

2024 Traffic Safety Culture Index

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration projects 39,345 traffic fatalities in 2024 in the United States. Although traffic fatalities have been trending downward since the 2021 peak, the number of road deaths remains high.

Risky driving behaviors continue to cause tens of thousands of deaths each year. A good understanding of the cultural environment surrounding these behaviors is critical to inform the development of effective countermeasures. Drivers' perceptions of roadway safety, including their personal concerns and self-awareness, both shape and reflect the nation's traffic safety culture and may influence the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors. While promoting safer behaviors offers significant potential to reduce deaths, changing long-standing driving patterns is challenging due to the influence of personal, environmental, and cultural factors.

For more than a decade, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has been committed to measuring America's traffic safety culture through the annual *Traffic Safety Culture Index* (TSCI) survey. The 2024 TSCI provides a comprehensive examination of the cultural environment of driving in the United States through three perspectives: the beliefs and attitudes that shape how Americans drive, drivers' views on roadway safety and government efforts, and changes in driving behaviors over time to inform efforts that promote safer roads.

METHODOLOGY

The 2024 TSCI includes a sample of 2,704 U.S. licensed drivers ages 16 or older who had driven at least once in the 30 days before completing the online questionnaire. Participants reported on perceived danger, risk of apprehension, and social disapproval of risky driving behaviors, their support for related laws and policies, and their own engagement in these behaviors. The 2024 survey added a new risky behavior—driving while scrolling through social media—along with questions on personal safety concerns, actions taken to reduce crash risk, and other related topics. Data from the 2024 TSCI were collected between August 7 and August 27, 2024, using a probability-based sampling panel representative of the U.S. population. After cleaning and quality checks, results were weighted to adjust for selection probability, non-response, and alignment with Census population totals.

TECHNICAL REPORT:

Zhang, X. & Steinbach, R. (2025).
2024 Traffic Safety Culture Index
(Technical Report). Washington, D.C.:
AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.



DOWNLOAD REPORT

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 Behaviors

- Most drivers perceived scrolling through social media (97%), texting/emailing (94%), or reading on a hand-held cell phone (90%) while driving as being extremely or very dangerous. Only 16% considered hands-free phone use to be very or extremely dangerous.
- Most drivers believed people who are important to them would disapprove of their distracted driving behavior, yet only one-third of drivers felt they would be caught for using a phone while driving.
- Many drivers reported texting (28%), reading messages (37%), or talking on a hand-held phone (36%) while driving. Most (59%) used hands-free technology, while only 11% reported scrolling through social media while driving.
- Support for a law against holding and talking on a phone while driving was high (79%), but only 40% supported a law against using hands-free technologies while driving.

Aggressive Driving Behaviors

- Most drivers viewed running a red light (80%) and aggressive driving (90%) as very or extremely dangerous.
- Fewer saw speeding as dangerous, and it received the lowest social disapproval among the behaviors studied.
- About 58% believed they would be caught for driving 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway, yet roughly half had done so in the past 30 days.
- Less than half (46%) supported using cameras to ticket drivers exceeding speed limits by more than 10 mph on residential streets.

Drowsy Driving Behaviors

- Drivers predominantly perceived drowsy driving to be very or extremely dangerous (93%); however, 19% of drivers reported having engaged in the behavior in the past 30 days.
- Almost 25% of drivers believed the police would apprehend them for drowsy driving.

Impaired Driving Behaviors

- Drivers perceived driving after drinking as very or extremely dangerous (93%), with 60% believing police would likely apprehend such drivers; only 7% reported doing so in the past 30 days.

- About 70% considered driving within an hour of using marijuana very or extremely dangerous, and 6% reported engaging in this behavior in the past 30 days.

Roadway Safety Perceptions

- In 2024, 96% of respondents expressed concerns about roadway safety, mainly unsafe driving behaviors: distraction (24%), speeding (16%), impairment (14%), and aggressive driving (11%). Road maintenance was cited by 16% as a safety concern.
- Among the drivers who reported changing their driving to reduce crash risk, 40% drove more defensively, 30% avoided speeding, and just over 10% reduced phone use or increased following distance.

Changes in Profiles of Risky Driving Engagement Over Time

- Using 2019–2024 TSCI data, latent class analysis identified five distinct groups representing general driving styles:
 - **Safe Drivers:** Rarely engaged in any risky driving behavior
 - **Distracted Drivers:** Predominantly engaged in all distracted driving behaviors
 - **Speeding Drivers:** Predominantly engaged in speeding behaviors
 - **Distracted and Aggressive Drivers:** Predominantly engaged in both distracted driving and aggressive driving behaviors
 - **Most Dangerous Drivers:** Engaged in all risky driving behaviors
- Safe Drivers were consistently the largest group, while Most Dangerous Drivers were the smallest over the six years.
- The proportion of drivers with a Distracted Driving style rose slightly over time, reaching a peak of 19% in 2023.
- Drivers were slightly less likely to be classified into the Speeding Drivers group compared to the Safe Drivers group over time. The prevalence of Speeding Drivers remained between 23%–27%.
- The prevalence of Distracted and Aggressive Drivers increased over the study period.
- The prevalence of Most Dangerous Drivers declined significantly, with fewer drivers classified in this group compared to Safe Drivers over time.