

**Remarks of Louis Harris**  
**Press Conference**  
**Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**  
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For the fifth time since 1996, I have some major results from our latest poll to report to you. As usual, conventional wisdom had better be prepared for some rude shocks. These results are hot off the griddle, since our in-depth survey was taken among a cross-section of 1003 adults between May 14 and June 3. The respected Peter Harris research group conducted all interviews by telephone.

Let me get right down to cases. Everyone knows that the leading edge of all auto vehicle sales is SUVs. They are the sacred cows. The common assumption in this town is that anything that is a hot seller, something people can't get enough of is untouchable. Above all, don't introduce the dead hand of government regulations or controls on cars and SUVs.

Well, my big news is that this assumption is dead wrong. And I will proceed to tell you why right now. Each year, crashes involving the rollover of vehicles result in more than 10,000 deaths. This is about a fourth of all deaths from motor vehicles. Yet, there are literally no government regulations, which might prevent rollover in passenger vehicles, including SUVs. Also, regulations to protect occupants in rollover crashes when they do happen are weak and decades-old.

We asked the American people directly and in depth about rollovers and SUVs. By 84% to 13%, a majority of the American people believes "the government should create safety rules that require manufacturers to make all passenger vehicles, including SUVs more stable and less likely to roll over." SUV owners favor this regulation by 82% to 14%. Mark this result well.

It means that SUV owners want strongly to be protected against rollovers in their vehicles. They don't want to give up their favorite vehicles. But they don't want to die in them, either. But, hold on, I haven't begun to give you all the results of what we asked.

Fully 86% of the public nationwide is aware of the problem of rollovers in SUVs. Among SUV owners 85% know rollovers in SUVs is a problem.

One concrete step that might be taken to underscore the risks of rollovers in SUVs met with widespread acceptance. That would be to require that stickers be placed on the windshields of all new cars indicating the likelihood of that vehicle to roll over. An 83% to 14% majority of the American people want such a posting on any new car they buy.

And guess what: among SUV owners, an 84% to 12% majority of SUV owners favor having such a sticker on their own car when they buy it. You might ask if the public is uniformly in favor of this idea. There are some softer segments: people who live in the west, where they drive more and take longer trips. The majority favoring stickers on windshields reporting the risk of rollovers is a lower 77% in the west and an even lower 71% of people whose family incomes are

above \$100,000, and a lesser 79% of men are in favor, compared with 87% of women. Of course, having reported these differences, it is well to remember that big majorities of all groups in the population support putting such stickers on the windshields of all new cars.

Another regulatory measure is this: install electronic stability controls to prevent cars from rolling over. Such devices are quite common in Europe. A 55% to 39% majority across the country favors requiring putting these electronic devices in all cars. A higher than average 64% of all SUV owners favor having the devices put in their vehicles.

Two other safety measures which could prevent injury or death in crashes were also tested. Advanced seat belts that tighten or loosen at different times during a crash to protect passengers during a vehicle rollover are favored by an 82% to 17% majority of the nation. A higher 83% of SUV owners also favor such seat belts. A second suggestion calls for requiring a major upgrading of roof safety standards to withstand the weight of the car when it rolls over. Nationwide, 83% favor such a requirement strengthening roof safety standards. Among SUV owners, a slightly higher 84% favor such a requirement.

Yet another problem involving SUVs was probed by our poll: mismatched collisions between SUVs and smaller cars. 2 in 3 people know about the dangers of such collisions. Yet, when we asked how concerned they were about these crashes between the larger SUVs and smaller passenger cars, 83% were “some-what” or “very concerned” about the problem. However, less than a majority, 47% were “very concerned.” Among SUV owners, a lower 41% said they were “very concerned.”

These results are significant. You might have been wondering about SUV owners being so worried about rollovers and safety requirements. But, when it comes to worrying about the people who might get injured or killed in a crash between their SUV and a smaller passenger vehicle, they are less concerned. The reason: they are deeply worried and downright scared of the safety problems that might affect their own lives. As for their feeling sorry about smaller cars they might crash into: well, they care but not as much!

We also asked about measures that can be taken to prevent passenger ejections from vehicles, an obvious problem in SUV and other rollovers. An 81% to 16% majority favors “installing stronger vehicle roofs so that windshields don’t pop out of the frame so easily during a crash.” An identical majority favors “safer door locks and latches so that doors don’t fly open in crashes.” A 78% to 19% majority favors “stronger side door window glass, like that in windshields, that won’t crumble in a crash.” By 70% to 22%, a majority supports “side air bag curtains that drop from the vehicle roof and come between the person and the side door and window.”

And, by 85% to 14%, a bigger majority favors “the government requiring better seat belts to prevent people from being ejected in crashes.” SUV owners opted for all of these measures by close to the national averages. We also asked our cross-section bluntly how each person would react to having such safety measures being required as standard equipment in all new passenger vehicles. A 71% to 26% majority supports such a new requirement.

We asked people how much extra they would be willing to pay to get these new safety standards installed in the next new car they might buy. We asked the same question back in our first survey in 1996. Back then, 75% opted for paying \$200 to \$300 more for such safety standards. Now, an almost unanimous 91% favors paying that amount.

At a time when adding to the price of motor vehicles underscores how vital and crucial safety standards are to the American people, it is my view that what I have just reported is no less than astounding. For it flies in the face of conventional wisdom in this town that more government regulation of any kind simply won't be tolerated by the American people. Well, we asked about such regulation covering health and safety matters. That was the first question in the entire survey. A full 91% of the American people favors, not opposes, the government setting such safety and health standards. The reason? People care deeply about their health and safety. It is a matter of no less than their life or death. Opposition to government regulations literally melts away when it comes to basic health and safety considerations.

Finally, the poll indicated that Americans are not only concerned about safety in vehicles, but about their safety on the road with big trucks. By large margins in all cases, they favor the mandatory installation of "black boxes" on all trucks (84%, up from 81% three years ago). This technology would cut down on drivers attempting to push the limit on hours driven. 70% of Americans oppose increasing truck weight limits, and they come down decisively with 80% saying they feel that trucks with 2 or more trailers are less safe. These consistent findings run contrary to what is going on in congress where attempts to diminish truck safety are common.

The bottom line: any politician this election year who categorically wants to diminish or eliminate government health and safety regulations, could be in deep trouble. And I don't care what region or community they come from. Specifically, in the case of the new sacred cow among vehicles, the SUVs, I would suggest one basic step: just ask SUV owners. They want their SUVs, make no mistake about that. But they want the safest SUVs that money can buy. They are even willing to pay more for such safety. Why? Because they feel their own lives are endangered unless just this kind of regulation is exercised. Perhaps the ultimate irony is that by invoking tough safety standards, sales of SUVs might actually increase. And the number of people dying from rollovers and SUV crashes might be sharply diminished.

My final word of advice to the automotive and political communities: get over your fetish of blindly opposing government regulation per se. Adopt regulations that mandate making new cars safer. That looks to me to be a win-win proposition all around!