

Street Racing: Prevalence, Participation, and Public Concern

Street racing on public roads poses serious risks to community safety. It involves reckless behaviors such as excessive speeding, illegal drag racing, street takeovers, and weaving through traffic, which endanger participants, pedestrians, other drivers, and emergency responders. Beyond immediate safety hazards, these activities can disrupt traffic and contribute to a sense of insecurity within communities. This study

uses self-reported survey data from a nationally representative sample of over 3000 U.S. drivers to examine the prevalence of street racing, levels of participation, and level of public concern. Findings across urban, suburban, and rural areas highlight perceptions of different street racing activities, the contexts in which street racing is experienced, and varying degrees of public concern regarding safety and community impact.

METHODOLOGY

The prevalence of street racing was examined through a driving behavior survey conducted with a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. A sample of drivers aged 16 and older were asked about their experiences and participation in various driving behaviors. The survey included targeted questions specifically addressing street racing, such as how often respondents observed it, whether they had watched or participated as a driver, and their level of concern about street racing in their communities. The survey was primarily concerned with street racing that occurs on public roads and included the following behaviors:

- Street takeovers (also sometimes called sidschows or exhibition driving): an organized or semi-organized event, usually at night, in which drivers take over an intersection or part of a public road and take turns doing donuts or other vehicle stunts in front of spectators.

- Drag racing: an organized or semi-organized speed competition on a public road in front of spectators where two or more vehicles start at the same place and race to a finish line.
- Weaving through traffic at high speeds and/or intentionally making difficult maneuvers while racing another vehicle. Participants may record their performance to post on social media.

Drivers aged 16 and older were recruited for the online survey from a pre-recruited nationally representative probability-based panel. Respondents who did not drive in the previous 30 days were omitted from the study. The survey was administered in English and Spanish from May 7 to May 19, 2025. Invitations were sent to 6,450 panelists aged 18 and older and 1,357 teens aged 16 and 17 years old. A total of 3,020 qualified respondents completed the questionnaire.

Data were weighted to project results from the survey sample to the U.S. population. Participants residing in areas within clearly defined metropolitan cities were classified as living in urban areas. Participants residing in neighborhoods outside major metro cities, including smaller suburban cities and surrounding non-city neighborhoods, were classified as living in suburban areas, while participants living in all other neighborhoods beyond metro regions were classified as

living in rural areas. More information on survey methodology can be found in a previous report (Steinbach et al., 2025).

Chi-square tests were conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed in the prevalence, participation, and public concern regarding street racing across various area types. Findings disaggregated by urban, suburban, and rural areas are presented in the results section. Findings disaggregated by region are available in Appendix A.

RESULTS

The survey focused on three key aspects of street racing: prevalence, participation, and public safety concerns. Questions on prevalence measured how often street racing occurs: *Thinking back to the past year how often have you noticed...* Questions on participation assessed whether respondents had ever taken part in such events: *Have you ever watched a street racing event on a public road in person? and Have you ever been a driver in a street racing event on a public road?* Questions on safety concerns evaluated the level of worry or perceived risk associated with street racing among the U.S. population: *How concerned are you, if at all, about street racing on public roads in your state? and How big of a problem, if at all, do you think street racing on public roads is now compared to recent years?*

Prevalence of Street Racing

The survey asked multiple questions to understand the prevalence of street racing. Table 1 presents a summary of responses regarding the frequency with which street racing was observed, categorized by types such as street takeovers, drag racing, and weaving. Nationally, 73% of drivers reported noticing at least one type of street racing in the past year. Drivers weaving through traffic was the most observed behavior, with 31% of respondents reporting noticing it regularly or fairly often. In contrast, street takeovers and drag racing were observed less frequently; only 9% of respondents reported having witnessed a street takeover regularly or fairly often, and 12% indicated the same regarding drag racing.

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Who Reported Observing Different Types of Street Racing Behavior in the Past Year.

	Regularly	Fairly often	Rarely	Just once	Never	At least once
Street takeovers, sideshows, or exhibition driving in your neighborhood	2	7	15	6	70	30
Drag racing on public roads in your neighborhood	4	8	21	7	60	40
Drivers weaving through traffic at high speeds or making difficult maneuvers in your neighborhood	9	22	31	7	31	69

The results were further disaggregated to examine the prevalence of street racing behaviors across different areas, including urban, suburban, and rural areas. Respondents who lived in urban areas reported observing all types of street racing more regularly than those who lived in rural areas (Table 2). For street takeovers, 13% of respondents living in urban areas reported observing them *regularly or fairly often*, compared with 6% of respondents in rural areas. In contrast, 61% of urban respondents reported never observing them compared with 80% of rural respondents. A similar pattern emerged for drag racing, with 17% of urban respondents reporting observing

drag racing *regularly or fairly often*, compared with 7% rural respondents. Meanwhile, 53% of urban respondents reporting never observing drag racing compared with 69% of rural respondents. For street racing involving weaving through traffic, 37% of urban respondents reported observing it *regularly or fairly often*, compared with 21% of rural respondents, while 25% of urban respondents reported *never* observing weaving compared with 45% of rural respondents. The chi-square tests (all $p < 0.001$) confirm statistically significant differences in the proportion of drivers who observed street takeovers, drag racing, and weaving by type of area.

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents Who Reported Observing Different Types of Street Racing Behavior Across Type of Area.

	Regularly	Fairly often	Rarely	Just once	Never	At least once
Street takeovers ($p < 0.001$)						
Urban	4	9	18	8	61	39
Suburban	2	6	13	6	74	26
Rural	1	5	11	3	80	20
All areas	2	7	15	6	70	30
Drag racing ($p < 0.001$)						
Urban	5	12	22	8	53	47
Suburban	3	7	20	8	63	37
Rural	2	5	20	4	69	30
All areas	4	8	21	7	60	40
Weaving through traffic ($p < 0.001$)						
Urban	11	26	32	6	25	75
Suburban	9	21	32	7	31	69
Rural	5	16	27	7	45	55
All areas	9	22	31	7	31	69

Engagement with Street Racing Events

Participants in the survey were asked whether they had ever been a driver in a racing event. Overall, 4% of respondents reported being a driver in street racing, indicating that such activities are relatively uncommon. While participation rates were low across all area classifications,

a higher proportion was observed among respondents residing in rural areas (6%) compared with those in urban (3%) and suburban (4%) areas (Figure 1). The chi-square test ($p = 0.014$) indicated a statistically significant difference in street racing participation across area types.

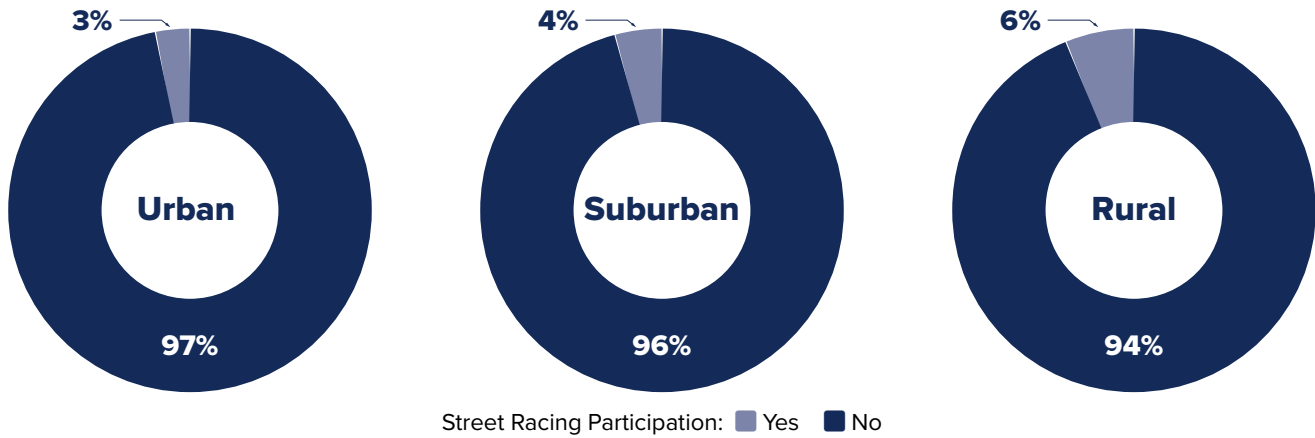


Figure 1: Proportion of Respondents Reporting Participation in Street Racing Events by Area Classification.

Respondents were also asked to self-report whether they had ever watched a street racing event, with responses categorized to differentiate between *intentional and unintentional viewing* of such events. Across all areas, 5% of respondents reported *intentionally watching* street racing across all area types. In contrast, unintentional viewing of street racing was more common, occurring

among 21% of all respondents. Specifically, 25% of urban respondents reporting *unintentional viewing*, compared with 17% of rural respondents. The findings are presented in Table 3. The chi-square test indicated a statistically significant difference in intentional and unintentional viewing of street racing across area types.

Table 3. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Intentional and Unintentional Viewing of Street Racing Events, Disaggregated by Area Classification.

	Yes, I attended an event intentionally	Yes, but not intentionally	No
$p = 0.006$			
Urban	5	25	70
Suburban	6	19	75
Rural	6	17	78
All areas	5	21	74

Concerns and Perceptions About Street Racing

Levels of public concern about street racing varied across area types with concern generally higher among drivers in urban areas and lower among drivers in rural areas. Table 4 summarizes the level of concern across area types. Across all areas, 11% of respondents were extremely concerned about street racing. Among

respondents living in urban areas, 13% reported being extremely concerned, compared with 5% of respondents living in rural areas. A larger proportion of rural respondents reported being *not at all concerned* (41%) compared to urban (21%) and suburban (26%) respondents. The chi-square indicated a statistically significant difference in levels of concern across different area types.

Table 4. Respondents’ Level of Concern Regarding Street Racing Across Area Type.

	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Slightly concerned	Not at all concerned	I don't know
<i>p < 0.001</i>						
Urban	13	15	22	22	21	7
Suburban	12	13	22	21	26	6
Rural	5	7	15	23	41	9
All areas	11	13	21	22	26	7

Results from respondents’ perceptions of street racing on public roads revealed that 35% indicated it is a much bigger or somewhat bigger problem today compared with recent years. The concern was much higher in urban areas, with 40% of drivers expressing this concern,

compared with 21% in rural areas. Rural drivers were more likely to say the problem is *about the same* (41%) or that they *do not think it is a problem* (18%) compared with urban drivers (34% *about the same*; 8% *do not think it is a problem*).

Table 5. Perceived Change in Street Racing as a Problem by Area Type.

	Much bigger problem today	Somewhat bigger problem today	About the same	Somewhat smaller problem today	Much smaller problem today	I do not think illegal street racing is a problem
<i>p < 0.001</i>						
Urban	13	27	34	9	9	8
Suburban	12	25	34	8	10	11
Rural	7	14	41	8	12	18
All areas	11	24	35	9	10	11

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide insight into the prevalence, participation, and perceived risks by road users associated with street racing across different geographic areas in the United States. Analysis of the survey data indicates that street racing behaviors can be routinely observed, though actual participation remains relatively low. Among the different forms of street racing, weaving through traffic at high speeds or executing challenging maneuvers were the most observed behaviors, suggesting that such actions may be more normalized or noticeable to the public compared with drag racing or street takeovers. Despite its visibility, only a small proportion of respondents reported intentionally attending or participating in these events, with 4% of the sample indicating direct involvement. This aligns with prior studies that suggest street racing is an infrequent but high-risk activity (Fergusson et al., 2003; Wickens et al., 2017).

The study highlights important geographic differences in both observation and participation. Respondents in urban and suburban areas reported more frequent exposure to street racing events, whereas those in rural areas demonstrated slightly higher participation rates. This distinction may reflect differences in traffic density, social dynamics, and risk perception. Urban residents may encounter street racing more often due to higher population density and the concentration of vehicles, whereas rural drivers may have fewer constraints and greater opportunities to engage in such risky driving behaviors. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that rural drivers often engage in riskier driving practices due to lower perceived consequences and reduced law enforcement visibility (Rakauskas et al., 2009; Rothe & Elgert, 2005).

Perceptions of street racing as a public safety concern also varied by geographic location. Urban respondents reported higher levels of concern, with a notable proportion indicating that street racing is a growing problem compared to previous

years, consistent with prior studies that have documented increasing public concern about street racing and its associated risks (Vingilis & Smart, 2009). Conversely, rural respondents expressed lower levels of concern, with many indicating that the prevalence of street racing had remained the same or was not perceived as a problem. This divergence suggests that awareness and perceived threat may be shaped by exposure frequency and local community context, which may influence both public attitudes and policy support for enforcement measures.

Intentional viewing of street racing events was rare across all geographic areas, yet unintentional exposure was more common in urban settings. This suggests that even passive observation may influence public perceptions of street racing prevalence and contribute to the normalization of risky driving behaviors. The combination of higher observation rates and elevated concern in urban areas indicates that these communities experience greater visibility of street racing events. Recent literature (Jackson & Leppert, 2024) has found that drivers in urban areas have higher levels of concern about many dangerous driving behaviors, such as distracted and aggressive driving, particularly in the post-pandemic period. Post-pandemic shifts in traffic patterns and social behaviors may have amplified both the occurrence of street racing and public awareness of these events.

Overall, these results underscore the complexity of street racing behavior, demonstrating that prevalence, participation, and perceived risk are not uniformly distributed across geographic settings. While direct engagement remains limited, the frequency of observation, particularly for weaving behaviors, indicates that street racing continues to be a salient safety issue. Previous studies have suggested several countermeasures that could potentially reduce street racing through educational campaigns, infrastructure strategy,

law enforcement, and community-based initiatives. Examples include implementing campaigns that reflect a sophisticated grasp of street racing subcultures (Wickens et al., 2017), developing recreational programs that provide access to legal raceways for informal racing (Wickens et al., 2017), ensuring that police have authority to address street racing (Peak & Glensor, 2004), and enlisting community support through neighborhood coalitions and local reporting programs (Peak & Glensor, 2004). Results presented in this research brief provided additional insights into the need for community-based initiatives that consider both the visibility of street racing and its geographic variability. Further research is warranted to examine demographic and behavioral predictors of participation, as well as the potential influence of observation on attitudes toward risky driving.

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ABOUT THE AAA FOUNDATION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, publicly supported charitable research and education organization. It was founded in 1947 by the American Automobile Association to conduct research to address growing highway safety issues. The organization’s mission is to identify traffic safety problems, foster research that seeks solutions, and disseminate information and educational materials. AAA Foundation funding comes from voluntary, tax-deductible contributions from motor clubs associated with the American Automobile Association and the Canadian Automobile Association, individual AAA club members, insurance companies and other individuals or groups.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Percentage of Respondents Who Reported Observing Different Types of Street Racing Behavior Across Four Regions.

	Regularly	Fairly often	Rarely	Just once	Never	At least once
Street takeovers ($p < 0.001$)						
North East	4	4	12	8	72	28
North Central	2	6	13	4	75	25
South	2	7	15	6	70	30
West	3	8	17	8	64	36
Drag racing ($p = 0.002$)						
North East	5	4	18	8	66	35
North Central	3	9	19	5	63	36
South	3	9	21	7	60	40
West	4	11	23	9	53	47
Weaving through traffic ($p = 0.003$)						
North East	11	17	30	7	34	65
North Central	7	19	30	7	37	63
South	9	24	32	6	30	60
West	9	24	33	8	26	74

Table A2. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Intentional and Unintentional Viewing of Street Racing Events, Disaggregated by Region.

	Yes, I attended an event intentionally	Yes, but not intentionally	No
$p = 0.573$			
North East	4	20	76
North Central	6	21	73
South	5	21	73
West	7	20	73

Table A3. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Participation in Street Racing Events, by Region.

	Yes	No
<i>p</i> = 0.859		
North East	3	97
North Central	4	96
South	4	96
West	4	96

Table A4. Respondents' Level of Concern Regarding Street Racing Across Four Regions.

How concerned are you about street racing on public roads in your State?	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Slightly concerned	Not at all concerned	I don't know
<i>p</i> = 0.01						
North East	13	12	22	19	28	7
North Central	9	9	20	22	32	8
South	11	13	22	22	26	7
West	13	16	21	22	21	7

Table A5. Perceived Change in Street Racing as a Problem by Region.

	Much bigger problem today	Somewhat bigger problem today	About the same	Somewhat smaller problem today	Much smaller problem today	I do not think illegal street racing is a problem
<i>p</i> < 0.001						
North East	14	22	33	9	11	11
North Central	7	21	39	7	10	17
South	11	24	35	10	10	9
West	15	27	33	8	9	8