

## 2025 Traffic Safety Culture Index

### INTRODUCTION

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration projects 36,640 traffic fatalities in 2025 in the United States. Although fatalities have declined, they remain unacceptably high.

To further reduce traffic deaths and serious injuries, growing attention has focused on traffic safety culture as a key component of safer transportation systems. Stronger safety cultures are associated with fewer risky driving behaviors, which contribute to tens of thousands of fatalities annually.

For more than a decade, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has assessed Americans' traffic safety culture through its annual Traffic Safety Culture Index (TSCI). The TSCI measures perceived danger, risk of apprehension, social disapproval of risky behaviors, self-reported behaviors, and support for countermeasures. The 2025 TSCI expands this framework by adding measures of contextual and personal influences, including perceptions of both safe and risky driving behaviors in their own neighborhoods, self-appraisals of behavior and abilities, and social stress. Together, these dimensions capture the attitudes, perceptions, and social pressures that shape driving behavior. As in previous years, this report details the data collection methodology and summarizes the major national-level results of the 18th annual TSCI.

### METHODOLOGY

The 2025 TSCI includes a sample of 2,699 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 perceived danger, risk of apprehension, and social disapproval of risky driving behaviors, their own engagement in these behaviors, and their support for related laws and policies. The 2025 survey also included new measures on drivers' perceptions of both safe and risky driving behaviors in their own neighborhoods, self-appraisals of behavior and abilities, and drivers' social stress. Data were collected from July 31 to August 13, 2025, using a probability-based panel representative of the U.S. population. After cleaning and quality checks, results were weighted to account for selection probability, non-response, and alignment with Census population totals.

### TECHNICAL REPORT:

Zhang, X. & Steinbach, R. (2026). *2025 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 Behaviors

- Most drivers perceived scrolling through social media (95%), texting/emailing (93%), or reading on a hand-held cell phone (91%) while driving as being extremely or very dangerous. Only 20% 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 (38%), or talking on a hand-held phone (32%) while driving. Most (61%) used hands-free technology, while only 10% reported scrolling through social media while driving.
- Support for a law against holding and talking on a phone while driving was high (83%), but only 40% supported a law against using hands-free technologies while driving.

### Aggressive Driving Behaviors

- Most drivers viewed running a red light (78%) and aggressive driving (90%) as very or extremely dangerous.
- Fewer saw speeding as dangerous, and it received the lowest level of social disapproval among the behaviors studied.
- About 62% 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 (47%) 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 (95%); however, 20% of drivers reported having engaged in the behavior in the past 30 days.
- Almost 26% 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 63% believing police would likely apprehend such drivers; only 7% reported doing so in the past 30 days.
- About 71% considered driving within an hour of using marijuana to be very or extremely dangerous, and 6% reported engaging in this behavior in the past 30 days.

### Perceived Neighborhood Driving Behaviors

- Most drivers perceived frequent risky behavior in their neighborhoods: 91% reported others driving too fast on freeways, 88% using cell phones while driving, 86% driving too fast on residential roads, and 81% engaging in aggressive driving (e.g., weaving or close passing). Drivers who perceived higher levels of such behavior were also more likely to report engaging in risky behaviors themselves, including excessive speeding, red-light running, unsafe lane changes or tailgating, and multiple forms of cell phone use while driving.
- At the same time, drivers also observed common safe behaviors, including obeying school zone speed limits (88%), slowing in construction zones (87%), adjusting speed in poor weather (85%), taking extra care around pedestrians (91%), and exercising caution around cyclists (87%).

### Comparisons with Peers

- Most drivers viewed themselves more favorably than others: 78% believed they drove more safely, 61% felt more skillful, 60% believed they handled distractions better, while 66% thought others were more aggressive. Speeding showed the strongest similarity with others, with about 50% reporting they drove at similar speeds to other drivers, and 19% reporting they drove faster.
- Perceived higher driving skill was positively associated with several risky behaviors, including driving 15 mph over the freeway speed limit, running a red light when a safe stop was possible, rapid lane changes or tailgating, driving without a seatbelt, and using hands-free technology.

### Perceived Social Stress

- Drivers with higher levels of social stress were more likely to report drowsy driving and driving without wearing a seatbelt.