



Americans' Pessimism About Afghanistan War Features Echoes of Vietnam, Despite Unity That Preceded the War in 2001

A Year After U.S. Withdrawal, a New Survey Finds a Vietnam Narrative Setting in for Afghanistan, but Americans Acknowledge They Don't Talk with Many Veterans Who Served There

August 10, 2022 – A new [survey released by More in Common](#) about Americans' perceptions of the war in Afghanistan finds the public shares high levels of negativity towards the war, with the hurried pullout from Kabul being among the single most vivid memories of the conflict.

Data showed that only 22% of Americans feel the Afghanistan War made America safer, and 48% of the country feels the war was a mistake. These sentiments resemble feelings toward the Vietnam War, in which only 17% of respondents felt that war made America safer, and 57% agreed it was a mistake in sending troops to fight. This is in contrast to America's involvement in World War II, which maintains positive views among a vast majority of Americans, according to the same survey.

"The origins of the Afghanistan War more closely align with America's entry into World War II in that both started with an attack on American territory followed by overwhelming national unity and purpose to exact justice and protect the homeland," said **Dan Vallone, Executive Director of More in Common U.S.** "Yet, Americans' memories of the conflict have shifted so much that many equate it now as 'another Vietnam' due to what Americans perceive as similar dynamics with how the war played out. Americans believe that both wars exhibited similar styles of warfare, length, political interference, and, most vividly, a chaotic drawdown."

This detailed opinion research surveyed Americans on their memories of and feelings towards the Afghanistan War and is being released nearly one year after the U.S. shuttered its embassy and withdrew military personnel following Taliban forces' overthrow of the internationally-recognized Afghan government. The survey also asked respondents about their memories of and feelings towards the Vietnam War and World War II to provide comparative analysis.

The research included questions regarding respondents' memories of key milestones in the 20-year Afghanistan War, from the terrorist attack on 9/11 and the start of military operations, to the 2011 killing of Osama Bin Laden, to the 2021 withdrawal, and, most recently, the killing of Al



Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. The findings show Americans appear to lack a strong set of shared memories about the war. Many respondents can only identify one or two events from that period, the most-cited being the 9/11 attack, the killing of Bin Laden, and the withdrawal. Americans' memories of the Vietnam War appear to be even more fractured.

"The Vietnam War and post-Vietnam period featured polarized political discourse and poor civilian-veteran relations," **added Vallone**. "Stamping Afghanistan as just 'another Vietnam' would be inaccurate, do a disservice to veterans of both conflicts, and inflame public discourse for more anniversaries to come — but it's not too late to correct that narrative. This research intends to spark a national conversation that memorializes the gains and losses from Afghanistan, and help Americans better understand the impact the war has had on our society."

In [research](#) released in November 2021 by More in Common, many Americans acknowledged then that they knew few if any veterans, and most could not recall any recent conversations with a veteran who served in Afghanistan — though they acknowledged the importance of such dialogue. In this month's survey, more Americans were able to identify critical moments from World War II history than they could for the Afghanistan War — suggesting a need for better teaching and greater public understanding around that conflict.

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About More in Common U.S.

[More in Common U.S.](#) is a non-partisan research and civic nonprofit that studies the forces pulling America apart, seeking to disrupt polarization and forge a stronger sense of what Americans have in common. Through its Veterans and Citizens Initiative, it works to connect veterans and the broader civilian society.