

**SURVEY OF THE
ATTITUDES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
ON HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY:**

LOCAL AND STATE ISSUES

Wave Five Of A Periodic Tracking Survey

Conducted For

ADVOCATES FOR HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY

By

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A Word about This Study

The Setting

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (“Advocates”), the leading national highway safety advocacy group, is an alliance of consumer, health, safety and insurance groups working together to advance highway and auto safety. In May 1996, Advocates commissioned the first in a series of in-depth polls of national public opinion on key issues affecting highway and auto safety. In May of 2004, Advocates commissioned the fifth such survey by Louis Harris. The 2004 survey measures trends in public opinion over the past three-to-eight years on certain issues and asks questions for the first time on several others.

These surveys deal with the basic parameters of public consent in America for state legislation in setting and enforcing policies that can make highway and auto travel safer. As with earlier waves, this year’s survey covers a broad spectrum of issues, including how important Americans feel the role of government should be in setting standards and passing policies and legislation on highway safety.

A Basic Public Commitment

Over the past 25 years, this country has had a serious dialogue and debate over the role of governmental standards and their enforcement in response to major efforts to limit government intervention. A major exception to the idea that less regulation may be both desirable and beneficial is in the area of public health and safety. When considering public safety and health, people see a real need for government to intervene and protect the larger community as a whole. Highway and auto safety are prime concerns.

On September 11, 2001, the pall of terrorism fell on American life, adding the pervasiveness of public worry about safety from a terrorist attack to other concerns about health and public safety. There is a relation between these two areas because, in both cases, the major intervener inevitably must be government. If government does not fully protect the basic safety and health of the country, then most people suffer a sense of personal vulnerability.

This year's survey illustrates specifically the proposition of community concern. Fundamentally, it holds that it is in the best interest of the community at large for government to assert responsibility for safety issues to the extent that insufficient intervention places individuals at incrementally greater risk. The survey indicates that vast majorities of the American people accept and support the idea that on safety issues it is desirable and necessary for government to set standards and enforce laws designed to protect the public.

Substance of This Year's Survey

Specifically, this year's study focused on four key areas:

- (1) Enforcing seat belt usage
- (2) Enforcement of laws to protect children
- (3) Cracking down on drunk drivers
- (4) Regulating traffic safety on community streets and roads

Methodology

A total of 1003 telephone interviews were completed by telephone with randomly selected adults aged 18 years and older between May 14, 2004 and June 3, 2004 by the Peter Harris Research Group on behalf of Louis Harris. Every household in the nation with a telephone had roughly an equal chance to participate in the survey.

The interview averaged 15.5 minutes in length. At the 95% level of confidence, the margin of error for a representative, national cross-section survey of 1003 respondents is approximately ± 3.1 percentage points. A complete report on the technical aspects of the study is contained in Appendix B of this report.

While the study was conducted at the initiation of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, the responsibility of the professionalism of the study and the findings reached rests squarely on Louis Harris, who was ably assisted by the Peter Harris Research Group. All of the results are available to the public. Appendix A includes a copy of the basic questionnaire for this survey including total results for each question that was asked in the survey.

SURVEY OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ON HIGHWAY AND AUTO SAFETY

MAJOR FINDINGS

Key Areas of State and Local Government Safety Regulations

Key highway and auto safety areas regulated by the state and local governments receive strong support in the survey:

1. Seat Belt Enforcement

Better than a 4-to-1 majority (80% to 19%) feels that “seat belt laws should be enforced just like any other traffic law.” The public recognizes the importance of wearing seat belts and the importance of the role of public safety officials in raising public awareness of the issue: *69% of Americans want public safety officials to give enforcing seat belt laws more attention*, including a 51% majority who want “much more attention” given to enforcement of seat belt laws.

These are significant findings because the United States lags behind other industrialized countries in seat belt use, and law enforcement officials have generally placed a lower priority on stopping individual drivers for failing to use seat belts. Now, the public appears to recognize the importance of buckling up to save lives and is ready to accept the idea that stronger enforcement is required to get more passengers to use their seat belts.

1. Enforcement of Laws to Protect Children in Motor Vehicles

With more than 50% of the public saying that they transport children between the ages of one and eight years old, the safety of these children is clearly on the minds of Americans.

- *By a wide margin of 84% to 14%, the public is strongly in favor of a law in every state to require children between the ages of four and eight to be in a booster seat.* This represents an increase in public support when Advocates asked this same question in 2001, with 79% in favor. Currently, only 26 states [has increased to 28 since survey was conducted in May/June 2004] and the District of Columbia require children in this age group to be properly restrained in a booster seat.

- *By an even greater margin of 90% to 10%, nine of ten Americans favor state laws that would make it illegal to leave children unattended in motor vehicles.*

3. Cracking Down on Drunk Drivers

With drunk driving apparently on the increase again recently, the public wants a tough crackdown once again on drunk driving:

- *An 80% to 18% majority now favors “police checkpoints to spot drunk drivers.* The turning point in the previous crackdown on drunk driving took place when mothers took over the leadership of bringing drunk driving to the attention of the public at large. While 77% of men favor police checkpoints to spot drunk drivers, *a higher 84% of women feel that way.* Indeed, throughout this survey, women are leading the way over men in backing tough enforcement measures that improve highway and auto safety.
- *A 92% to 6% majority nationwide favors “impounding the cars of repeat drunk drivers.”*
- *Another substantial majority of 82% to 15% nationwide favors “installing in cars owned or driven by repeat offenders ignition devices that measure the level of alcohol in the blood before the driver can start the motor vehicle.*

Clearly, the American people are ripe and ready for another major crackdown on drunk driving. *87% of Americans feel that drunk driving should receive more attention by public safety officials.* This has increased from 82% in 2001. This includes 75% who feel drunk driving should receive “much more attention,” greater than the 69% who felt this way in 2001.

4. Mandatory Use of Motorcycle Helmets

An 80% to 17% majority favors their state “requiring that all motorcyclists wear helmets.”

There is a sharp division on this issue between men and women. Women favor mandatory wearing of helmets by motorcycle drivers by 91% to 7%, while men support such a measure by a substantially lower 68% to 28% margin. This result typifies a pattern that emerges repeatedly in the survey: *Women are more safety oriented than are men.* It is noteworthy, however, that on most issues decisive majorities of men also back measures such as this one, albeit by smaller majorities.

5. Controlling Reckless Driving in City and Town Neighborhoods

Over the past two surveys for Advocates, people have been asked about the growing problems of deaths and injuries caused by reckless driving on local streets in America's cities and towns. In the 2004 survey, a new question was added, indicating that a **56% majority feel "speeding in my neighborhood is a problem."** The survey asked about five specific concerns affecting local safety:

- **Using Cell Phones while Driving.** 82% say that "cell phones used by drivers" needs more attention, including 65% who want it to receive much more attention. Several states and localities have passed laws which prohibit people from using cell phones while driving unless they use a hands-free device.
- **Red Light Running.** 80% report that the problem of drivers running red lights should receive more attention, including 57% who want it to receive "much more attention," up from 46% three years ago.
- **Speeding on Local Streets.** 79% say "speeding on local streets" needs more attention by public safety officials, including 59% who say it needs "much more attention."
- **Safety of Intersections.** 79% feel that "improving the safety of intersections" is a problem in need of more attention, including 50% who want it to receive much more attention, up from 43% in 2001.
- **Pedestrian Crossings.** 71% feel that "making it safer for pedestrians to cross the street" is in need of more attention, including 46% who say it needs much more attention, up from 43% three years ago.

Clearly the public is now aware of the dangers from cars in neighborhoods, both as a threat to the safety of an increasing number of pedestrians who cross streets and intersections and to drivers of cars who now are threatened by reckless driving in their own neighborhoods.

APPENDIX A:

SURVEY RESULTS QUESTION-BY-QUESTION

HIGHWAY SAFETY TRACKING SURVEY
WAVE V
MAY-JUNE 2004

Q1. Regardless of how you vote, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?

	Total
	%
Republican	33
Democrat	28
Independent	24
Other/not registered/refused/not sure	15

Q2a. In some states, seat belt laws are enforced just like any other traffic law. In other states, seat belt laws are not strictly enforced. Do you think that all states should enforce seat belt laws just like any other traffic law, or should seat belt laws not be enforced like other traffic laws?

	Total
	%
Enforce like any other traffic law	80
Should not be enforced like other traffic laws	19
Not sure	1

Q2b. Do you think that speeding is a problem in your neighborhood, or not?

	Total
	%
Feel speeding is a problem	56
Not a problem	43
Not sure	1

Q3a. Drunk driving deaths have been on the increase again in recent years. To prevent drunk driving and to arrest drunk drivers, do you favor or oppose (READ EACH ITEM AND RECORD BELOW)?

1. Police checkpoints to spot drunk drivers?

	Total
	%
Favor	80
Oppose	18
Not sure	2

2. Impounding the cars of repeat drunk driving offenders?

	Total
	%
Favor	92
Oppose	6
Not sure	2

3. **Installing in cars owned or driven by repeat offenders, ignition devices that measure the level of alcohol in the blood before the driver can start the motor vehicle?**

	Total
	%
Favor	82
Oppose	15
Not sure	3

- Q3b. **(T) Do you favor or oppose your state requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets?**

	2001	2004	Change
	%	%	
Favor	81	80	-1
Oppose	17	17	-0-
Not sure	2	3	+1
Not sure	1		

- Q4a. **About half the states have laws that require children to be placed in a booster seat when they outgrow child safety seats. Generally these laws cover children between 4 and 8 years old. Booster seats raise the child up from the seat so that the adult safety belt will fit better and give them better protection. Do you favor or oppose a law that would apply to all states, requiring them to have booster seat protection for children between 4 and 8 years old?**

	Total
	%
Favor	84
Oppose	14
Not sure	2

- Q4b. **Do you ever transport children between one and eight years old in your car, or not?**

	Total
	%
Transport children ages 1 through 8 in car	52
Do not transport	48
Not sure	0

- Q4c. **On a hot day, it can get over 100 degrees inside a closed vehicle. When children are left alone in parked cars on hot days, they can suffer severe dehydration, heat stroke or even death. Last year, 42 children died this way. Would you favor or oppose state laws that make it illegal to leave children alone in a parked vehicle?**

	Total
	%
Favor	90
Oppose	8
Not sure	2

Q5. (T) Thinking about your own safety on each of these issues, how much attention do you feel public safety officials should give (READ EACH ITEM ON THE LIST) -- much more attention, somewhat more attention, or is adequate attention already now given to it, or should less attention be paid to it?

		Needs Much More Attention	Needs Somewhat More Attention	Subtotal	Attention is Adequate	Should Pay It Less Attention	Not Sure
		%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Drivers red light running	2004	57	23	80	18	1	1
	2001	46	27	73	23	2	1
2. Improving the safety of intersections	2004	50	29	79	20	1	*
	2001	43	35	78	21	1	1
3. Making it safer for pedestrians to cross the street	2004	47	24	71	27	1	1
	2001	43	24	67	30	3	1
4. Cell phone used by drivers	2004	65	17	82	12	4	2
	2001	67	16	83	11	5	1
5. Drunk driving	2004	75	12	87	12	1	*
	2001	69	13	82	16	1	1
6. Enforcing seat belt laws	2004	51	18	69	22	7	2
	2001	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
7. Speeding on local streets*	2004	59	20	79	18	1	2
	2001	53	24	77	20	3	*
8. Speeding on highways*	2004	44	26	70	25	4	1
	2001	53	24	77	20	3	*
9. Big truck safety	2004	50	24	74	22	1	3
	2001	46	25	71	25	2	2

* Asked in 2001 as: "Speeding on local streets and highways."

FACTUAL QUESTIONS

F1. Sex (By Observation. (DO NOT ASK.))

	Total
	%
Male	48
Female	52

F2. How old are you?

	Total
	%
18-24	8
25-29	9
30-34	11
35-39	10
40-49	16
50-54	10
55-64	15
65 and older	21
Refused	0

F3. Is the head of this household presently single, married, widowed, divorced, separated, or living with a partner?

	Total
	%
Single	18
Married	57
Widowed	7
Divorced	9
Separated	3
Living with a partner	6
Refused	*

F4. Which of these best describes the income bracket for your total household income last year?

	Total
	%
\$15,000 or less	10
\$15,001-\$25,000	12
\$25,001-\$35,000	14
\$35,001-\$50,000	14
\$50,001-\$75,000	19
\$75,001-\$100,000	16
\$100,001-\$150,000	10
\$150,001 and over	6
Not sure/Refused	14

F5. What is the last grade or highest level of school you completed? (READ LIST IF NECESSARY)

	Total
	%
Less than high school	8
High school graduate	41
Some college	29
Four year college degree	14
Post graduate degree	8
Refused	*

F6. Which of the following vehicles do you or members of your family own or drive - a van, a pickup truck, a sport utility vehicle, another type of passenger car, or a motorcycle? (MULTIPLE RECORD.)

	2004
	%
A van	19
A pickup truck	37
A sport utility vehicle	31
Another type of passenger car	72
Motorcycle	6
Don't own/drive a car (vol.)	5
Not sure	*

F7. Are you of Latino descent or not?

F8. Do you consider yourself to be white, black or African-American, Asian, Native American, racially mixed, or do you belong to some other race?

Qs. F7 and F8	Total
	%
Latino (all races)	11
White	72
Black or African American	12
Asian or Pacific Islander	4
American Indian, Native American, or Alaska Native	*
Racially mixed	1
Other	*
Not sure/refused	0

F9. Do you live in a large city with half a million or more people in it, a suburb of a large city, a medium-sized city, a small city, a small town, a rural area, or some other type of place?

	Total
	%
Large city	24
Suburb of a large city	17
Medium-sized city	15
Small city	15
Small town	15
Rural area	14
Other type of area	*
Not sure	*

APPENDIX B:

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Between May 14, 2004 and June 3, 2004, the Peter Harris Research Group on behalf of Louis Harris interviewed by telephone 1,003 randomly selected adults aged 18 years or older for Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. Every household in the nation with a telephone had roughly an equal chance to participate in the survey.

The interview averaged 15.5 minutes in length. At the 95% level of confidence, the margin of error for a representative, national cross-section survey of 1003 respondents is approximately ± 3.1 percentage points.

The sample was prepared by Marketing Systems Group. The overall sample was prepared in replicates of 100. Each replicate is a proportionate, representative sample of the nation as a whole. We used the Genesys "National Plus" sample, already cleaned for business, fax, and non-working numbers.

Peter Harris Research Group, Inc. ("PHRG") conducted the telephone interviewing for the 2004 Highway Safety Survey using its computer-assisted telephone interviewing ("CATI") system purchased from Sawtooth Technologies. PHRG is a full-service market research company located in New York City that has been in continuous operation since 1994.

The raw survey data were weighted according to data obtained from the United States Census Bureau on the national distribution of the population by age, gender, region, Hispanic population, and race among non-Latino groups.

Quality Control Procedures

Several quality assurance procedures are in place at PHRG:

First, PHRG is very selective in its hiring of telephone interviewers. PHRG hires only those interviewers who can meet its top-quality standards. Interviewers must be highly articulate (over 90% of our workforce is drawn from the New York City performing arts community), courteous, professional, and accurate in their keystrokes. PHRG pays its interviewers above scale and knows for a fact that higher-skilled interviewers achieve the highest cooperation and production rates.

Second, PHRG monitors interviewers on a regular basis. Monitoring enables PHRG to ensure clear, courteous, and non-biasing reading of survey questions, accurate keystrokes, and completeness of interviewing. It enables PHRG to ensure optimal skill development and data collection accuracy.

Third, PHRG verifies at least 10% of each interviewer's work; that is, PHRG calls back at least 10% of the respondents who completed interviews with each interviewer and verifies the answers to several questions. This gives PHRG additional information on the accuracy of interviewers' data entry and whether or not any systemic issues pertain to questions. Typically, PHRG will verify several factual and attitudinal questions.

Calls to each respondent were attempted up to six times. Academic research has demonstrated this to be the optimal number combining thoroughness and cost efficiency.

A total of 13 interviewers worked on the 2004 Highway Safety Survey. PHRG interviewing staff reflects racial and gender diversity. Our experience indicates that between 10 and 15 interviewers is optimal for a study such as this because it ensures excellent quality control and optimal length in the field.