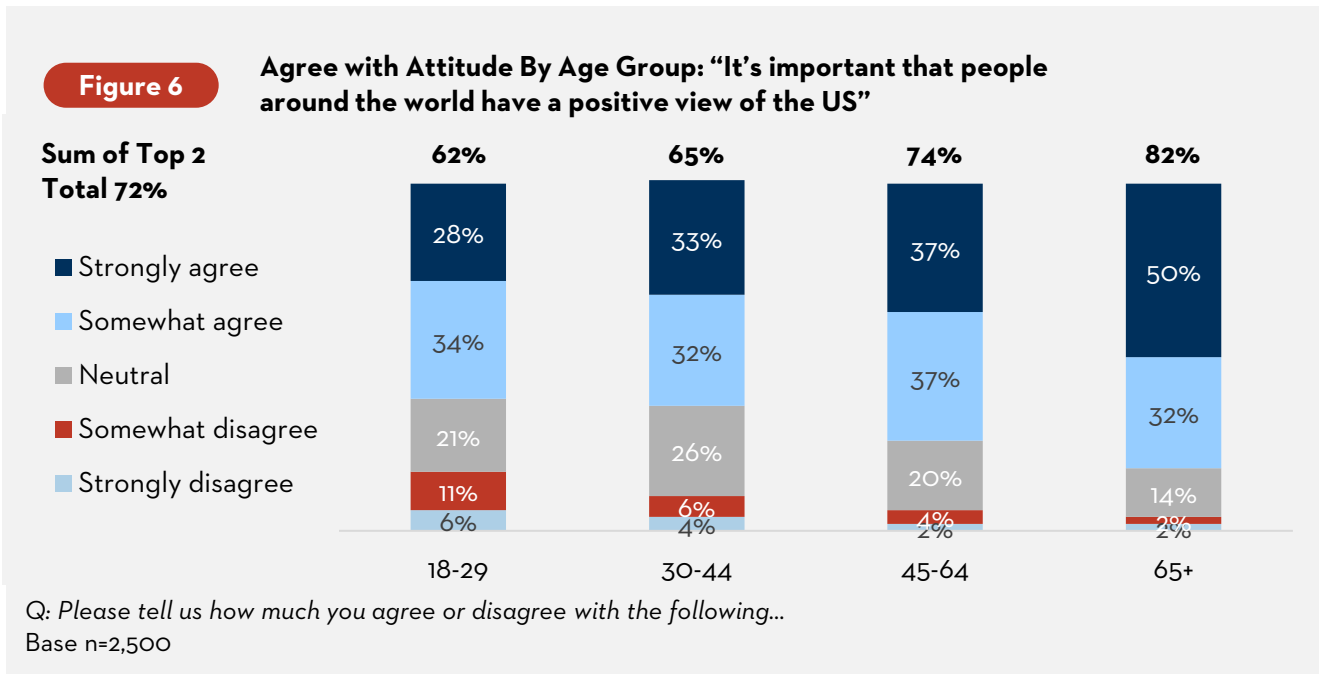
Sum of % Top 2

- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree



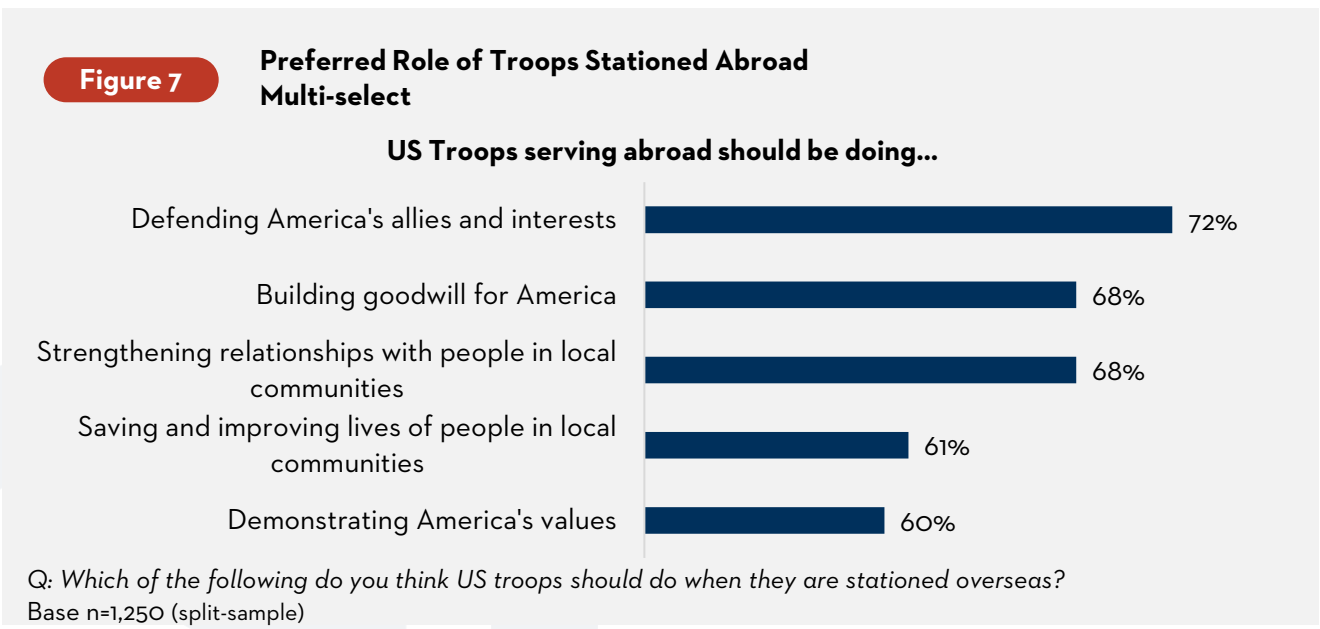
Q: Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following;
[Strongly agree - Strongly disagree] Base n=2,500

There is also widespread agreement that it's important for America to have a positive image in the world (Figure 6). This belief grows stronger with age, indicating a possible generational aspect to national pride. Insights from our qualitative research support this, with older participants more likely to mention historical events, such as World War II, where America played a leading role in the world.



Support for US troops in their missions was also among the strongest attitudes, with nearly universal support (86%) (Figure 5). However, beyond defense, Americans have a limited understanding of troops' roles abroad. Of particular interest, in addition to the troop's primary defensive role, most Americans (68%) would like troops to develop relationships and build goodwill with the local people wherever they are stationed (Figure 7).

Some important barriers to garnering support for America's role in the world were identified in the qualitative phase. Among these, Americans mostly want to help people and are less interested in helping other governments or nations.



Americans are Most Concerned that Threats Abroad Could Create Instability for Them Here at Home

Finding

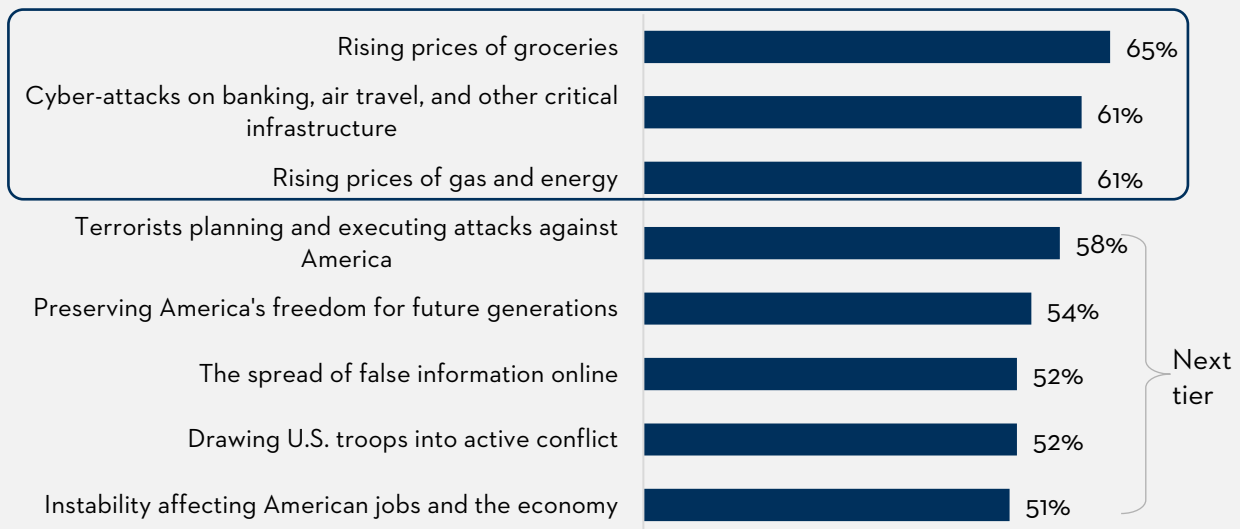
Americans are most concerned about personal economic and safety issues (i.e. price of groceries and gas and cyberattacks); other issues rate lower. These concerns show how Americans may perceive certain threats abroad directly impacting their daily lives at home.

While Americans support an active global role for the US, they are most concerned with how international threats can directly impact their daily lives at home. Economic issues, particularly the high cost of living and the threat of cyberterrorism to personal safety, rank as Americans' greatest personal concerns (Figure 8). These concerns tend to intensify with age, with significantly fewer younger Americans expressing concern across various issues.

Americans want to understand how helping global neighbors will benefit them at home. Further, our studies revealed that plain language is essential in communicating. Concepts such as supply chain disruption, instability abroad, or even flows of refugees and migrants may be overly complex and seem distant (and mentions of these rate lower for concern). However, when issues are framed in terms of everyday concerns, such as the price of groceries or energy, Americans find them more relevant and easier to understand.

Figure 8

Concerns for Impacts of International Issues Multi-select (excerpts)



Q: Conflicts and other international issues could affect us here in America in a variety of ways. Which of the following concerns you, personally? Base n=2,500

Age and Ideological Differences are Measured in Support for Types of Aid and Projects

While support for aid to US troops is consistently strong across age groups (Figure 9), younger Americans show significantly higher support for women's rights and providing opportunities for all people vs. older Americans.

Figure 9

Support for Types of US Aid by Age Group

% Very or Somewhat Supportive

Types of Aid (Selected)	Total n=2,500	Age 21-44 n=982	Age 45+ n=1,518
Support for American troops (their safety and mission success)	88%	79%	94%
Aid for children (nutrition, medical assistance, education)	82%	82%	82%
Humanitarian aid (food, shelter, healthcare)	80%	81%	79%
Human rights (advancing free speech, religion, assembly, press)	73%	74%	72%
Women's rights (support for education, medical assistance, economic empowerment)	72%	77%	70%
Providing opportunities for a better life (education, economic empowerment)	70%	74%	67%

Q: How supportive are you of the following types of US assistance in countries where it's needed?

As shown in Figure 10, more than six in 10 Americans support every one of the international projects and places tested. Age-based differences, however, also appear in these project priorities (Figure 10). Specifically, older Americans are more likely to support Israel and security in the Middle East, while younger counterparts prioritize the projects that support Ukraine and Gaza.

Figure 10

Support for Project/Places by Age Group

% Very or Somewhat Supportive

Project/Places	Total n=2,500	Age 21-44 n=982	Age 45+ n=1,518
Supporting US troops' safety and success in their missions around the world (ex. building American goodwill among communities where they are stationed)	84%	76%	89%
Helping people in Africa stop terrorist groups such as ISIS from recruiting in their communities	70%	70%	69%
Helping US troops and partners in the Middle East provide security for civilians amid regional violence	68%	66%	70%
Helping communities in Israel recover from terrorist attacks	67%	60%	71%
Providing opportunities for Ukrainian high school children to help rebuild their schools and communities	66%	72%	62%
Helping Taiwanese volunteers and first responders increase preparedness to save lives in a crisis	65%	67%	65%
Providing life-saving assistance to help Ukrainian soldiers defend themselves and their country	65%	67%	63%
Providing humanitarian aid to suffering civilians in the Gaza conflict area	63%	70%	59%

Q: And how supportive are you of the following types of projects by non-profit organizations?

Ideological divides are also evident in support for different projects and places (Figure 11). Conservatives are more likely to express support for Israel, while liberals show greater support for the Ukraine-related initiatives, humanitarian aid in Gaza, helping to support security in Africa and the Middle East, and to prepare for crises in Taiwan.

Figure 11

Support for Project/Places by Ideology

% Very or Somewhat Supportive

Support for Projects/Places	Total n=2,500	Liberal n=786	Moderate n=819	Conservative n=804
Supporting US troops' safety and success in their missions around the world (ex. building American goodwill among communities where they are stationed)	84%	84%	83%	87%
Helping people in Africa stop terrorist groups such as ISIS from recruiting in their communities	70%	79%	67%	66%
Helping US troops and partners in the Middle East provide security for civilians amid regional violence	68%	77%	67%	64%
Helping communities in Israel recover from terrorist attacks	67%	66%	65%	72%
Providing opportunities for Ukrainian high school children to help rebuild their schools and communities	66%	85%	67%	48%
Helping Taiwanese volunteers and first responders increase preparedness to save lives in a crisis	65%	77%	63%	59%
Providing life-saving assistance to help Ukrainian soldiers defend themselves and their country	65%	82%	65%	50%
Providing humanitarian aid to suffering civilians in the Gaza conflict area	63%	85%	65%	42%

Q: And how supportive are you of the following types of projects by non-profit organizations?



Conclusions

This comprehensive study reveals a largely united American public in its support for an active American global role, while remaining mindful of domestic challenges.

Americans recognize that global threats abroad can have direct implications at home, especially when it comes to everyday concerns like the economy. At the heart of their views, Americans prioritize helping people, rather than nations, expressing a clear desire to assist individuals in need. Ultimately, the American public understands that investing in national security is essential to creating a safer, freer, and more prosperous nation.

Spirit of America's vision is that whenever our country sends its men and women to serve abroad, the American people will be by their side as partners in their missions and will help them demonstrate through action who Americans are and what we stand for. By channeling the power of the American people – our goodwill, generosity, can-do spirit, and power of inspiration – we help America and its ideals succeed. Our belief is that together, we are America at its best.

Methodology

YouGov interviewed 3,218 registered voters in the United States, who were then matched down to a sample of 2,500 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The sampling frame is a politically representative "modelled frame" of US adults, based upon the American Community Survey (ACS) public use microdata file, public voter file records, the 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration supplements, the 2020 National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll, and the 2020 CES surveys, including demographics and 2020 presidential vote.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2020 presidential vote choice as well as a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.





THANK YOU!

For information about our projects funded by citizen support please visit spiritofamerica.org

About Spirit of America

Spirit of America is a nonprofit founded by CEO Jim Hake in 2003 to engage citizens in preserving the promise of a free and better life.

Spirit of America's unprecedented partnership with the US military is unique due to its agreement with the Department of Defense, allowing it to collaborate with US troops to build goodwill and deliver assistance at scale, including in Ukraine, Taiwan and the Middle East.

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