

2022 Traffic Safety Culture Index

INTRODUCTION

Two years after the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered American lifestyles, patterns of daily life are continuing to recover. Compared to 2020, both American's daily driving patterns and the traffic volumes on major corridors increased in 2021 and remained at similar levels in 2022. However, there has been a corresponding trend in traffic fatalities. In 2021, traffic fatalities reached their highest number since 2005, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration projects only a small decrease (0.3%) in 2022. Pedestrian fatalities in particular have skyrocketed in recent years. Unsafe driving behaviors, such as speeding, alcohol involvement, and non-use of a seatbelt, play a crucial role in traffic fatalities. As what the U.S. Secretary of Transportation has called the "national crises of traffic deaths" continues to affect an unacceptable number of Americans, it is imperative to develop efficient and effective countermeasures to prevent sudden and violent deaths both inside and outside vehicles and create an environment where all road users can move around safely.

For more than a decade, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has been committed to deepening our understanding of America's traffic safety culture through the annual Traffic Safety Culture Index (TSCI) survey. As traffic safety has worsened, responses from the 2022 TSCI can provide insights into understanding public perceptions, attitudes toward, and engagement in unsafe driving behaviors and aspects that should be considered when developing countermeasures.

METHODOLOGY

The 2022 TSCI includes a sample of 2,499 U.S. licensed drivers ages 16 or older who completed the online survey and reported having driven at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey. Participants were asked questions regarding perceived danger, risk of apprehension, social approval of dangerous driving, and their support for laws and policies designed to curtail these behaviors, as well as self-reported engagement in these behaviors. Data from the 2022 TSCI were collected between July 28 and August 29, 2022, using a probability-based sampling panel representative of the U.S. population.

TECHNICAL REPORT:

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. (2023). *2022 Traffic Safety Culture Index* (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

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ABOUT THE AAA FOUNDATION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

Founded in 1947, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit, publicly supported charitable research and educational organization dedicated to saving lives by preventing traffic crashes and reducing injuries when crashes occur. Funding for this research was provided by voluntary contributions from AAA/CAA and their affiliated motor clubs, individual members, AAA-affiliated insurance companies, and other organizations or sources.

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KEY FINDINGS

Distracted Driving

- Roughly 93% of drivers identify both texting/emailing and reading on a hand-held cell phone while driving as very or extremely dangerous. Fewer drivers perceive holding and talking on a hand-held cell phone (76%) or using a technology that allows hands-free use of their phones (19%) as very or extremely dangerous.
- Approximately one-third of respondents believe that drivers would likely be apprehended for texting/emailing on a cell phone (37%), holding and talking on a cell phone while driving (37%), or reading a text/email on a cell phone (35%).
- Drivers predominantly agree that people important to them would disapprove of them engaging in distracted driving behaviors (87% to 95%, depending on the behavior).
- Nevertheless, more than a quarter of drivers (27%) reported having sent a text/email while driving. More drivers reported they drove while holding and talking on a phone (38%) or drove while reading a text/email (37%). The majority of drivers (59%) indicated they used a hands-free technology to talk/text/email while driving.
- Almost 80% support a law against holding and talking on a phone while driving, while only 42% support a law against using hands-free technologies to read/text/email while driving.

Aggressive Driving

- Most respondents believe driving through a red light (83%) or driving aggressively including switching lanes quickly and driving closely behind other vehicles (89%) is very or extremely dangerous.
- Fewer drivers perceive speeding as a dangerous activity and the speeding behaviors have the lowest perceived social disapproval of all the examined unsafe driving behaviors.
- About 63% of drivers believed police would likely apprehend them for traveling 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway, yet approximately half reported having engaged in the behavior in the 30 days prior to the survey.
- Fewer than half (43%) of the respondents support a policy using cameras to automatically ticket drivers who drive more than 10 mph over the speed limit on residential streets.

Drowsy Driving

- Drivers predominantly perceive drowsy driving to be very or extremely dangerous (95%); however, 18% of drivers reported having engaged in the behavior in the past 30 days.
- Just over a quarter of respondents (27%) believe the police would likely apprehend them for drowsy driving.

Impaired Driving

- Drivers overwhelmingly perceive driving after drinking alcohol (94%) as very or extremely dangerous and 68% believe such a driver would be likely to be apprehended by police. Only 7% of respondents reported having engaged in this behavior in the past 30 days.
- By comparison, only 70% of drivers perceive driving (within an hour) after using marijuana as very or extremely dangerous and 26% believe such a driver would be likely to be apprehended by police. Only 6% of respondents reported having engaged in this behavior in the past 30 days.

Identifying Profiles of Risky Driving

- Based on the patterns of reported risky driving behavior engagement, the following six unique groups were identified using a latent class analysis and were interpreted:
 - Safe Drivers (41.2%): Few engaged in any risky driving behavior.
 - Distracted Drivers (15.0%): Predominantly engaged in all distracted driving behaviors.
 - Speeding Drivers (22.7%): Predominantly engaged in speeding behaviors.
 - Distracted and Aggressive Drivers (17.3%): Predominantly engaged in both distracted driving and aggressive driving behaviors.
 - Impaired Drivers (1.3%): Predominantly engaged in impaired driving (e.g., drunk driving).
 - Most Dangerous Drivers (2.4%): Engaged in all risky driving behaviors.
- Distracted Drivers, Distracted and Aggressive Drivers, and Most Dangerous Drivers were on average approximately 40 years of age (~13 years younger than members of the other groups).
- Approximately 60% of both the Speeding Drivers and Most Dangerous Drivers were males, whereas 57% of the Safe Drivers were females.
- 14% of respondents were from non-metropolitan locations; however, 37% of Impaired Drivers resided in non-metropolitan settings.