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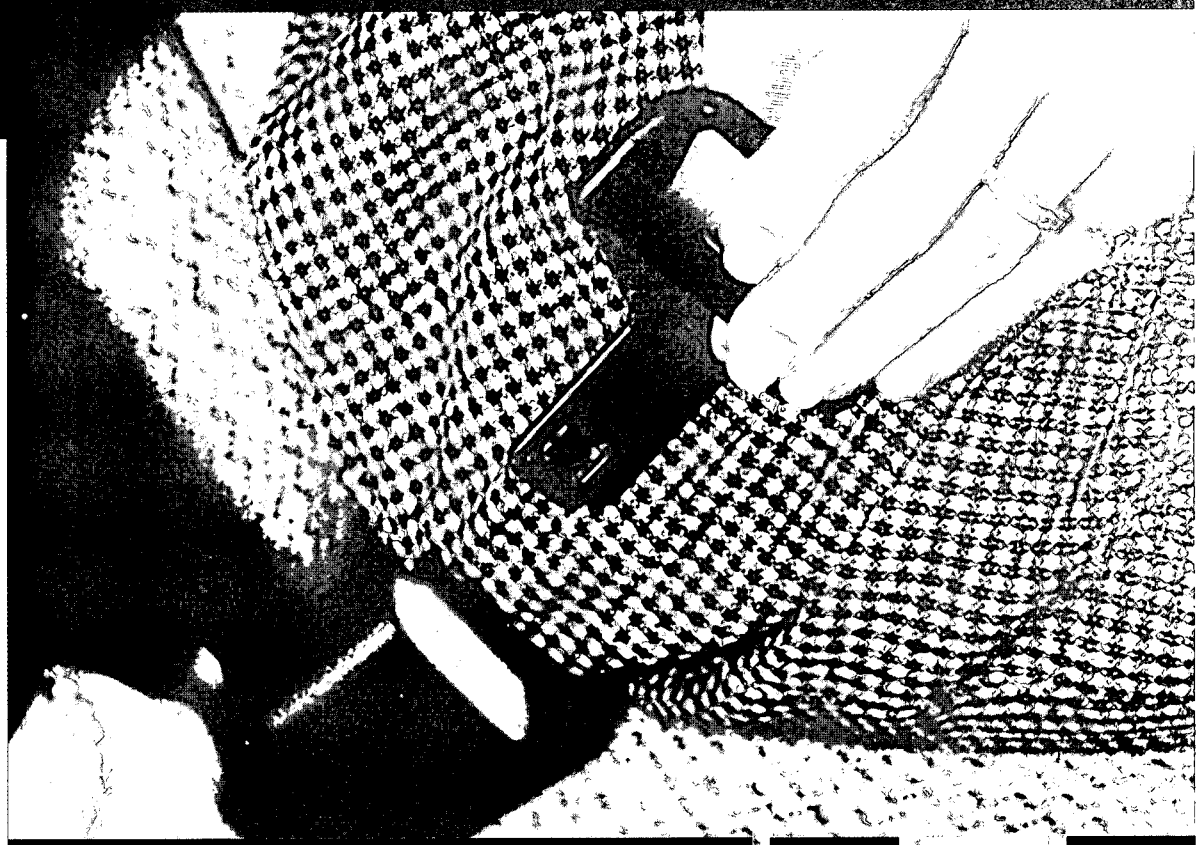

2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey

Volume 2

Safety Belt Report

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16. Abstract

The 2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey was the fifth in a series of biennial national telephone surveys on occupant protection issues conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Data collection was conducted by Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc., a national survey research organization. The survey used two questionnaires, each administered to a randomly selected national sample of about 6,000 persons age 16 or older. Interviewing began January 8, 2003 and ended March 30, 2003. This report presents the survey findings pertaining to safety belts. Detailed information on the survey methodology, as well as copies of the questionnaires, are contained in a separate NHTSA report ("2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey. Volume 1. Methodology Report").

The passenger car remains the most common primary vehicle driven by adults (59%), although the percentage has continued to drop as SUVs (13%) have increased in frequency. The predominant type of safety belt in the front seat of vehicles is the one-piece manual lap and shoulder system (80%). Drivers increasingly are reporting that they have adjustable shoulder belts (52%). Eighty-four percent of drivers said they wore their safety belt "all of the time" while driving, but 7% of those immediately said that they did not use a safety belt while driving at least once in the past day or week. Reported belt use traditionally is higher than observed belt use, although the demographic patterns tend to be the same. Reported safety belt use was lower among males, drivers age 16-24, drivers in rural areas, pickup truck drivers, drivers who engage in other risky driving behaviors, and drivers in secondary enforcement States. Drivers most often cited injury avoidance as their most important reason for using safety belts (66%). Part-time belt users substantially outnumbered those who reported never wearing safety belts, and their primary reasons for non-use were driving just a short distance and forgetting. Eighty-eight percent of the public favored laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear safety belts, 64% favored standard enforcement and 65% favored fines for drivers who do not wear safety belts.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey (MVOSS) was the fifth in a series of biennial national telephone surveys on occupant protection issues conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Data collection was conducted by the firm Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), a national survey research organization. The survey employed two questionnaires, each administered to a randomly selected national sample of approximately 6,000 persons age 16 and older (with younger ages oversampled). Interviewing began January 8, 2003 and ended March 30, 2003.

This report presents the survey findings pertaining to safety belts. The data are weighted to yield national estimates. Readers are cautioned that some subgroup analyses (indicated in the body of the report) are based on a small number of cases. Technical information on confidence intervals is presented in Appendix A so that readers may judge the precision of sample estimates. A full description of the methodology, and the questionnaires, is presented in a separate report.

Vehicle Characteristics

- **Motor Vehicle Use.** About 89% of persons age 16 and older drive a motor vehicle. Certain demographic groups had far higher percentages of non-drivers than the national average, such as Blacks[1] (22%), Hispanics (28%), teenagers (22%), and persons in low-income households (28% in households under $15,000).
- **Vehicle Type**. Passenger cars continued to drop as a percentage of the vehicle fleet, although they still accounted for 59% of all primary vehicles driven (versus 71% in 1994). Pickup trucks (16%), SUVs (13%), and vans/minivans (10%) followed next in frequency.

Safety Belt Use

- **Type Of Belt**. Four-fifths (80%) of primary vehicles had one-piece manual lap and shoulder belts in the front seat. In vehicles having a shoulder belt, 52% had adjustable shoulder belts. While some of the persons with adjustable belts (31%) said that they had never tried to adjust their adjustable shoulder belt, those who did usually said that they were able to make the belt more comfortable (93%).
- **Reported Belt Use**. When asked how often they used their lap and shoulder safety belts while driving, more than four-fifths (84%) of drivers said "all of the time". However, on a follow-up question, 7% of these "all of the time" users immediately stated that they had not worn their safety belt while driving at some time during the past day or week. Nine percent of drivers said they used their safety belt "most of the time" while driving. Seventy-one percent of these "most of

[1] The category used on the racial background question since the 1994 baseline survey is "Black or African American".

the time" users said on the follow-up question that they had not worn their safety belt while driving at some time during the past day or week.

- **Reported Belt Use By Safety Belt System.** Among those safety belt systems not having an automatic component, reported "all of the time" use was lowest among lap only systems (64%) and highest among one-piece lap and shoulder systems (84%). Among two-piece belt systems where the shoulder belt was always being used, drivers were much more likely to use their lap belt "all of the time" if the shoulder belt was manual (96%) rather than automatic (66%).
- **Reported Belt Use By Demographics.** Reported "all of the time" use by drivers tended to be lower among males (79%), drivers ages 16-24 (79%), pickup truck drivers (71%), and drivers in rural areas (77%).
- **Safety Belt Use On The Job.** About one-third of drivers (34%) said they drove a motor vehicle at least sometimes as part of a job or business. Most drove as part of a job or business almost every day (57%) or a few days a week (24%). A majority of these drivers (53%) reported that their company had a policy requiring safety belt use when driving on the job. Drivers were more likely to report higher safety belt use on the job compared to personal driving if they thought their company had a safety belt policy (25% versus 16%). For driving in general (among drivers who at least on occasion drove on the job), the percentage of drivers who reported wearing safety belts "all of the time" was higher among those who thought their company had a safety belt policy than those who did not (83% versus 76%).
- **Safety Belt Use By Seating Position.** Reported safety belt use was lower in the back passenger seating positions compared to the driver and front passenger seating positions. Whereas more than four-fifths of respondents said they always wore their safety belt when driving (84%) or riding as a passenger in the front seat (83%), just over half (53%) said they always wore the belt when riding as a passenger in the back seat.

Reasons For Safety Belt Use And Non-Use

- **Reasons For Use.** Injury avoidance was the most frequent reason given by drivers for wearing safety belts regardless of how often they wore their safety belts. However, infrequent safety belt users (73%) gave this as a reason less often than frequent safety belt users (96%).
- **Most Important Reason For Use.** When drivers were asked for the most important reason for wearing safety belts, about two-thirds (66%) said it was injury avoidance. Infrequent users of safety belts (42%) were less likely than frequent users (67%) to report injury avoidance as their primary reason for safety belt use.
- **Reasons For Non-Use.** Among drivers who at least on occasion did not use their safety belt, the most frequent reasons for non-use were that they were only driving a short distance (56%), they forgot (55%), they were in a rush (40%), or they found the belt uncomfortable (32%).

- **Most Important Reason For Non-Use**. The most important reasons given by drivers for not wearing safety belts were usually that they forgot (25%) or they were driving just a short distance (23%). These two reasons were characteristic of part-time safety belt users, who substantially outnumbered drivers who rarely or never wore their safety belts. The primary reasons for non-use among the rare/never users tended to revolve around discomfort, concerns about safety belts being dangerous, personal freedom, and absence of habit.
- **Annoyances From Safety Belts.** All drivers, whether or not they wore safety belts regularly, were asked if there was anything they particularly disliked or found annoying about wearing them. One-third (33%) answered "yes," with females (40%) more likely to respond affirmatively than males (26%). The most common complaint involved pressure or pain on parts of the body (52%). Females who were annoyed by safety belts particularly expressed this type of discomfort (61%), especially being choked by the safety belt (48%).

Attitudes About The Utility Of Safety Belts, Risk Perception, And Fatalism

- **Would Want Safety Belt On In Crash.** The vast majority of the public (95%) age 16 and older either strongly (88%) or somewhat (7%) agreed with the statement "If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on." As reported safety belt use increased, so did agreement with the statement.
- **Perceived Harm From Safety Belts.** More than one-third of the public (35%) either strongly (14%) or somewhat (21%) agreed with the statement "Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you." As reported safety belt use decreased, agreement with the statement increased.
- **Impact On Medical Insurance Costs.** About two-thirds of the public (65%) either strongly (41%) or somewhat (24%) agreed that "Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts." Agreement was highest among those who used their safety belt "all of the time" (67%).
- **Anxiety From Safety Belts.** Relatively few people (15%) agreed strongly (9%) or somewhat (5%) that "Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident." Agreement with this statement was expressed more often by persons who only sometimes (19%) or rarely/never (26%) wore their safety belt.
- **Accidents Happen Close To Home.** Four-in-five persons (80%) either strongly (57%) or somewhat (23%) agreed that "Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home." Agreement with this statement was higher among persons who wore their safety belt all (82%) or most (83%) of the time than those who rarely or never wore it (76%).
- **Seriousness Of Crashes Close To Home.** Relatively few people (16%) strongly (8%) or somewhat (8%) agreed "An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away."
- **Pressure From Group Norms.** About one-in-five persons (19%) either strongly (13%) or somewhat (6%) agreed that "I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not." Persons who wore their safety belt

only some of the time (12%) or rarely/never (12%) were less likely to agree with this statement than more frequent safety belt users.

- **Parental Influence On Safety Belt Use.** Among persons ages 16-24, 69% either strongly (51%) or somewhat (18%) agreed that "I have a habit of wearing a seat belt because my parents insisted I wear them when I was a child." The percentage who agreed dropped to 44% among persons ages 25-34, and 26% among those ages 35-44, reflecting the lower belt use rates during their childhood years for these age cohorts.
- **Fatalism And Safety Belt Use.** The fatalistic belief that wearing safety belts did not matter because "If it is your time to die, you'll die" was more prevalent among drivers who reported less frequent safety belt usage: 23% among "all of the time" users, 29% among "most of the time" users, 47% among "some of the time" users, and 59% among those who rarely or never wore safety belts.
- **Differences In Attitude By Age.** About one-half (47%) of 16-20 year-olds agreed that safety belts were as likely to harm as to help, compared to 34% of those 21 to 64 and 31% of those 65 and older. The youngest age group also was more likely to agree that an accident close to home was usually not as serious (30%), that putting on a safety belt makes them worry more about being in an accident (27%), that they would feel self-conscious if they were going against the group norm in wearing safety belts (30%), and that medical insurance costs would decrease if more people wore safety belts (73%).
- **Differences In Attitudes By Race/Ethnicity.** Blacks and Hispanics differed markedly from Whites and non-Hispanics on perceived risk and the utility of safety belts. Whereas less than one-third of Whites (31%) and non-Hispanics (33%) agreed that safety belts were as likely to harm as help, about one-half of Blacks (48%) and Hispanics (52%) agreed. Blacks and Hispanics also were more likely than Whites and non-Hispanics to agree that putting on a safety belt made them worry more about being in a crash, or that a crash close to home would not be as serious as one farther away. Hispanics (36%) and Blacks (26%) were more likely than the other groups to say they would feel self-conscious about using safety belts if their friends did not. Blacks (39%) and Hispanics (37%) were more likely than Whites (23%) and non-Hispanics (25%) to agree with the fatalistic statement that wearing a safety belt did not matter because if it was your time to die, you'll die.
- **Differences In Attitudes By Education.** Persons who had more years of formal schooling tended to be less fatalistic, less ambivalent about the injury reduction benefits of safety belts, and less self-conscious about going against group norms of non-use.

Attitudes, Knowledge, And Experience With Safety Belt Laws And Their Enforcement

- **Support For Front Seat Safety Belt Laws.** The vast majority of the public (88%) favored safety belt laws for front seat occupants either "a lot" (69%) or "some" (18%). More females (92%) than males (82%) voiced support for front seat safety belt laws. Blacks (92%) and Hispanics (93%) were more likely to express support than Whites (86%) and non-Hispanics (87%).
- **Support For Back Seat Safety Belt Laws.** Among persons who supported front seat safety belt laws, 80% also supported applying safety belt laws to back seat adult passengers. Of the total population age 16 and older, 70% supported laws for adults in both the front and back seats.
- **Support For Fines/Points.** Almost two-thirds (65%) of the population age 16 and older supported fines for drivers who did not wear safety belts. About half that many (31%) supported points against the license as a penalty. Among persons who supported fines, 40% favored a fine under $50 (or no fine at all) if it was a first time violation. For repeat violations, 13% supported fines under $50 while 48% favored fines of $100 or more.
- **Knowledge Of Who Is Covered By The Law.** Almost everyone (94%) believed his/her State had a law requiring safety belt use. They most often thought the law covered drivers (98%), children in the front (93%), and adult passengers in the front (94%). Many thought the law in their State also covered children in the back (86%). Fewer than half (48%) assumed that adults were required to wear safety belts in the back seat.
- **Awareness Of (Standard/Secondary) Enforcement Provisions In Their State.** Safety belt laws contain either standard enforcement provisions (i.e., law enforcement officers can stop a vehicle on the basis of observing a safety belt violation) or secondary enforcement provisions (i.e., some other violation must be observed before stopping a vehicle). At the time of the survey, 18 States plus the District of Columbia had standard enforcement laws, 31 States had secondary enforcement laws, and 1 State did not have a safety belt law applicable to adults. Among those who believed their State had a safety belt law (94%), 66% thought the law permitted standard enforcement. About three-fourths (77%) of the total population in standard enforcement States believed their State had a safety belt law that included standard enforcement provisions. In secondary enforcement States, there were more persons who believed their State law had standard enforcement provisions (46%) than thought it had secondary enforcement provisions (31%).
- **Enforcement Provisions And Reported Safety Belt Use.** Drivers were more likely to report that they wore their safety belt "all of the time" while driving if they resided in States having standard enforcement provisions (89%), as opposed to secondary enforcement provisions (81%). The difference in "all of the time" use was similar when comparing drivers who <u>believed</u> their State safety belt law permitted standard enforcement (86%) to those who <u>believed</u> their State law called for secondary enforcement (80%).

- **Support For Standard Enforcement.** Overall, 64% of the population believed that police should be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observed a safety belt violation when no other traffic laws were being broken, compared to 61% in 2000. Support was greater among females (68%), Blacks (67%), and Hispanics (74%). As expected, support was higher in standard enforcement States (71%). But even in secondary enforcement States, the majority (56%) favored standard enforcement.
- **Stopped By Police In Past Year For Traffic Related Reason.** About one-in-six drivers (17%) said they had been stopped by police for a traffic-related reason in the past year, more often males (20%) than females (14%). Traffic-related stops for the general population of drivers peaked at ages 21-24 (32%), and then declined across subsequent age groups. Drivers usually said they were wearing safety belts when stopped (86%). More than half (59%) of all drivers stopped by the police received some type of ticket.
- **Previously Received A Ticket/Warning For A Safety Belt Violation.** About 13% of the population age 16 and older had received a ticket and/or warning some time in the past for violating safety belt laws (7% had received a ticket only, 2% had received both a ticket and a warning, and 4% had received only a warning). In States with standard enforcement provisions, 14% had received a ticket and/or warning, compared to 12% in secondary enforcement States. When asked if their frequency of safety belt use had changed after receiving the safety belt ticket or warning, 58% said they started using their safety belt more often. However, the current level of belt use reported by drivers who had received a ticket or warning was still well below that of drivers who had never received either.
- **Perceived Risk Of Personally Being Ticketed.** Almost half (46%) of drivers considered it very (21%) or somewhat (25%) likely that they would receive a ticket if they did not wear their safety belt at all while driving over the next six months. The perceived risk of being ticketed was higher among drivers in standard enforcement States, and higher among drivers who tended to wear their safety belt more often. Among demographic groups, Hispanics (64%) and Blacks (57%) were more likely than others to perceive themselves at risk of being ticketed.
- **Perceived Emphasis On Ticketing For Safety Belt Violations By Local Police.** The public was more likely to agree (42%) than disagree (37%) with the statement "Police in my community generally do not bother to write tickets for seat belt violations." Many people (21%) said they did not know. Agreement that police don't bother to write tickets was more likely in secondary enforcement States (47%) than standard enforcement States (38%), and more likely among infrequent than frequent safety belt users.
- **Preferred Level Of Enforcement Activity.** When asked to rate on a 10-point scale how strictly they believed the police should enforce safety belt laws, the public's response was mixed. They most often picked a value of "10" (27%) meaning "Police should give tickets at every opportunity," although responses also clustered at the middle and low end of the scale. The average score was

6.3, but higher among females (6.6) than males (5.9), Blacks (6.5) than Whites (6.1), and Hispanics (7.2) than non-Hispanics (6.1).

Comparison To Prior Year Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Surveys

- **General Stability In Findings.** In many areas, the 2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey found circumstances essentially unchanged from its predecessors:
  - The percentage of drivers who drive on the job (34%) has remained stable since 1994 (34%-36%).
  - In 2003, 7% of drivers who said they wear safety belts "all of the time" also said that they did not wear safety belts while driving in the past day or week. This is consistent with what was obtained in the previous years (8% to 10%).
  - About two-thirds of drivers (66% in 2003, 64%-68% in earlier years) continued to point to injury avoidance as their most important reason for wearing safety belts.
  - Forgetting (25%) and driving only a short distance (23%) continued as the most important reasons for non-use of safety belts, with similar percentages to previous years.
  - Persons who said they rarely or never wore their safety belts continued to be substantially outnumbered by part-time safety belt users (i.e., persons who reported wearing safety belts more often than rarely, but also admitting some non-use). As in previous years, the survey found reasons for non-use to differ between part-time users and rare/never users, with "forgetting" and "only driving a short distance" more characteristic of part-time users while rare/never users tended to refer to "discomfort" and "other" reasons (e.g., personal freedom issues, perceived dangers from belts, lack of habit).
  - There has been little change in attitudes concerning the utility of safety belts, and associated perceptions of risk, since those questions were introduced in 1998.
  - Since 1994, more than 80% of the public has favored safety belt laws that apply to the front seat, and about two-thirds has favored laws that also apply to the back seat. Support for fines has ranged from 60% to 65%, while support for points as a sanction has been about 30%.
  - The percentage of the population aware that their State has a safety belt law remained unchanged since 1994 at 94%.
- **Changing Equipment.** The 2003 survey detected a continuation of change in the vehicle fleet and restraint systems used:
  - Among drivers' primary vehicles, passenger cars continued to decrease as a proportion of the vehicle fleet (71% in 1994; 59% in 2003) while SUVs increased (3% in 1994; 13% in 2003).
  - There was a small but continued increase in one-piece manual lap and shoulder systems in the front seat of drivers' primary vehicles (70% in 1994; 80% in 2003), with this being by far the predominant restraint system.

- Adjustable shoulder belts continued their penetration of the vehicle fleet (36% in 1996; 52% in 2003).

- **Increasing Use Of Safety Belts.** There has been a steady rise in reported use of safety belts:
  - The percentage of drivers who reported wearing their safety belt "all of the time" when they drive has increased from 74% in 1994 to 76% in 1996 to 79% in 1998 to 83% in 2000 to 84% in 2003.
  - "All of the time" safety belt use by front seat passengers increased from 73% in 1996 to 84% in 2003.
  - Reported "all of the time" safety belt use in the back seat also increased, rising from 37% in 1996 to 53% in 2003.
  - The percentage of drivers reporting that there is something they dislike or find annoying about their safety belt has declined by a percentage point or two with each subsequent survey, from 40% in 1994 to 33% in 2003.

- ***Increasing* Acceptance Of Standard Enforcement.** The number of States with safety belts laws that contain provisions permitting standard enforcement has increased substantially since the survey was first administered, reaching 18 at the time of the 2003 survey. Consistent with that increase:
  - The percentage of the population who believe their State law permits standard enforcement has steadily increased, reaching 66% in 2003 from 49% in 1994.
  - Support for standard enforcement has also steadily increased, from 52% in 1996 (when the question was first asked) to 64% in 2003.

- **Greater Perceived Risk Of Being Ticketed.** There were continuing trends in the implications that persons saw for themselves personally with respect to enforcement:
  - Since 1996, the percentage of drivers who considered it somewhat or very likely that they would be ticketed if they did not wear their safety belt at all while driving over the next six months has increased from 33% in 1996 to 39% in 1998 to 42% in 2000 to 46% in 2003.
  - The percentage of the population of drivers who believed their likely reaction to receiving a ticket would be that they deserved it, rather than that they did not deserve it, has increased by 1 to 3 percentage points with each subsequent survey, reaching 71% in 2003.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey is conducted biennially for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). It is a national telephone survey composed of two questionnaires, each administered to several thousand randomly selected persons age 16 and older. The Version 1 Questionnaire emphasizes safety belt issues while Version 2 emphasizes child restraint issues. The questionnaires also contain smaller modules addressing such areas as air bags, emergency medical services, and crash injury experience. For the 2003 survey, each questionnaire was administered to approximately 6,000 individuals.

NHTSA conducted the first Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey in 1994. Subsequent versions of the survey have included modest revisions to reflect changes in information needs. Thus, the 2003 survey contained numerous items from the earlier surveys allowing the agency to monitor change over time in knowledge, attitudes, and (reported) behavior related to motor vehicle occupant safety. The 2003 survey also included new questions dealing with such areas as wireless phone use while driving, inspection stations for child restraints, and new LATCH and tether child car seat attachments.

The following report presents findings from the 2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey pertaining to safety belts. Specifically, it explores the following areas: 1) 2003 safety belt use; 2) reasons for safety belt use and non-use; 3) attitudes concerning the utility of safety belts, and 4) attitudes, knowledge, and experience with safety belt laws and their enforcement. A fifth section examines trends between 1994 and 2003 on selected safety belt issues.

Methodology

The 2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey was conducted by Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), a national survey research organization. SRBI conducted a total of 12,377 telephone interviews among a national population sample. To reduce the burden on respondents, the survey employed two questionnaires. A total of 6,180 interviews were completed with Version 1 and 6,197 interviews were completed with Version 2. Although some questions appeared in both versions (e.g., demographics, crash injury experience, safety belt use), each questionnaire had its own set of distinct topics. Each sample was composed of approximately 6,000 persons age 16 and older, including oversamples of persons age 16-39. The procedures used in the survey yielded national estimates of the target population within specified limits of expected sampling variability, from which valid generalizations can be made to the general public.

The survey was conducted from January 8, 2003 to March 30, 2003. For a complete description of the methodology and sample disposition, including computation of weights, refer to the 2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey, Volume I. Methodology Report. The report includes English and Spanish language versions of the questionnaires.

The percentages presented in this report are weighted to reflect accurately the national population age 16 and older. Unweighted sample sizes ("N"s) are included so that readers know the exact number of respondents answering a given question, allowing them to estimate sampling precision (see Appendix A for related technical information).

Percentages for some items may not add to 100 percent due to rounding, or because the question allowed for more than one response. In addition, the number of cases involved in subgroup analyses may not sum to the grand total who responded to the primary questionnaire item being analyzed. Reasons for this include some form of nonresponse on the grouping variable (e.g., "Don't Know" or "Refused"), or use of only selected subgroups in the analysis. Moreover, if one of the variables involved in the subgroup analysis appeared on both versions of the questionnaire but the other(s) appeared on only one questionnaire, then the subgroup analysis was restricted to data from only one version of the questionnaire.

The survey employed two questions to categorize cases for subgroup analyses involving race and ethnicity. The first asked respondents if they considered themselves to be Hispanic or Latino. Those who said "Yes" composed the Hispanic analytic subgroup in the study, those who said "No" composed a non-Hispanic comparison group. The second question was treated independently of the ethnicity question, i.e., it was asked of every respondent. The interviewers recited several different racial categories, and asked respondents which categories described them. Respondents could select more than one. For purposes of analysis, a respondent was assigned to a specific racial category if s/he selected only that category. The few respondents who selected multiple categories (fewer than 350 out of more than 12,000 cases) were analyzed as a separate multi-racial group. Because race and ethnicity were considered independently, each racial group could include both Hispanics and non-Hispanics, and the Hispanic analytic group included both Blacks and Whites.

The abbreviations DK and Ref are frequently listed as response categories in the report. DK stands for "Don't Know" and Ref stands for "Refused". For most questions, the persons who answered "Don't' Know" vastly outnumbered those who refused to answer the question.

2003 SURVEY RESULTS

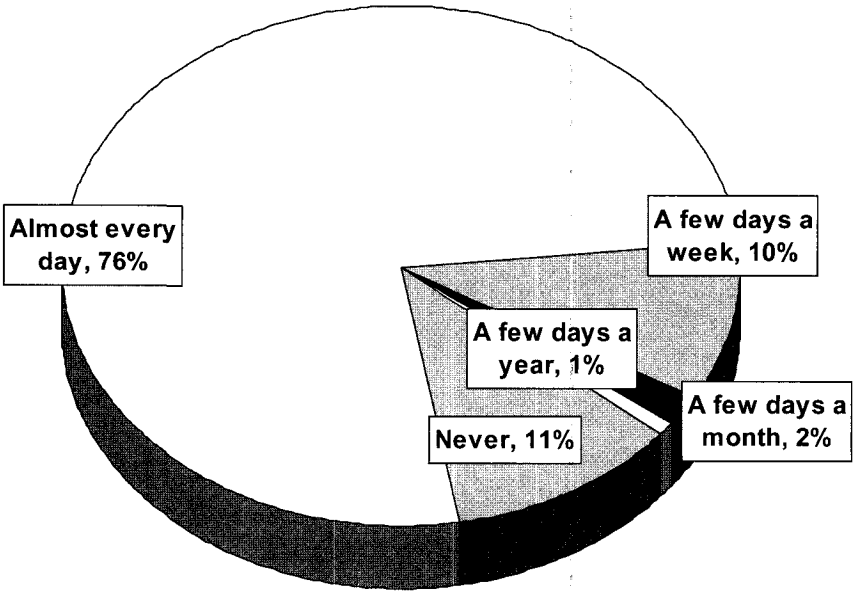
CHAPTER 1: SAFETY BELT USE

Prior to collecting detailed information on safety belt use, the survey asked respondents if they were drivers, and if so, what type of vehicle they most often drove. Drivers were then asked about the safety belt configuration in that vehicle. Only then did the survey query respondents about their safety belt use, defining it as usage **while driving their usual vehicle**. The questionnaire flow was designed to maximize consistency by giving all respondents a standard definition to use when discussing their belt use behavior.

Drivers And Vehicles

About nine-in-ten persons age 16 and older drive a motor vehicle. Three-in-four do so almost every day.

Figure 1
Driving Frequency



Qx: How often do you drive a motor vehicle? Almost every day, a few days a week, a few days a month, a few days a year, or do you never drive?

Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=12377

There were proportionally fewer drivers among the youngest and oldest age groups, racial and ethnic minorities (see page xx for group definitions), females and low-income households.

Table 1
Driving Frequency By Demographic Characteristics

Qx: How often do you drive a motor vehicle? Almost every day, a few days a week, a few days a month, a few days a year, or do you never drive?

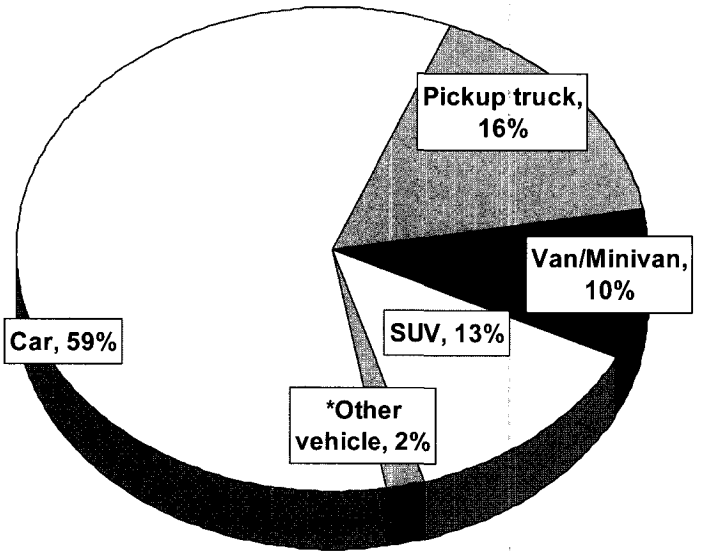
Base: Total population age 16+.

	Unweighted N	Almost every day	A few days a week	A few days a month	A few days a year	Never
Age						
16-20	(1058)	56%	14%	7%	2%	22%
21-24	(886)	77%	6%	3%	1%	13%
25-34	(2779)	80%	6%	2%	1%	11%
35-44	(2687)	86%	5%	1%	*	8%
45-54	(1847)	85%	6%	1%	1%	7%
55-64	(1286)	78%	11%	1%	1%	9%
65+	(1643)	58%	21%	4%	1%	15%
Gender						
Male	(5880)	81%	8%	2%	1%	8%
Female	(6497)	71%	11%	3%	1%	14%
Race						
Black	(1096)	65%	7%	4%	2%	22%
White	(9179)	80%	10%	2%	1%	7%
Asian	(276)	73%	10%	2%	1%	13%
Native American/ Alaskan Native	(240)	64%	14%	2%	1%	18%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	(47)	62%	7%	4%	3%	25%
Multi-race	(311)	67%	13%	2%	2%	16%
Ethnicity						
Hispanic	(1519)	58%	10%	3%	2%	28%
Non-Hispanic	(10744)	79%	10%	2%	1%	8%
Income						
<$15,000	(1360)	50%	16%	5%	1%	28%
$15,000-29,999	(1923)	68%	13%	3%	1%	15%
$30,000-49,999	(2508)	83%	8%	1%	*	7%
$50,000-74,999	(2088)	88%	6%	2%	*	4%
$75,000-99,999	(1113)	92%	3%	1%	1%	3%
>$100,000	(1318)	91%	6%	1%	*	2%

*Less than 0.5%. --No cases.

Many households have more than one motor vehicle. Since the type of safety equipment may vary from one vehicle to another, drivers were asked about the vehicle that they drive most often. Roughly six-in-ten drivers (59%) use a car as their primary vehicle, followed by 16% who drive a pickup truck, 13% who drive a sport utility vehicle (SUV), and 10% who drive a van or minivan.

Figure 2
Primary Vehicle Driven



Qx: Is the vehicle you drive most often a car, van, motorcycle, sport utility vehicle, pickup truck, or other type of truck?

Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

Unweighted N=11070

**Includes 1.1% other trucks, 0.3% motorcycles, 0.2% other, and 0.1% Not sure/Refused.*

The survey posed a series of questions to determine the type of safety belt installed in the front seat of the respondent's primary vehicle. The initial question asked whether it was a lap belt, shoulder belt, or both.

Safety belts in 92% of primary vehicles went across both the lap and shoulder. Differences were relatively small across vehicle types. Only 13 vehicles out of more than 11,000 reportedly had no safety belts in the front seat.

Table 2
Safety Belt Configuration By Type Of Primary Vehicle

Qx: For the next series of questions, please answer only for the (car/truck/van) you said you usually drive. Do the seat belts in the front seat of the (car/truck/van) go across your shoulder only, across your lap only, or across both your shoulder and lap?

Base: Vehicle driven most often is not a motorcycle.

Safety Belt Position	Total	Car	Van/Minivan	SUV	Pickup truck
	(N=**11039)	(N=6566)	(N=1049)	(N=1496)	(N=1753)
Across shoulder only	6%	7%	5%	4%	6%
Across lap only	1%	1%	1%	*	2%
Across both	92%	92%	93%	95%	92%
Vehicle has no belts	*	*	*	--	*
Not sure/Refused	*	*	*	*	*

*Less than 0.5%. --No cases. **Includes 133 other trucks, 24 other vehicles, and 18 not sure or didn't respond to vehicle type.

If the front seat safety belt went across both the shoulder and lap, the survey asked if it was one-piece or two separate belts and if the safety belts were automatic. Table 3 shows that 80% of front seat safety belts (in primary vehicles) were one-piece manual lap/shoulder systems. Relatively few safety belts (9%) had an automatic component, whether one-piece or two-piece. In addition, 6% of those with automatic belts said that they at least sometimes disconnected, disabled, or placed the belt behind them.

The results also suggested that some people may not fully understand their belt system. Dozens of respondents answered "Don't Know" to one or more basic belt configuration questions. In addition, two-piece lap/shoulder belts where both belts were automatic are not known to exist in the vehicle fleet (i.e., automatic lap belts have not been installed into production vehicles).

Table 3
Type Of Driver Safety Belt In Primary Vehicle

Qx: Do the seat belts in the front seat of the (car/truck/van) go across your shoulder only, across your lap only, or across both your shoulder and your lap?

Qx: Are the shoulder and lap belt one piece or are they two separate belts?

Qx: Are both the shoulder and lap belt automatic, is only the shoulder belt automatic or is neither the shoulder or lap belt automatic?

Qx: Is the shoulder belt automatic or do you have to fasten it?

Base: Vehicle driven most often has safety belts.

N	Belt system type	Description	Percent
10062	**One-piece systems**	**Only one buckle**	**91%**
124	Lap belt only	One belt that goes across the driver's lap.	1%
8897	Lap/shoulder-manual	Combination system that must be pulled and buckled by the driver.	80%
397	Lap/shoulder-automatic	Combination system that automatically fastens around the driver.	4%
568	Shoulder only-manual	One belt that goes across the driver's shoulder that must be pulled and buckled by the driver.	5%
74	Shoulder only-automatic	One belt that automatically fastens across the driver's shoulder.	1%
2	One-piece-NS/Ref	One-piece, don't know if automatic/refused to say.	*
894	**Two-piece systems**	**Two separate buckles for lap and shoulder belts.**	**8%**
412	Lap manual/ shoulder manual	Driver must pull and fasten each belt separately.	4%
399	Lap manual/ shoulder automatic	Belt automatically fastens across driver's shoulder but driver must pull and fasten lap belt.	4%
71	Lap automatic/ shoulder automatic	Each belt automatically fastens around the driver	1%
12	Two-piece-NS/Ref	Two-piece, not sure if automatic.	*
70	**Not sure**	**Not sure where belts cross, or if one-piece or two-piece**	**1%**

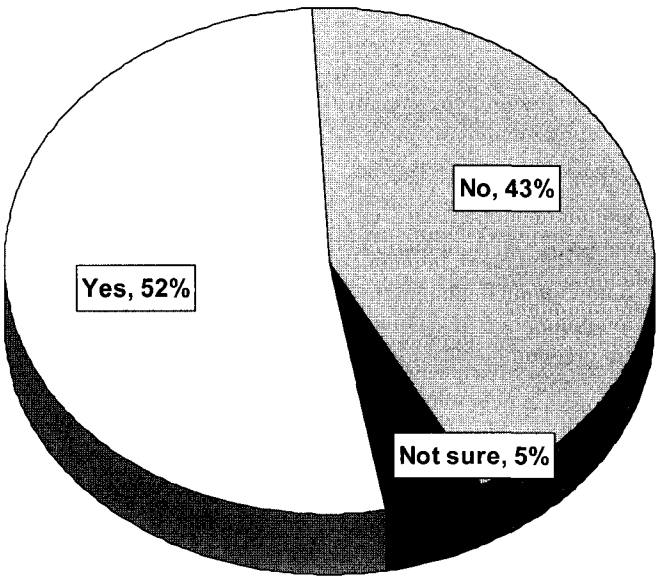
*Less than 0.5%.

Adjustable Shoulder Belt

Drivers were asked if their shoulder belts were adjustable (i.e., their attachment to the door or frame behind the driver's left shoulder can be moved up or down). This adjustment of the shoulder strap allows for a more comfortable fit.

More than half of all drivers said their shoulder belt was adjustable (52%) while 43% of drivers said that it was not. A small percentage (5%) said they were not sure.

Figure 3
Have Adjustable Shoulder Belt



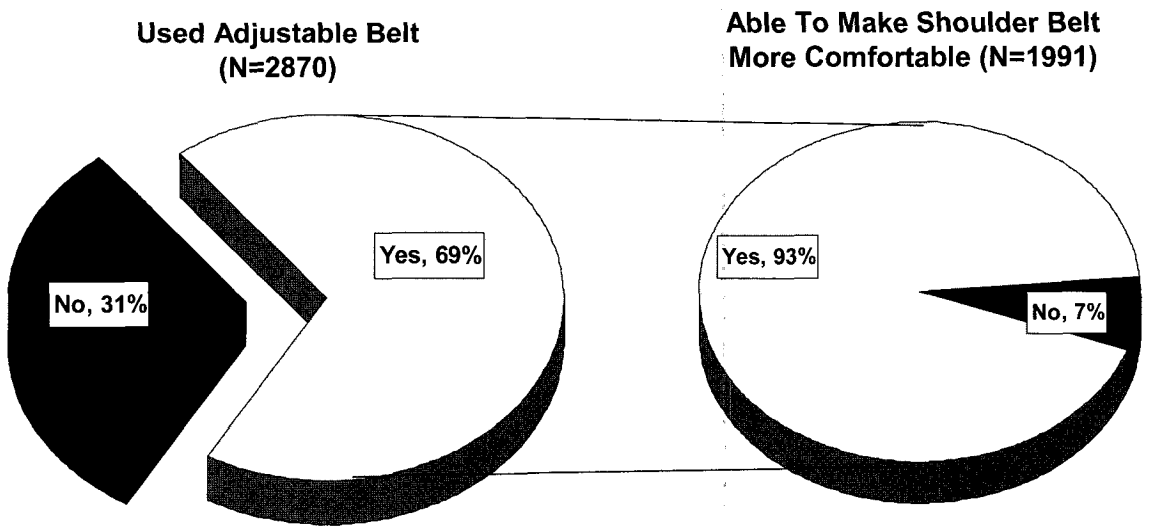
Qx: Shoulder belts are usually attached to the door or frame behind the driver's left shoulder. In some vehicles, this attachment can be moved up or down to adjust the shoulder belt. Is this attachment adjustable in your vehicle?

Base: Vehicle has safety belts across both lap and shoulder or across shoulder only.

Unweighted N=5470

About seven in ten drivers (69%) with adjustable shoulder belts said they had tried to adjust them. More than nine in ten (93%) said their adjustments made the belts more comfortable.

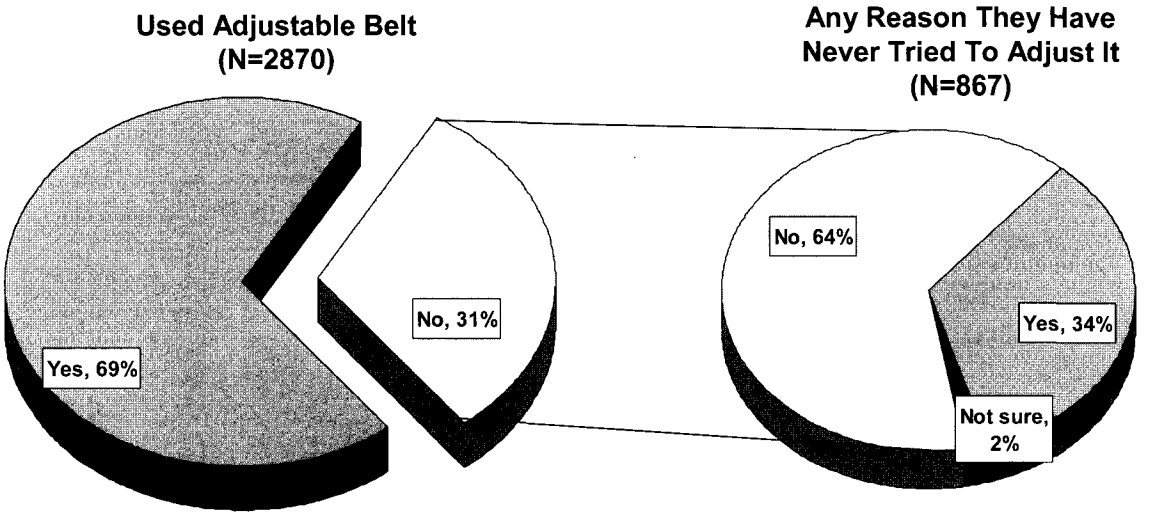
Figure 4
Effectiveness Of Adjustable Shoulder Belts



Qx: Have you ever tried to adjust it?
Qx: Were you able to make the shoulder belt more comfortable by adjusting it?
Base: Pie1: Vehicle has adjustable shoulder belts.
Pie 2: Tried to adjust belt.
Unweighted N's listed above.

About one-third of drivers did not use the adjustable feature on their shoulder belts. Most of them (64%) said there was no particular reason why they have never tried to use it. Those that gave a reason usually said it was because the belt already fit satisfactorily (see Table 4).

Figure 5
Any Reason Why They Have Never Tried To Adjust The Shoulder Belt



Qx: Have you ever tried to adjust it?
Qx: Is there any reason why you have never tried to adjust it?
Base: Pie1: Vehicle has adjustable shoulder belts.
Pie 2: Never tried to adjust belt.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Table 4
Reasons Why Drivers Have Never Tried To Adjust The Adjustable Feature On Their Shoulder Belt

Qx: What is the reason?

Base: Drivers with adjustable shoulder belts who said they never tried to adjust them, and said there was a reason why they had never tried to adjust them.

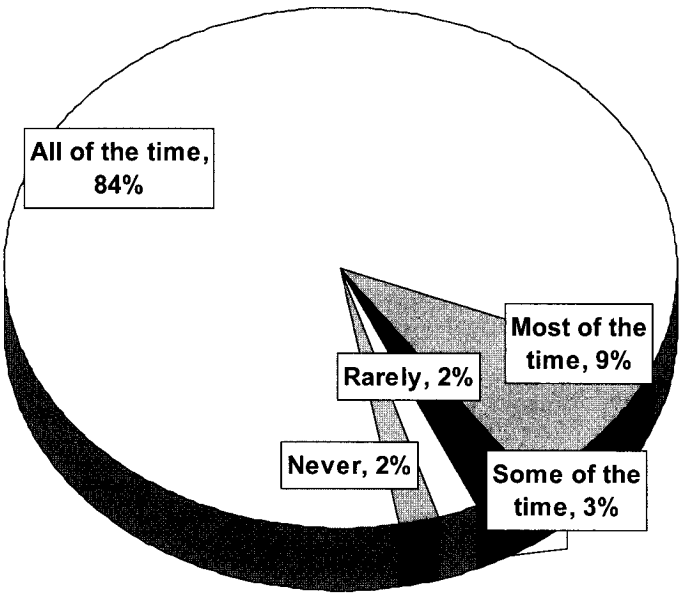
Unweighted N=304

Reason	Percent
Already fits/fits as is/it's fine where it is now.	73%
It was adjusted for me/they adjusted it to fit me.	1%
It's comfortable enough/comfortable as is.	20%
Never thought about it.	1%
Other miscellaneous responses.	4%
Not sure.	1%

Drivers' Use Of Safety Belts

The vast majority of drivers (84%) reported using their safety belt "all of the time" while driving. Most of the remaining drivers (9%) said they used their safety belt "most of the time." Few drivers reported that they rarely (2%) or never (2%) wore their safety belt.[2]

Figure 6
Reported Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use

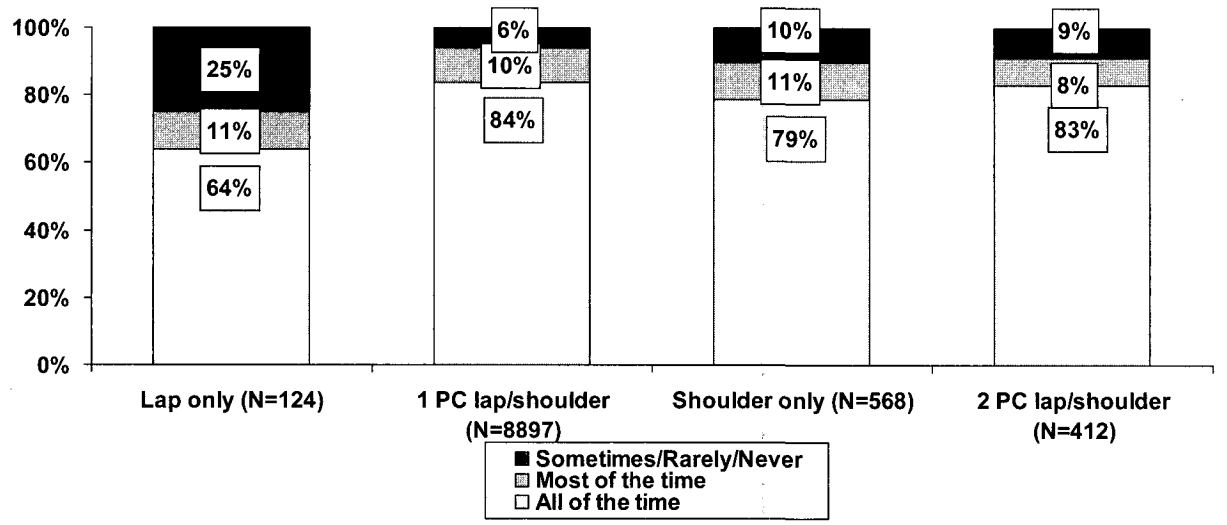


Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N=11005

[2] Frequency of safety belt use was determined by combining the two questions which asked how often drivers wore their lap belt and their shoulder belt. Values were assigned by taking the highest response for either question. For example, if a respondent stated that s/he wore a shoulder belt "all of the time" but a lap belt "most of the time", the respondent was assigned to the category "all of the time".

Drivers were most likely to wear safety belts all of the time if the belts had both a lap and shoulder strap, either attached as a one-piece system (84%) or separated into a two-piece system (83%). Shoulder only systems corresponded with somewhat lower usage (79%), while lowest usage occurred in vehicles with lap only systems (64%).

Figure 7
Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use: Belts Not Having Automatic Components



Qx: Do the seat belts in the front seat of the (car/truck/van) go across your shoulder only, across your lap only, or across both your shoulder and lap?

Qx: Are the shoulder and lap belts one piece or are they two separate belts?

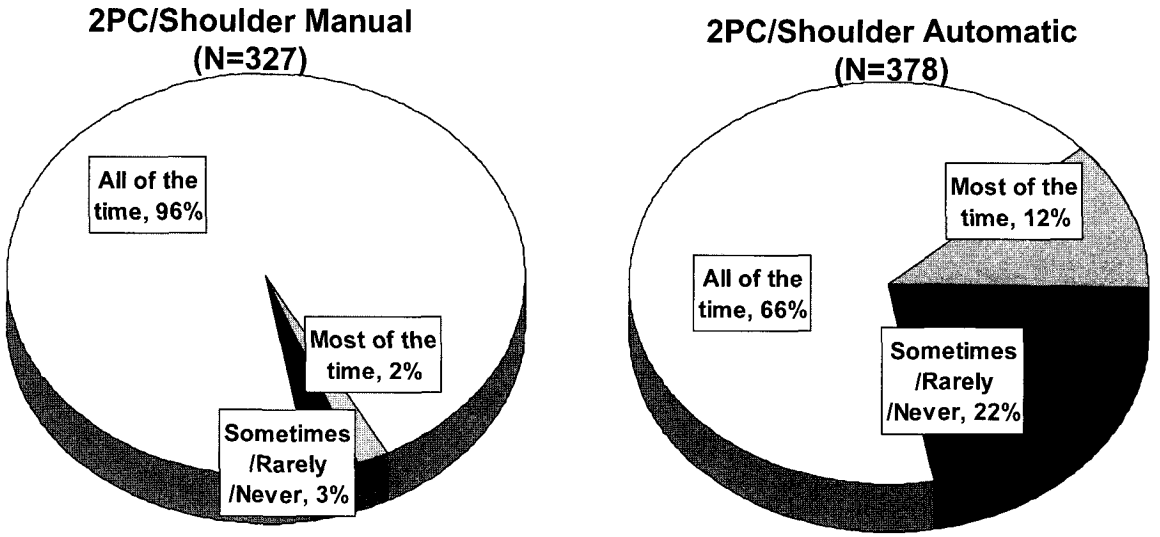
Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

Base: Drivers whose safety belts have no automatic component.

Unweighted N's listed above.

A key question about two-piece belt systems is whether persons who wear their shoulder belt also put on their lap belt (lap and shoulder belts used together are the most effective form of restraint for preventing injuries and fatalities). Figure 8 shows that if the shoulder belt was manual and used all of the time, 96% of drivers said that they also wore their lap belt all of the time. But if the shoulder belt was automatic and used all of the time, then 66% said they wore their lap belt all of the time [this analysis excluded systems reported to have both an automatic lap belt and an automatic shoulder belt because they were considered to be errors in belt identification by respondents].

Figure 8
Frequency Of Driver Lap Belt Use:
Shoulder Belt Used All The Time



Qx: Are the shoulder and lap belt one piece or are they two separate belts?

Qx: Are both the shoulder and lap belt automatic, is only the shoulder belt automatic or is neither the shoulder or lap belt automatic?

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (lap/shoulder) belt?

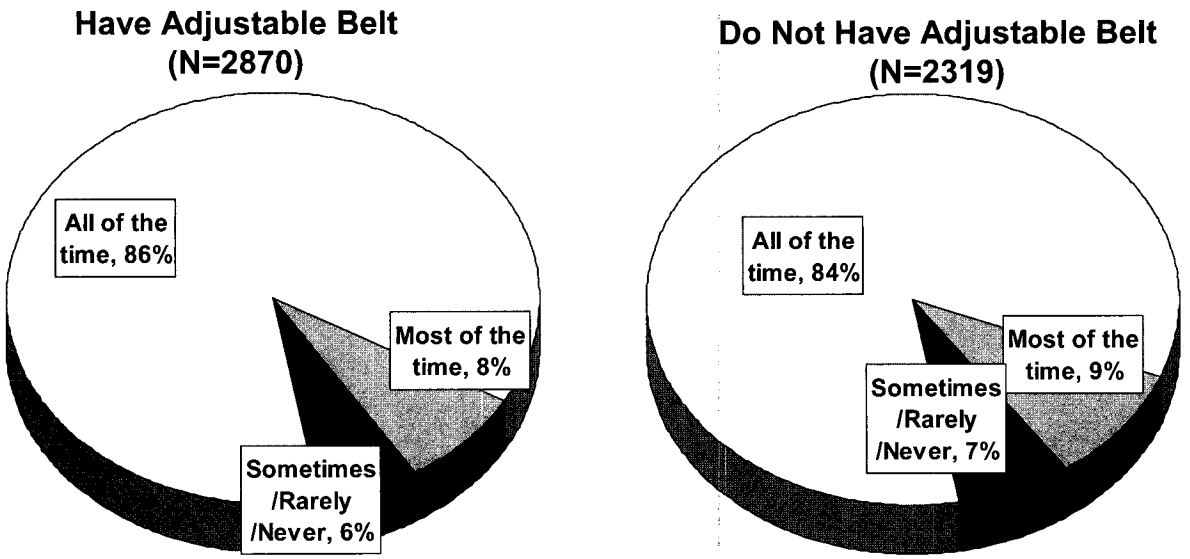
Base: Drivers with two-piece belt systems (lap belt is manual) who always use their shoulder belt.

Unweighted N's listed above.

**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

Since drivers who use the adjustable feature on shoulder belts are usually able to make themselves more comfortable (see page 8), analyses were conducted to assess whether the presence of an adjustable shoulder belt corresponded with higher belt usage. Figure 9 shows the results. Eighty-six percent of drivers who had adjustable shoulder belts reported using their shoulder belt "all of the time" compared to 84% of drivers who did not have shoulder belts with the adjustable feature.

Figure 9
Frequency Of Driver Shoulder Belt Use: Adjustable Versus Non-Adjustable Shoulder Belts



Qx: Shoulder belts are usually attached to the door or frame behind the driver's left shoulder. In some vehicles, this attachment can be moved up or down to adjust the shoulder belt. Is this attachment adjustable in your vehicle?

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has shoulder belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Group Differences In Reported Safety Belt Use

Table 5 presents group differences in reported safety belt use by drivers while driving. The "all of the time" response category is the primary index employed by this survey to describe level of safety belt use. It therefore provides a good point of reference for readers to focus on while reviewing the Table.

One of the largest differentiating factors in belt use was the gender of the driver. Females (89%) were significantly more likely to report "all of the time" use than males (79%). Another differentiating factor was the type of primary vehicle driven, with pickup truck drivers (71%) less likely to report "all of the time" use than drivers of cars (88%), vans/minivans (87%), or SUVs (86%). In addition, drivers in rural areas (77%) were less likely than those in urban (86%) or suburban areas (86%) to report "all of the time" use. A linear relationship between usage and income or education failed to materialize. However, the analysis indicated that drivers at the highest educational levels were most likely to report wearing safety belts "all of the time."

Younger drivers were less likely than older drivers to wear safety belts. The percentage of drivers ages 16-20 (79%) and 21-24 (79%) who reported "all of the time" safety belt use was lower than the percentage for the overall population (84%).

Blacks (83%) were similar to Whites (84%) in reported "all of the time" use.[3] The figure for Hispanics (88%) was somewhat higher than that for non-Hispanics (84%). It bears noting that a large proportion of Hispanics in the study sample resided in states whose safety belt laws contained provisions permitting standard (as opposed to secondary) enforcement of safety belt violations.[4] In particular, a substantial proportion of the Hispanic sample resided in California, which has standard enforcement provisions as well as the second highest observed safety belt usage rate of any state according to 2002 figures.

Table 5 also lists reported safety belt usage by weight and height for each gender. Four years ago, the weight and height groups for analysis were determined by separating males and females into approximate quartiles. Inspection of the 2003 data showed the separation points used in 1998 and 2000 to be reasonable for the current data. Thus, the analysis presented in Table 5 uses groups comparable to those in 1998 and 2000. The 2003 data shows lower belt use among males in the heaviest weight quartile. There was no pattern among females. There was little variability in reported belt use according to reported height except for slightly higher belt use among males under 5'9" in 2003.

[3] See operational definition on page xx

[4] See page 134 for more information on standard and secondary enforcement

Table 5
Driver Safety Belt Use By Demographic And Other Characteristics

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van), how often do you wear your (lap/shoulder) belt?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

	Unweighted N	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never
Total	(11005)	84%	9%	3%	2%	2%
Gender						
Male	(5346)	79%	12%	4%	2%	3%
Female	(5659)	89%	6%	3%	1%	1%
Age						
16-20	(827)	79%	11%	5%	4%	2%
21-24	(778)	79%	12%	5%	3%	2%
25-34	(2502)	82%	9%	4%	2%	2%
35-44	(2488)	84%	9%	3%	2%	2%
45-54	(1705)	85%	9%	3%	1%	2%
55-64	(1169)	84%	10%	3%	1%	2%
65+	(1373)	90%	6%	2%	1%	1%
Race						
Black	(871)	83%	10%	4%	2%	1%
White	(8477)	84%	9%	4%	2%	2%
Asian	(240)	92%	6%	1%	--	1%
Native American/ Alaskan Native	(189)	82%	9%	3%	1%	4%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	(35)	88%	7%	6%	--	--
Multi-race	(265)	83%	9%	3%	2%	4%
Ethnicity						
Hispanic	(1117)	88%	7%	3%	1%	1%
Non-Hispanic	(9795)	84%	9%	4%	2%	2%
Education						
11 or less	(1170)	82%	9%	4%	3%	3%
HS grad/GED	(3228)	80%	11%	5%	2%	3%
Some college	(2599)	84%	9%	3%	2%	2%
College grad	(3924)	88%	8%	3%	1%	1%

*Less than 0.5%. --No cases.

Table 5 (Continued)
Driver Safety Belt Use By Demographic And Other Characteristics

	Unweighted N	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never
Income						
<$15,000	(976)	85%	8%	4%	2%	2%
$15,000-29,999	(1649)	82%	10%	4%	2%	2%
$30,000-49,999	(2345)	83%	9%	4%	2%	2%
$50,000-74,999	(2012)	83%	9%	4%	2%	2%
$75,000-99,999	(1082)	84%	9%	3%	2%	1%
>$100,000	(1281)	84%	9%	4%	2%	1%
Child under age 16 in household	(4411)	84%	10%	3%	2%	2%
No child under 16 in household	(6570)	85%	8%	4%	2%	2%
Urbanicity						
Urban	(3070)	86%	8%	3%	1%	1%
Suburban	(5452)	86%	7%	3%	1%	2%
Rural	(2483)	77%	13%	5%	3%	2%
Vehicle type						
Car	(6553)	88%	8%	3%	1%	1%
Van/Minivan	(1046)	87%	6%	4%	1%	1%
Pickup truck	(1744)	71%	15%	6%	4%	4%
SUV	(1492)	86%	9%	3%	1%	1%
Injured in crash						
Yes	(3126)	84%	9%	3%	2%	2%
No	(7861)	84%	9%	4%	2%	1%

Table 5 (Continued)
Driver Safety Belt Use By Demographic And Other Characteristics

	Unweighted N	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never
Weight						
Males						
<163 lbs.	(595)	84%	9%	4%	1%	2%
163-180 lbs.	(627)	85%	9%	3%	1%	2%
181-205 lbs.	(679)	79%	12%	4%	3%	2%
206+ lbs.	(743)	74%	13%	5%	3%	4%
Females						
<126 lbs.	(635)	89%	7%	3%	1%	*
126-140 lbs.	(690)	91%	6%	2%	1%	*
141-160 lbs.	(623)	92%	6%	1%	*	1%
161+ lbs.	(764)	87%	6%	4%	1%	2%
Height						
Males						
<5'9"	(752)	83%	8%	5%	1%	3%
5'9"-5'10"	(652)	79%	12%	4%	2%	3%
5'11"-6'0"	(679)	80%	13%	4%	1%	2%
6'1" +	(551)	78%	11%	4%	4%	3%
Females						
<5'3"	(681)	90%	6%	2%	1%	*
5'3"-5'4"	(742)	90%	6%	2%	1%	*
5'5"-5'6"	(692)	90%	6%	2%	1%	*
5'7" +	(666)	88%	5%	3%	1%	2%

Relating Safety Belt Use To Other (Problem) Behaviors

Past research has suggested that persons who do not wear their safety belt are more likely to engage in other unsafe or unhealthy behaviors. The Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey asked questions about alcohol use and driving speed. Tables 6 and 7 show drivers' reported belt use according to how persons answered these questions.

Whether or not persons had consumed alcohol in the recent past did not make much difference in reported safety belt use. Rather, what seemed to matter was the manner in how people drank. Those drivers who typically consumed 1 drink when drinking reported the highest belt use among drinkers: 89% said they wore their safety belt all of the time. The percentage who said "all of the time" declined to 83% for those who averaged 2-3 drinks, 75% for those who averaged 4-6 drinks, and 61% for those who averaged more than 6 drinks. Among those persons who stated that they had driven a vehicle after drinking alcohol within the past 30 days, 78% claimed they wore their safety belt all of the time while driving. If they acknowledged driving when they thought they had consumed too much alcohol to drive safely, all of the time use fell to 63% (although the number of persons who reported that they drove after drinking too much was small).

Reported safety belt use was lower among persons who tended to drive faster than others. The survey asked drivers which statement best described their highway driving: "I tend to pass other cars more often than other cars pass me" or "Other cars tend to pass me more often." Those who tended to pass others were less likely to report wearing their safety belt all of the time (79% compared to 87% of those who tended to be passed). The survey also asked how fast the respondents generally drove on highways. Those who tended to drive more than 70 miles per hour were less likely to report wearing safety belts compared to slower drivers (80% versus 86%).

Table 6
Driver Safety Belt Use By Alcohol Use

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van), how often do you wear your (lap/shoulder) belt?
Qx: During the past 30 days, have you had at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage, including liquor, beer, wine or wine coolers?
Qx: Did you drink any alcoholic beverages at all during the past 12 months?
Qx: On the average, how many drinks did you typically have on the days you drank?
Qx: During the past 30 days, have you driven a vehicle after you had been drinking alcohol?
Qx: In the past 30 days, have you driven a vehicle when you thought you might have consumed too much alcohol to drive safely?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

	Unweighted N	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never
Alcohol Use						
Within past 30 days	(2973)	84%	10%	4%	2%	1%
In past year, but not in past 30 days	(783)	85%	9%	3%	1%	2%
Not in past year	(1771)	87%	6%	3%	1%	2%
Usual number of drinks						
1	(1419)	89%	7%	3%	1%	1%
2-3	(1720)	83%	11%	3%	1%	1%
4-6	(431)	75%	9%	7%	5%	4%
7 or more	(96)	61%	14%	6%	9%	10%
Drank and drove in past 30 days	(706)	78%	13%	4%	2%	2%
Drank too much and drove in past 30 days	(44)	63%	19%	4%	6%	8%

Table 7
Driver Safety Belt Use By Driving Speed

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van), how often do you wear your (lap/shoulder) belt?
Qx: Which statement best describes your highway driving: I tend to pass other cars more often than other cars pass me, or other cars tend to pass me more often?
Qx: In general, how fast do you drive on highways?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

	Unweighted N	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely	Never
I tend to pass other cars more often	(1786)	79%	11%	5%	3%	3%
Other cars tend to pass me more often	(3276)	87%	8%	3%	1%	1%
Neither, I drive the same as most others	(254)	90%	5%	3%	1%	1%
Both, I pass others, and others pass me	(150)	85%	7%	3%	2%	2%
Normal speed on highway						
55 or less	(910)	86%	9%	2%	1%	1%
56-60	(877)	86%	8%	3%	1%	1%
61-70	(2697)	86%	8%	4%	1%	1%
More than 70	(895)	80%	10%	5%	3%	2%

Clarifying Reported Usage

Questionnaire development during 1994 included cognitive testing. During the testing, subjects were asked how often they wore their safety belt while driving their vehicle. Most said "all of the time." The interviewers then followed that question with a cognitive probe, asking the subjects when was the last time they did not wear their safety belt while driving. A number of persons who had just previously said that they wore their safety belt "all of the time" while driving responded "yesterday" or even that very morning.

It appeared that some subjects chose to interpret the initial usage question in a way that differed from the exact wording of the item, so NHTSA included the cognitive probe in the survey. Seven percent[5] of drivers who said that they wore their safety belts "all of the time" immediately acknowledged not using their safety belt while driving in the past day or week. Seventy-one percent of self-reported "most of the time" users admitted recent non-use, indicating that usage by at least some people in this category may be much more sporadic than the label would suggest. In general, the data implied a significant difference in usage between the "all of the time" and "most of the time" categories.

Table 8
Last Time Drivers Did Not Wear Safety Belt
By Frequency Of Reported Safety Belt Use

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van), how often do you wear your (lap/shoulder) belt?
Qx: When was the last time you did not wear your seat belt (neither lap nor shoulder) while driving?
Qx: Has there been any occasion in the past 12 months when you did not wear your seat belt (neither lap nor shoulder) when driving?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion wear safety belts.

Last time safety belt not worn	All of the time (N=9213)	Most of the time (N=1004)	Some of the time (N=389)	Rarely (N=188)
Today	3%	24%	57%	68%
Past week	5%	47%	35%	25%
Past month	4%	15%	5%	3%
Past year	4%	3%	1%	2%
Not sure/Within past year	1%	2%	1%	*
Year or more ago	84%	7%	1%	1%

[5] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Table due to rounding.

Revised Safety Belt Use

Table 9 shows what happens when "all of the time" users who conceded to not wearing their safety belt in the past day or week while driving were subtracted from the "all of the time" category. The percentage of "all of the time" belt users declined 6 percentage points, from 84% to 78%.

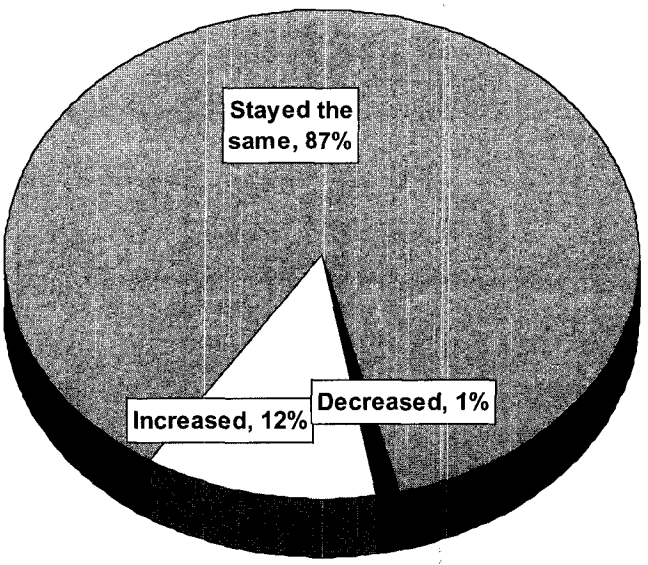
Table 9
Revised Safety Belt Use By Drivers

	All of the time (Excludes past day or week non-users)	All of the time **But** Past day or week non-use	Most of the time	Some of the time/Rarely/ Never
Total drivers	78%	**6%**	9%	7%
Male	73%	**6%**	12%	9%
Female	84%	**6%**	6%	4%
Black	76%	**7%**	10%	6%
White	78%	**6%**	9%	7%
Age 16-24	71%	**8%**	11%	10%
Age 25-69	79%	**6%**	9%	7%
Age 70+	84%	**7%**	6%	4%
Passenger cars	81%	**6%**	8%	5%
Pickup trucks	64%	**6%**	15%	14%
Urban	80%	**6%**	8%	6%
Suburban	81%	**5%**	7%	6%
Rural	70%	**7%**	13%	9%

Reported Changes In Belt Use

Besides questioning drivers about their current safety belt usage, the survey asked respondents whether their use of safety belts when driving had changed in the past 12 months. Most (87%) said that their usage had stayed the same. Twelve percent answered that it had increased, while 1% reported a decrease.

Figure 10
Reported Change In The Use Of Safety Belts By Drivers



Qx: In the past 12 months, has your use of seat belts when driving (car driven most often) increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N=5540

Regional Differences

NHTSA segments the country into ten regions for programmatic outreach. Table 10 shows both change in belt use and frequency of belt use reported across the ten regions. No more than 1% of drivers in any region reported that their use of safety belts in the past year when driving had decreased. The percentage of drivers who said that their usage had increased ranged from 8% in NHTSA Region IX to 15% in NHTSA Regions I and VII. In some regions, small 12-month increases may reflect higher pre-existing usage rates that limited the amount of potential gain. For example, Region IX recorded the highest overall usage rate (92% said they wore their safety belts all of the time) and lowest increase (8%). Readers are cautioned that some of the regional percentages are based on small numbers. In particular, Regions I (n=275), VII (n=257), VIII (n=201), and X (n=246) all included fewer than 300 cases in computing the percentage increase/decrease.

Table 10
Patterns Of Reported Driver Safety Belt Use By NHTSA Region

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van), how often do you wear your (lap/shoulder) belt?
Qx: In the past 12 months, has your use of seat belts when driving (car driven most often) increased, decreased or stayed the same?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

NHTSA regions	States	Change in safety belt use within past year (N=5540)		Percent of drivers reporting using safety belt "All of the time" (N=11005)
		Increased	Decreased	
I	CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT	15%	1%	76%
II	NJ, NY	11%	*	88%
III	DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV	11%	1%	80%
IV	AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN	14%	1%	82%
V	IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI	12%	1%	83%
VI	AR, LA, NM, OK, TX	13%	*	86%
VII	IA, KS, MO, NE	15%	*	79%
VIII	CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY	13%	*	74%
IX	AZ, CA, HI, NV	8%	1%	92%
X	AK, ID, OR, WA	10%	1%	90%
	Total	**12%**	**1%**	**84%**

*Less than 0.5%.

Demographic Differences

Persons who were younger (25% for 16-20 year-olds), were not high school graduates (17%), or were Black (19%) were more likely to report that their use of safety belts as drivers had increased in the past 12 months.

Table 11
Reported Change In Driver's Use Of Safety Belts In The Past Year By Demographic Characteristics

Qx: In the past 12 months, has your use of seat belts when driving (car driven most often) increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

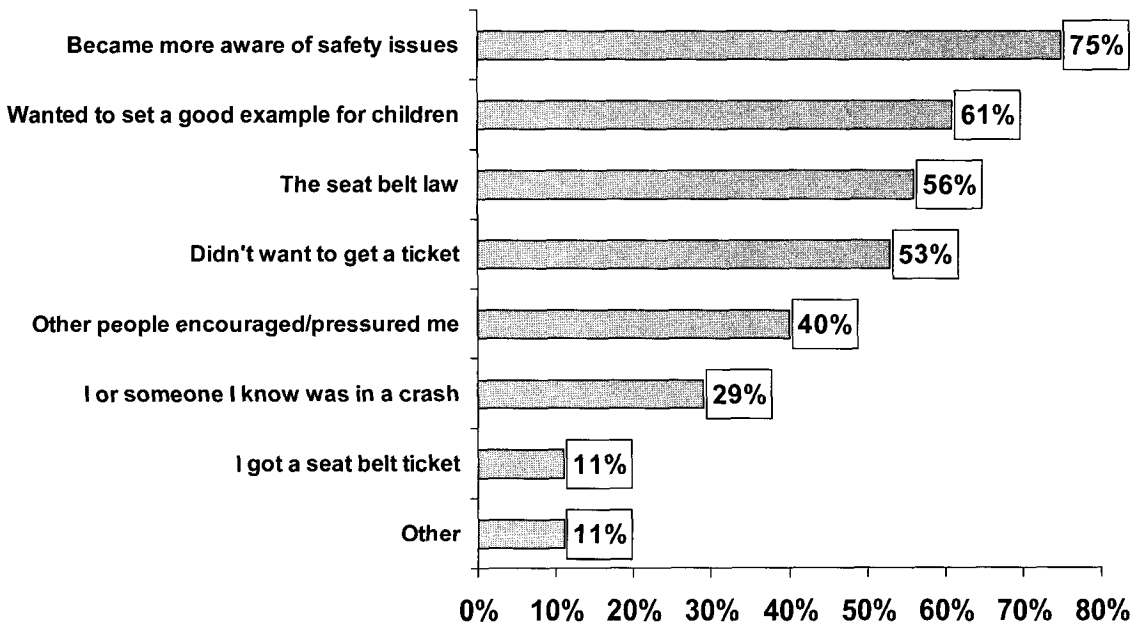
	Unweighted N	Increased	Decreased	Stayed the same
Age				
16-20	(420)	25%	2%	73%
21-24	(411)	18%	1%	81%
25-34	(1279)	12%	1%	86%
35-44	(1265)	12%	*	87%
45-54	(874)	10%	*	89%
55-64	(580)	10%	1%	88%
65+	(639)	7%	*	92%
Gender				
Male	(2684)	12%	1%	86%
Female	(2856)	12%	1%	87%
Race				
Black	(439)	19%	1%	80%
White	(4278)	11%	1%	88%
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	(555)	15%	1%	83%
Non-Hispanic	(4955)	12%	1%	87%
Education				
11 or less	(588)	17%	1%	81%
HS grad/GED	(1579)	14%	1%	85%
Some college	(1378)	13%	1%	86%
College grad	(1969)	8%	*	92%

*Less than 0.5%. -- No cases.

Reasons For Change

Drivers who said that their use of safety belts had increased over the past 12 months were asked what caused the change. The interviewers read seven potential reasons to the respondents, who then indicated for each whether it was a cause of their increased safety belt use. The interviewers also gave the respondents the opportunity to volunteer other reasons. Most often, the drivers ascribed their increased use of safety belts to a greater awareness of safety (75%) and wanting to set a good example for children (61%). Belt laws (56%), avoidance of a ticket (53%), and pressure from others (40%) also emerged as significant reasons. While 11% volunteered "other" reasons, these often elaborated on safety-related and child-related reasons.

Figure 11
Causes Of Increased Safety Belt Use

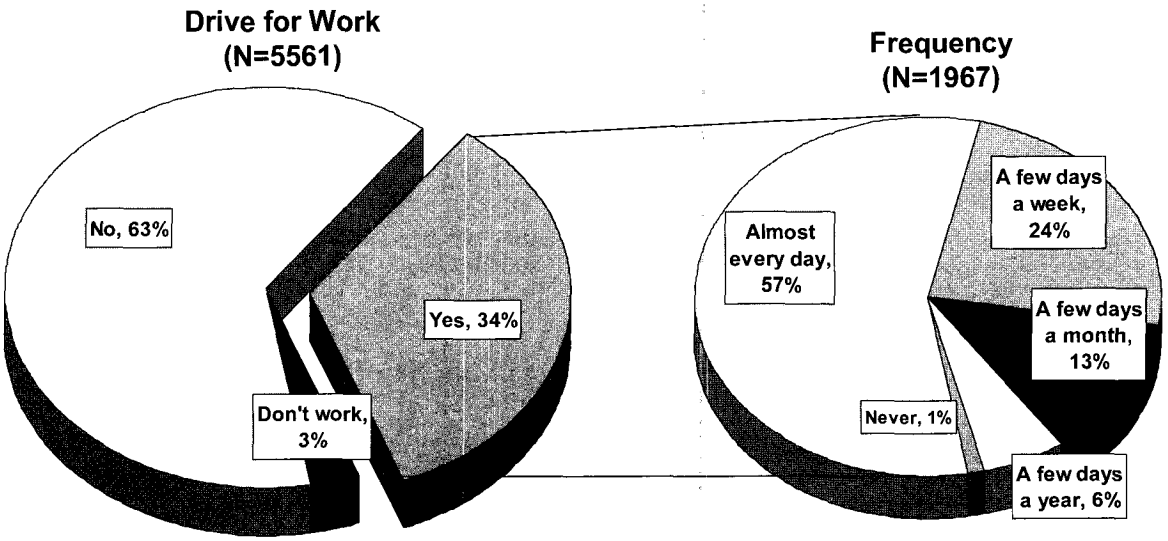


Qx: What caused the change? Was it because... ?
Base: Drivers who reported an increase in safety belt use over the past 12 months.
Unweighted N=680

Company Safety Belt Policy

Thirty-four percent of drivers at least sometimes drove a vehicle as part of a job or business (not including driving to and from work). This was more prevalent among males (43%) than females (25%). If someone drove on the job, it usually occurred at least several days a week. More than one-half (57%) of those who drove on the job said they did so almost every day, another 24% said they did so a few days a week.

Figure 12
Frequency Drive Vehicle As Part Of Job Or Business



Qx: Not including driving to and from work, do you at least sometimes drive a vehicle as part of a job or business?

Qx: How often do you drive a vehicle as part of a job or business? Almost every day, a few days a week, a few days a month, or a few days a year?

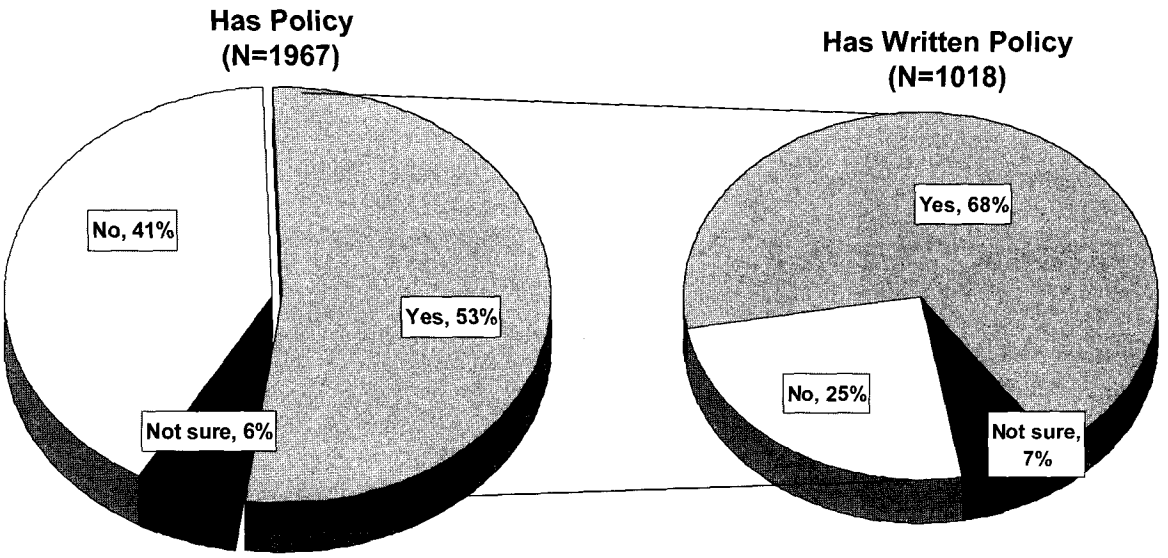
Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

Unweighted N's listed above.

**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

More than one-half of drivers (53%) who drove on the job believed their company had a policy requiring safety belt use when driving on the job. Forty-one percent said there was no policy and 6% were unsure. Among those who thought their company had a policy, 68% claimed it was a written policy. One-quarter (25%) did not believe the policy was written, and 7% were unsure. In total, 36% of those who drove as part of a job or business reported that their company had a written policy requiring the use of safety belts when driving on the job.

Figure 13
Presence Of Company Safety Belt Policy

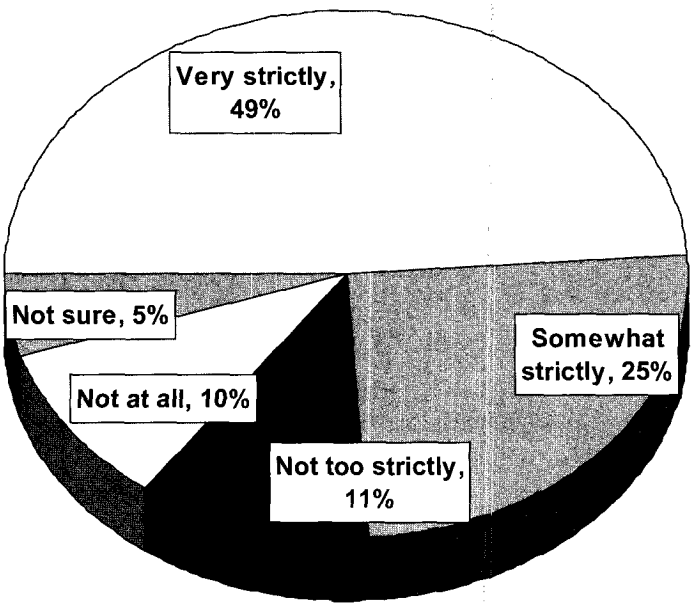


Qx: Does your company or business have a policy requiring seat belt use when driving on the job?
Qx: Is that a written policy?
Base: Drivers who drive on the job.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Company Enforcement Of Safety Belt Policy

If workers believed that their company had a safety belt policy, they also tended to believe that it was enforced at least to some degree. About one-half (49%) of drivers who drove on the job and believed their company had a safety belt policy said that the policy was enforced "very strictly." Another 25% stated that it was "somewhat strictly" enforced. About one-in-five persons answered that the policy was not too strictly enforced (11%) or not enforced at all (10%).

Figure 14
Enforcement Of Company Safety Belt Policy



Qx: How strictly does your company enforce its policy about wearing seat belts?
Base: Drives a vehicle as part of job and believes the company has a safety belt policy.
Unweighted N=1018

Company enforcement of safety belt policy may take the form of requests, notices, visual checks, warnings, suspensions, dismissals, or fines. Among drivers who drove on the job and reported at least some enforcement of their company safety belt policy, the most frequently identified approaches to enforcement were requests for cooperation from employees without attaching penalties (26%), suspensions or dismissals (18%), and warnings (15%). In addition, 24% said that the company "kept an eye out" to check that safety belts were being worn. Eight percent stated that belt use was essentially left up to the individual because the company didn't really enforce their policy.

Table 12
How Employer Enforces Safety Belt Policy

Qx: How does your company enforce its seat belt policy?

Base: Drives a vehicle as part of a job and believes company (very, somewhat, or not too strictly) enforces safety belt policy.

Unweighted N=849

Method	Percent
Ask to wear (no penalty specified)	**26%**
Boss/Supervisor asks employees to wear their seat belts	14%
Written notices/Posted instructions (unspecified)	7%
Safety meetings/Safety talk every week	4%
Written notice in company vehicle	2%
Any other asked to wear mentions	2%
Warnings	**15%**
Boss/Supervisor gives daily verbal warning	2%
Written reprimand in your file	9%
Initial warning	3%
Warning posted on your vehicle's window	*
Any other warning mentions	4%

Category totals may sum to less than the components listed due to multiple responses, coding decisions, and/or rounding.

Table 12 (Continued)
How Employer Enforces Safety Belt Policy

Method	Percent
Suspensions/dismissals	**18%**
After a single violation	6%
Suspension for noncompliance/Suspension after a warning	6%
After a couple of infractions you are fired/dismissed	5%
Other suspension/dismissal mentions	2%
Fined	**3%**
Fined/Fine deducted from paycheck	3%
Miscellaneous	**43%**
People keep eye out to see/check you are wearing seat belt	24%
Left up to individual/not really enforced	8%
Offender pays ticket	2%
Medical coverage is void if not wearing seat belt	1%
Any other miscellaneous mentions	10%
Not sure/No answer	**17%**

*Less than 0.5%.

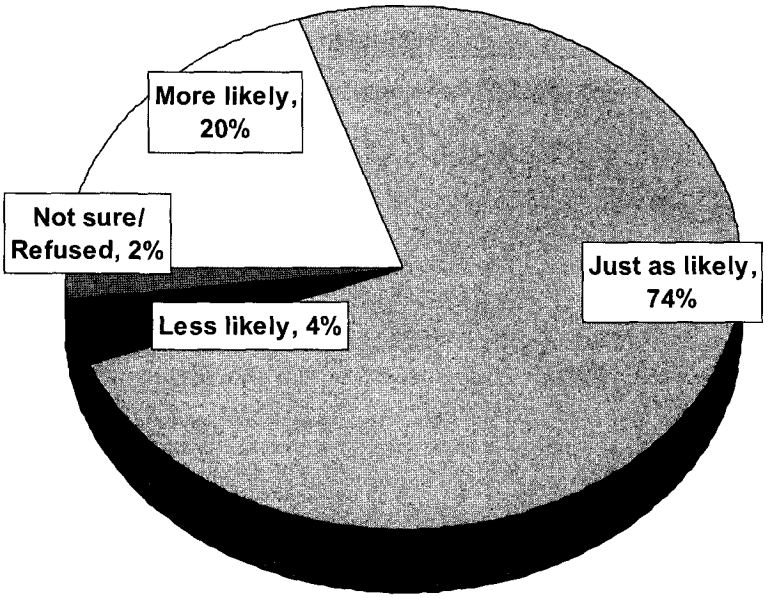
Categories sum to more than 100% because more than one response was allowed.

Safety Belt Use At Work And Company Policy

Those persons who drove as part of their job were asked if there was any difference in their safety belt use between their work and personal driving. Persons who had indicated that they never wore their belt when driving were not asked the question.

A majority of drivers (74%) said that there was no difference in their safety belt use when driving on the job as compared to when driving for personal use. However, 20% claimed they were more likely to wear their safety belts on the job, whereas 4% reported that they were less likely to wear them at work.

Figure 15
Likelihood Of Wearing Safety Belt: Work Compared To Personal Driving



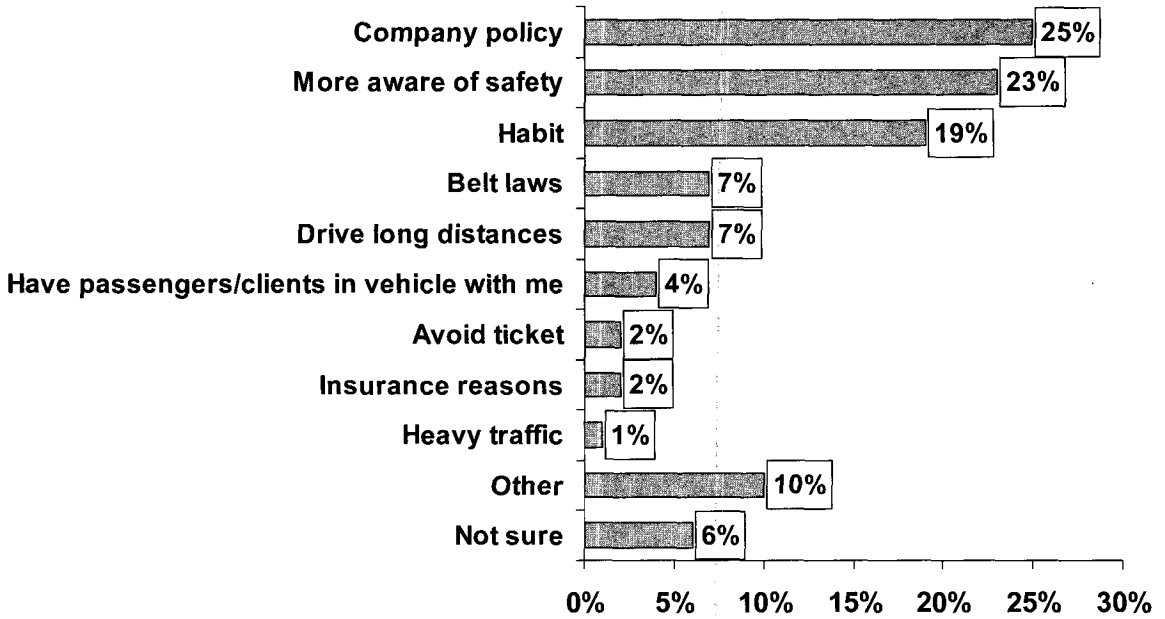
Qx: Are you more likely, less likely or just as likely to wear your seat belt when driving on the job as compared to when driving for personal use?

Base: Drives a vehicle as part of job and at least on occasion wears a safety belt.

Unweighted N=1902

Of those more likely to wear their safety belt when driving on the job, the most frequent reason was because of company policy (25%), followed by an increased awareness of safety (23%). Among the few drivers who said they wore their safety belt less frequently when driving on the job, the single most common reason was that they were in and out of the vehicle all of the time (34%).

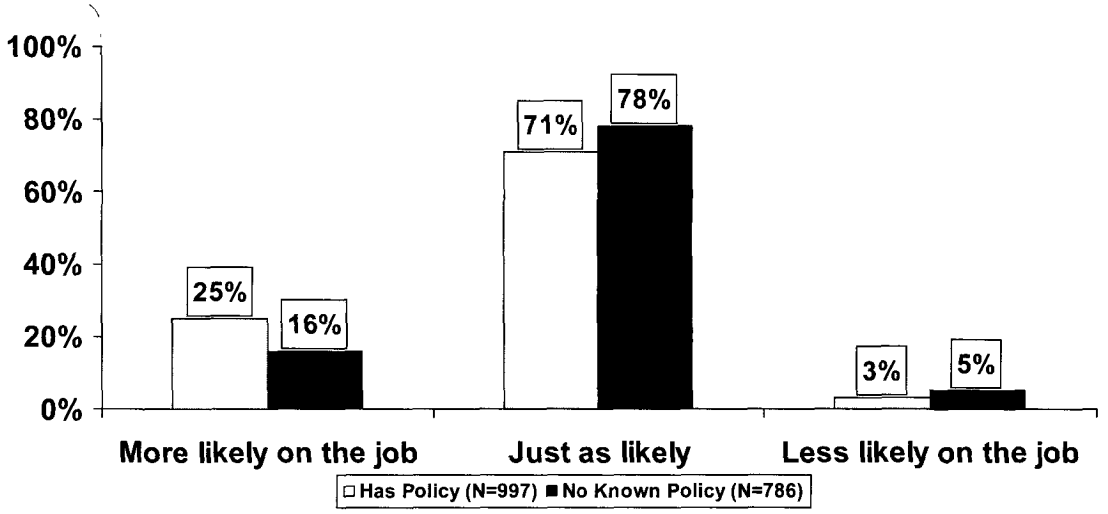
Figure 16
Causes Of Increased Belt Use When Driving On The Job



Qx: Why are you more likely to wear your belt when driving on the job?
Base: More likely to wear safety belt when driving on the job as compared to personal driving.
Unweighted N=378
Categories sum to more than 100% because more than one response was allowed.

A key question is whether or not the presence of a company safety belt policy affects employees' safety belt use. The item asking respondents to compare their safety belt use when driving for work to their usage during personal driving provides one means for exploring this issue. Figure 17 compares the responses to this question from drivers who thought their company had a safety belt policy to those who did not think there was a company policy. It shows that drivers were more likely to report higher safety belt use on the job if they believed their company had a safety belt policy (25% to 16%).

Figure 17
Drivers' Job Versus Personal Safety Belt Use By Presence Of Company Policy



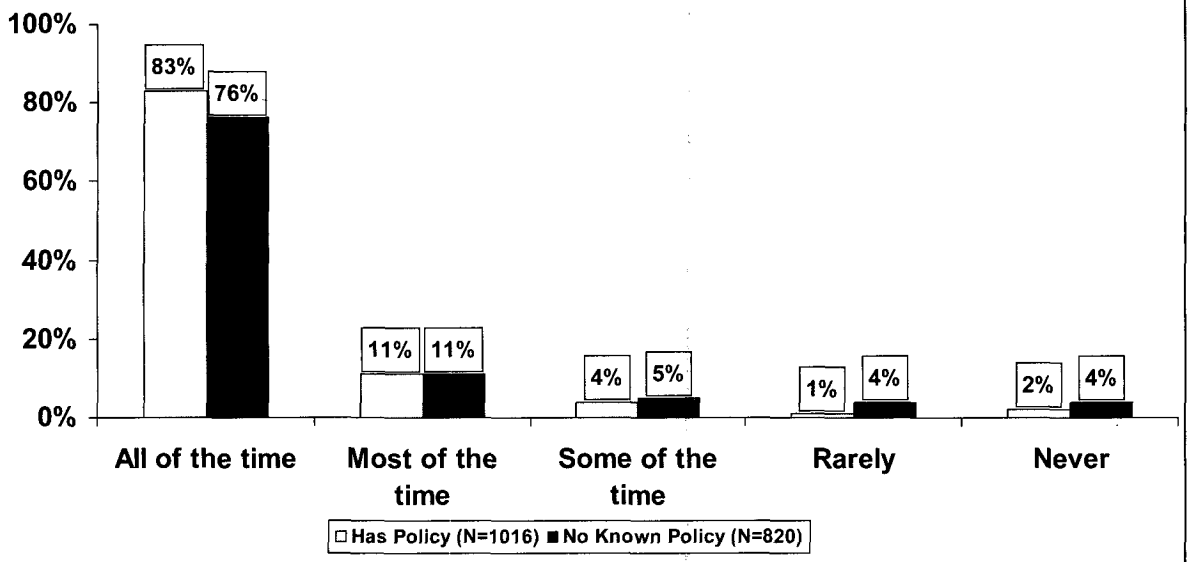
Qx: Does your company or business have a policy requiring seat belt use when driving on the job?

Qx: Are you more likely, less likely or just as likely to wear your seat belt when driving on the job as compared to when driving for personal use?

Base: Drives a vehicle as part of job, at least occasionally wears safety belt, and primary vehicle has safety belts. Unweighted N's listed above.

Figure 17 assessed whether company policies were associated with reported differences in safety belt usage between work and personal driving. However, it did not address the question of whether the presence of a company safety belt policy affected usage during both types of driving. Figure 18 looks at general reported safety belt usage (i.e., not associated with a particular type of driving) for persons who drove on the job and did, or did not, believe that their company had a safety belt policy. This analysis included persons who said they never wore their safety belts while driving. According to the data, 83% of drivers who thought their company had a policy said they wore their safety belts "all of the time" compared to 76% who did not think there was a company policy.

Figure 18
Drivers' General Safety Belt Use
By Presence Of Company Policy

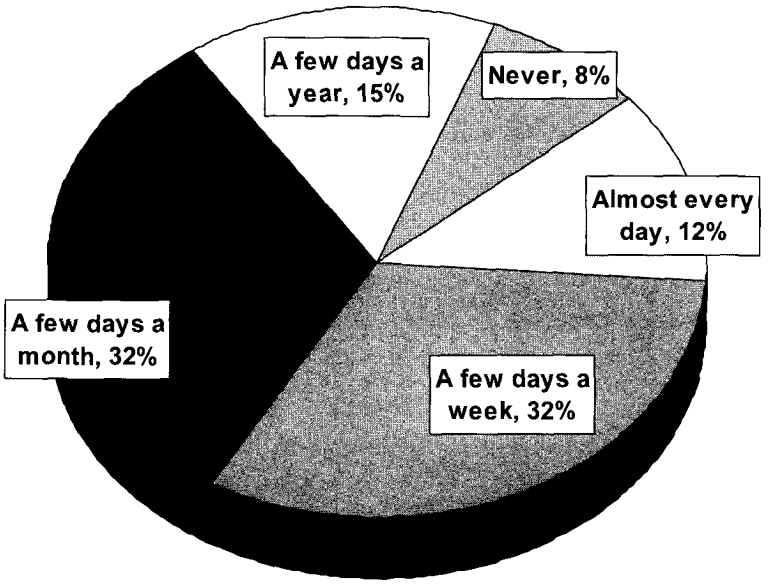


Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: Does your company or business have a policy requiring seat belt use when driving on the job?
Base: Drives a vehicle as part of job and primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Passenger Use Of Safety Belts

More than 90% of the public ride as passengers in motor vehicles at least on occasion. Twelve percent do so almost every day while larger numbers ride as passengers either a few days a week (32%) or a few days a month (32%).

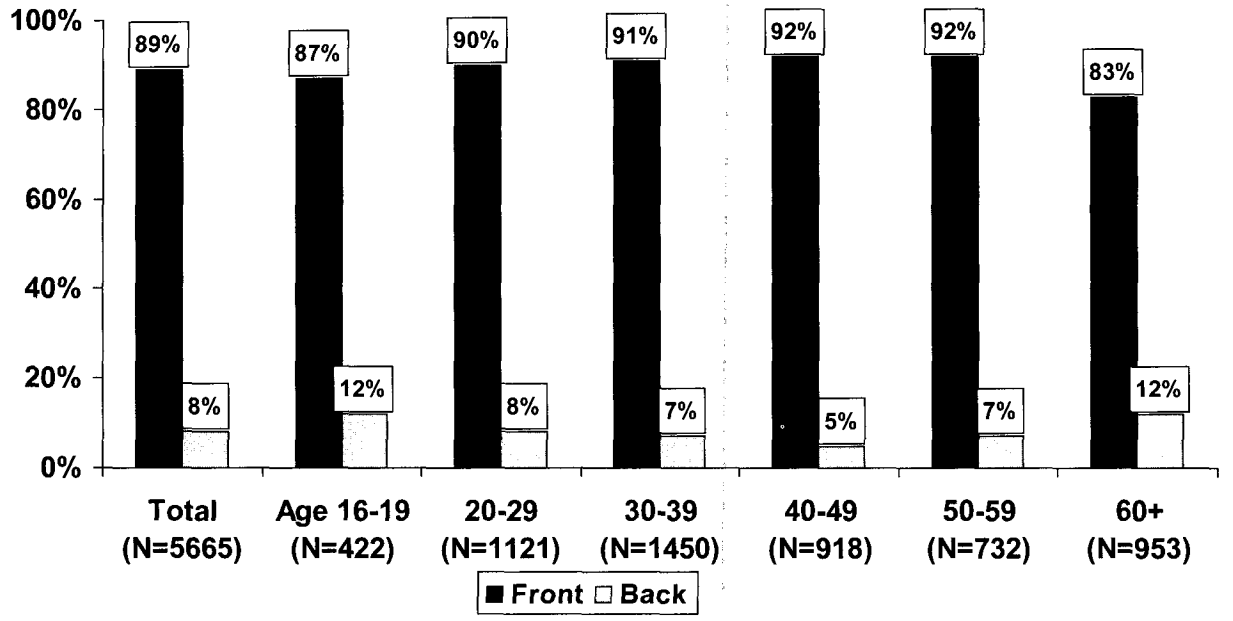
Figure 19
Frequency Ride As Passenger



Qx: How often do you ride as a passenger in any kind of car, van or truck?
Base: Total population age 16+.
Unweighted N=6180
**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

The vast majority of persons age 16 and older (89%) usually sit in the front seat when riding as passengers in motor vehicles. Eight percent usually sit in the back and 3% were unsure where they usually sat. Persons age 60 and older were least likely to usually sit in the front.

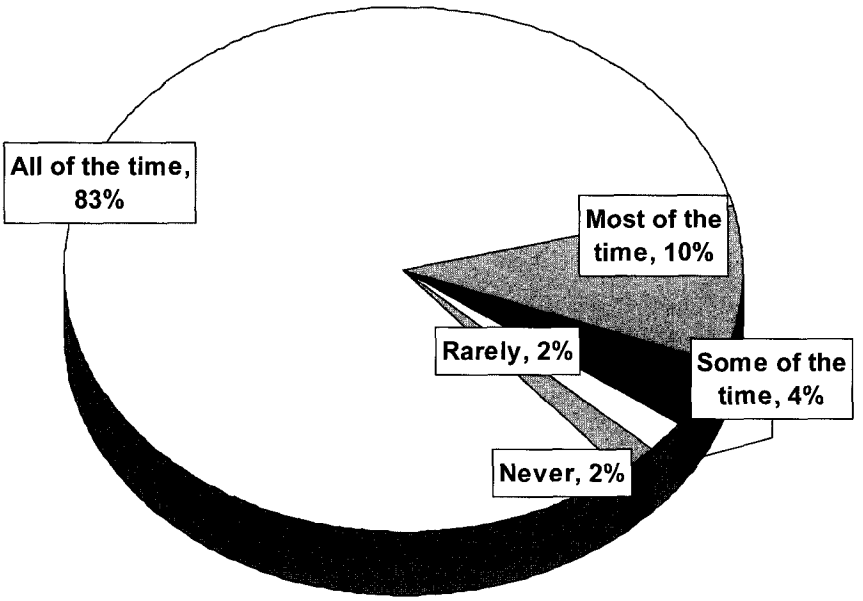
Figure 20
Usually Rides In Front Or Back Seat



Qx: When you are a passenger, do you usually ride in the front seat or the back seat?
Base: At least sometimes rides as a passenger.
Unweighted N's listed above.

As noted on page 11, 84% of drivers said that they used their safety belt "all of the time" while driving. Reported safety belt usage was about the same on the front seat passenger side at 83%

Figure 21
Reported Frequency Of Safety Belt Use As Passenger In Front Seat



Qx: When riding as a passenger in the front seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: At least sometimes rides as a passenger.
Unweighted N=5665
**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

Safety belt use may be affected by whether a person is sitting in his/her normal seating position as unusual situations could interfere with established habits. However, for the front seat passenger position, the data showed little difference in reported usage between persons who normally rode in the front as passengers and those who normally rode in the back. Eighty-two percent of persons who normally rode in the front seat as passengers said they always wore their safety belt when riding as front seat passengers. Eighty-six percent of those who normally rode in the back seat said they always wore their safety belt when riding as front seat passengers.

Table 13
Frequency Wear Safety Belt As Front Seat Passenger By Where Usually Ride As Passenger

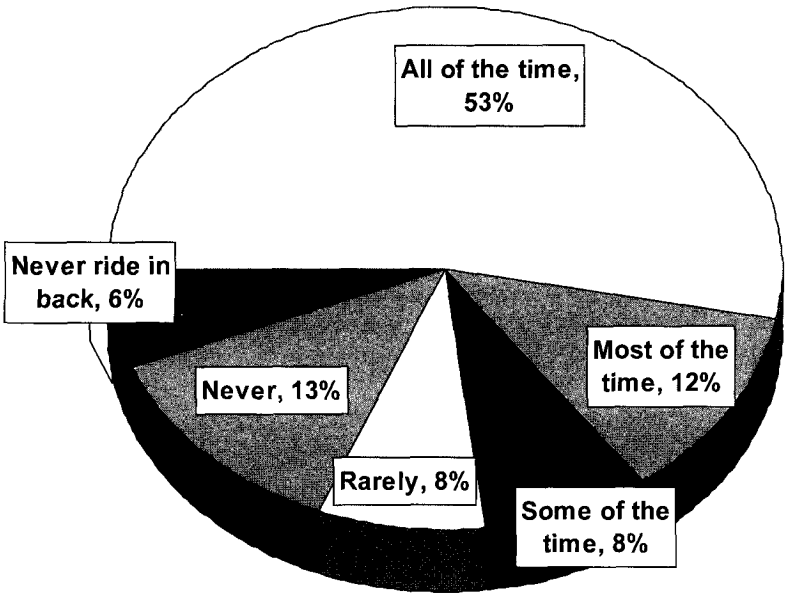
Qx: When you are a passenger, do you usually ride in the front seat or the back seat?
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the front seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: At least sometimes rides as a passenger.

Frequency of front seat passenger safety belt use	Where usually ride as a passenger		
	Front seat	Back seat	Not sure
	(N=5047)	(N=449)	(N=162)
All of the time	82%	86%	84%
Most of the time	10%	6%	8%
Some of the time	4%	4%	4%
Rarely	2%	1%	1%
Never	2%	1%	1%
Never ride in front seat	*	2%	2%
Not sure/Refused	*	*	*

*Less than 0.5%.

Safety belt use was substantially lower in the back seat passenger positions. Only 53% of persons said that they always wore their safety belt when riding as a passenger in the back seat. About one in eight (13%) reported never wearing safety belts in the back seat. It bears repeating, however, that the vast majority of adults usually rode in the front seat (see page 38).

Figure 22
Reported Frequency Of Safety Belt Use As Passenger In Back Seat



Qx: When riding as a passenger in the back seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: At least sometimes rides as a passenger.
Unweighted N=5665

As with the front seat (page 40), safety belt use in the back did not vary substantially according to the person's normal seating position. Fifty-two percent of those who normally rode in the front seat as passengers said they always wore their safety belt when riding in the back. Fifty-five percent of those who normally rode in the back seat said they always wore their safety belt when riding as back seat passengers.

Table 14
Frequency Wear Safety Belt As Back Seat Passenger By Where Usually Ride As Passenger

Qx: When you are a passenger, do you usually ride in the front seat or the back seat?
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the back seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: At least sometimes rides as a passenger.

Frequency of back seat passenger safety belt use	Where usually ride as a passenger		
	Front seat	Back seat	Not sure
	(N=5047)	(N=449)	(N=162)
All of the time	52%	55%	59%
Most of the time	12%	12%	17%
Some of the time	8%	11%	6%
Rarely	8%	9%	6%
Never	13%	13%	11%
Never ride in back seat	7%	*	1%
Not sure/Refused	*	*	*

*Less than 0.5%.

People were fairly consistent in their reported safety belt use as drivers and front seat passengers. More than nine-in-ten (93%) who said they used their safety belt all of the time when driving also said they wore their safety belt all of the time while riding as front seat passengers. About two-thirds (62%) of those who rarely or never wore their safety belts while driving also rarely or never used them as front seat passengers.

Table 15
Frequency Of Safety Belt Use As Driver By Frequency Of Safety Belt Use As Front Seat Passenger

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the front seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least sometimes ride as passengers.

Frequency of safety belt use as front seat passenger	Seat belt use as driver			
	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely/Never
	(N=4325)	(N=450)	(N=168)	(N=157)
All of the time	93%	31%	12%	14%
Most of the time	5%	57%	21%	11%
Some of the time	1%	9%	52%	12%
Rarely/Never	1%	3%	15%	62%
Never ride in front	*	--	--	--
Not sure/Refused	--	--	--	--

*Less than 0.5%. -- No cases.

Even those who normally wore their safety belts in the front seat were less inclined to wear their safety belts in the back. Only 61% of persons who said they always wore safety belts while driving also said they always wore them as back seat passengers. About two-fifths of persons who wore safety belts "most of the time" as drivers either always (13%) or most of the time (28%) wore them when riding in the back.

Table 16
Frequency Of Safety Belt Use As Driver By Frequency Of Safety Belt Use As Back Seat Passenger

Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the back seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least sometimes ride as passengers.

Frequency of safety belt use as back seat passenger	Seat belt use as driver			
	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Rarely/Never
	(N=4325)	(N=450)	(N=168)	(N=157)
All of the time	61%	13%	7%	5%
Most of the time	12%	28%	3%	2%
Some of the time	8%	12%	17%	1%
Rarely/Never	14%	38%	61%	82%
Never ride in back	6%	8%	12%	10%
Not sure/ Refused	*	1%	--	--

*Less than 0.5%. -- No cases.

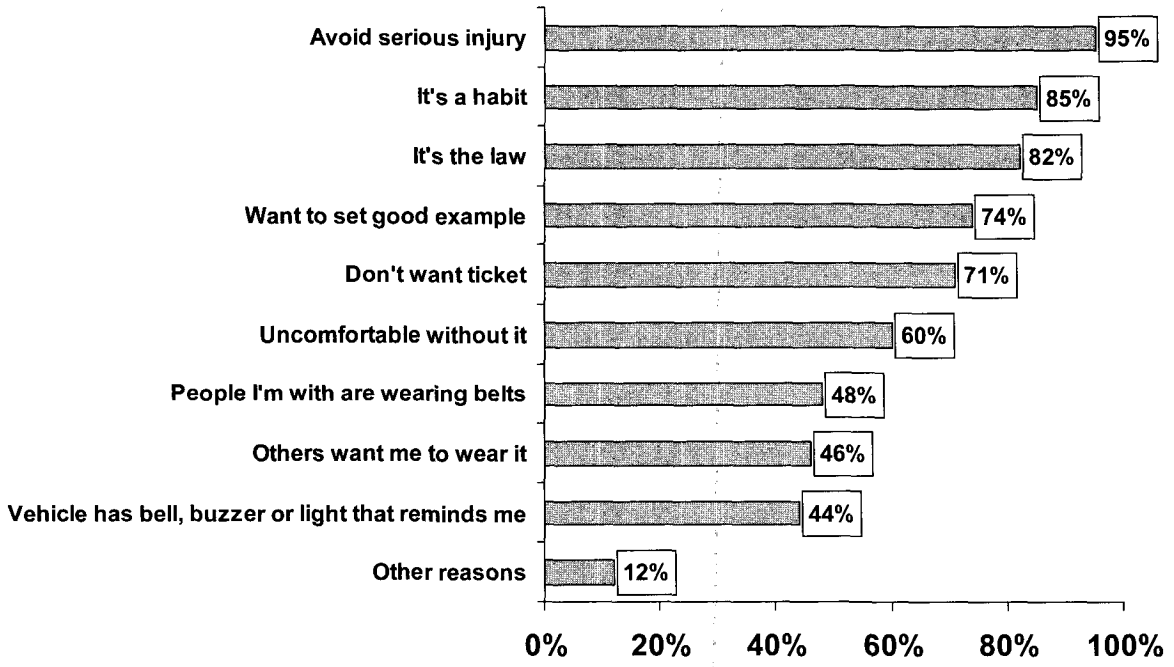
2003 SURVEY RESULTS

CHAPTER 2: REASONS FOR SAFETY BELT USE AND NON-USE

Reasons For Safety Belt Use

Drivers who wore shoulder or lap belts at least on occasion were asked their reasons for wearing safety belts when they drove. Nine potential reasons for safety belt use were read to respondents. They were asked whether each reason was a factor in their use of safety belts. The respondents were then given an opportunity to volunteer other reasons for their safety belt use. Almost all drivers (95%) said that avoiding serious injury was a reason they wore their safety belts. **Injury avoidance ranked first regardless of the group to which persons belonged** (see following pages). The drivers also frequently attributed safety belt use to habit (85%), the law (82%), wanting to set a good example for others (74%), and not wanting a ticket (71%).

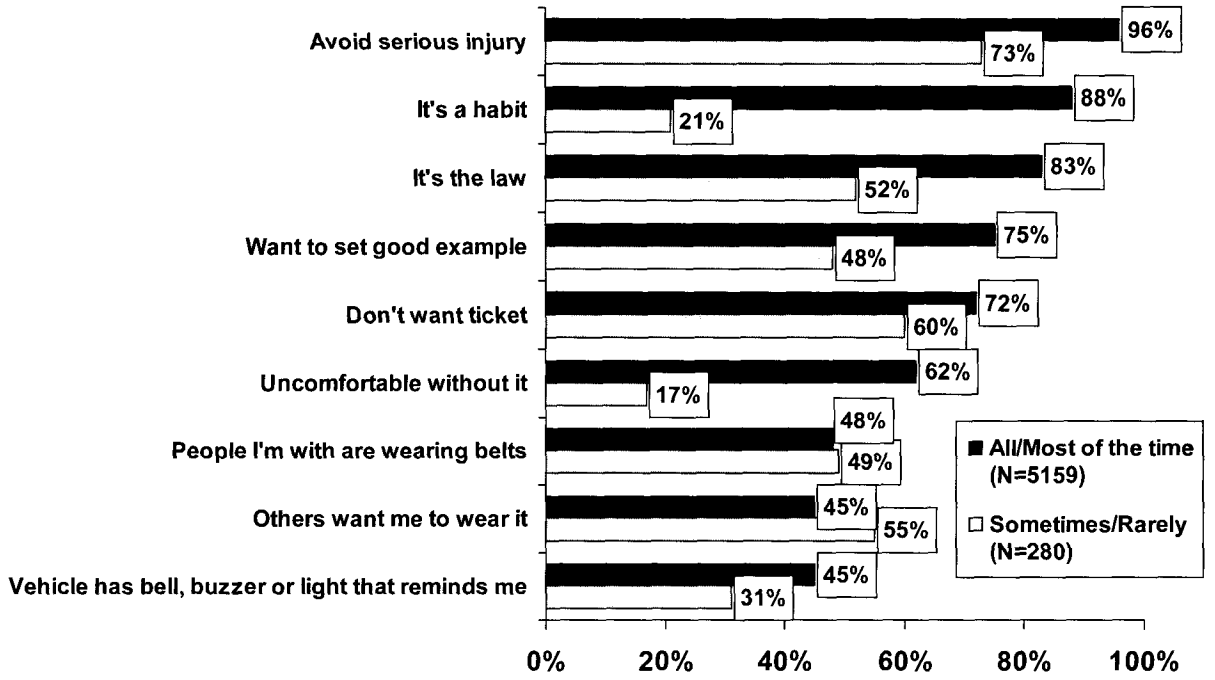
Figure 23
Reasons For Safety Belt Use - Drivers



Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because…
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.
Unweighted N=5439

While almost all drivers (96%) who said they wore their safety belts "all" or "most" of the time gave injury avoidance as a reason for use, only 73% of those who "sometimes" or "rarely" wore safety belts did the same. Frequent users also were more likely than infrequent users to mention the law, setting a good example, and characteristics of regular use (habit; uncomfortable without it). Infrequent users (55%) were more likely than regular users (45%) to report wearing their safety belts because others wanted them to do so.

Figure 24
Driver Reasons For Safety Belt Use
By Reported Level Of Safety Belt Use



Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because…
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Females, on average, gave more reasons for their safety belt use, as evidenced by the generally higher percentages. They were particularly more likely than males to report wearing their safety belt because they were uncomfortable without it (64% to 56%), wanted to set a good example for others (79% to 69%), and it was the law (86% to 77%).

Drivers ages 16 through 20 showed more concern about getting a ticket (80%) than did drivers ages 21 to 64 (71%) or 65 and older (66%). Younger drivers were more likely than the older age groups to say they wore their safety belt because others wanted them to wear it (57% versus 46% and 38%).

Table 17
Driver Reasons For Safety Belt Use By Gender And Age

Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because...

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=2836)	(N=2603)	(N=415)	(N=4318)	(N=634)
Avoid serious injury	95%	94%	95%	94%	96%
It's a habit	87%	83%	84%	85%	85%
It's the law	86%	77%	84%	81%	83%
Want to set good example	79%	69%	71%	75%	71%
Don't want ticket	73%	69%	80%	71%	66%
Uncomfortable without it	64%	56%	56%	60%	61%
People I'm with are wearing belts	49%	48%	52%	48%	48%
Others want me to wear it	46%	46%	57%	46%	38%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	47%	41%	46%	43%	51%

Blacks (79%) and Hispanics (80%) more frequently cited the threat of being ticketed as a reason for safety belt use than did Whites (70%) and non-Hispanics (70%). They also were more likely to refer to the law. Blacks were less likely than the other groups to wear safety belts out of habit, while Hispanics were more likely than the others to wear them because they wanted to set a good example for others.

Table 18
Driver Reasons For Safety Belt Use By Race And Ethnicity

Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because...

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=434)	(N=4193)	(N=549)	(N=4861)
Avoid serious injury	94%	95%	97%	94%
It's a habit	80%	86%	83%	85%
It's the law	87%	80%	88%	81%
Want to set good example	72%	74%	79%	74%
Don't want ticket	79%	70%	80%	70%
Uncomfortable without it	55%	61%	60%	60%
People I'm with are wearing belts	48%	48%	49%	48%
Others want me to wear it	37%	48%	40%	47%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	50%	44%	43%	45%

Persons who had not attended college were more likely than those who had attended to attribute their belt use to the law and their not wanting to be ticketed. High school graduates were also slightly more likely to attribute belt use to wanting to set a good example or because of the people they were with. Conversely, aspects of regular use such as habit and being uncomfortable when not wearing the safety belt were slightly more common reasons among college graduates.

Table 19
Driver Reasons For Safety Belt Use By Education

Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because…

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=571)	(N=1532)	(N=1354)	(N=1956)
Avoid serious injury	94%	93%	94%	97%
It's a habit	81%	83%	84%	88%
It's the law	86%	86%	82%	76%
Want to set good example	74%	78%	74%	71%
Don't want ticket	78%	76%	73%	63%
Uncomfortable without it	57%	57%	58%	65%
People I'm with are wearing belts	50%	52%	47%	45%
Others want me to wear it	46%	48%	45%	44%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	44%	47%	43%	44%

Drivers of SUVs and vans or minivans were more likely than drivers of other vehicles to include wanting to set a good example as a reason for belt use. Pickup truck drivers were less prone than the others to refer to habit or feeling uncomfortable without the belt as reasons for use or because it's the law.

Table 20
Driver Reasons For Safety Belt Use By Type Of Primary Vehicle

Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because...

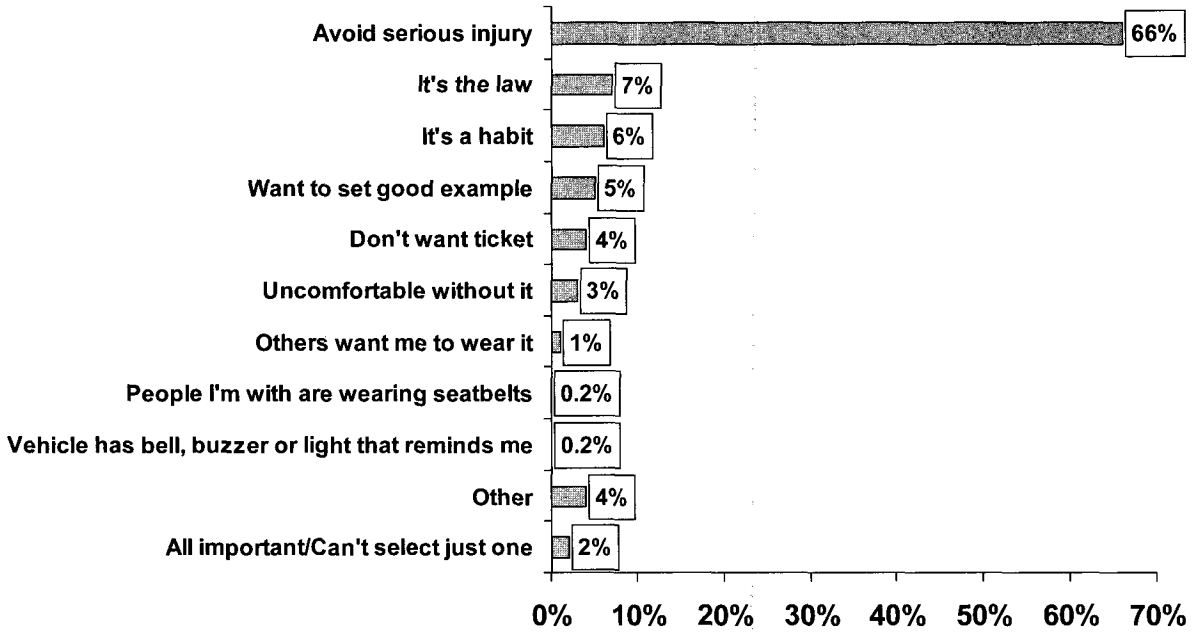
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=3242)	(N=552)	(N=818)	(N=735)
Avoid serious injury	95%	95%	91%	96%
It's a habit	86%	84%	80%	88%
It's the law	82%	84%	77%	83%
Want to set good example	73%	79%	70%	80%
Don't want ticket	71%	69%	73%	72%
Uncomfortable without it	61%	64%	54%	63%
People I'm with are wearing belts	47%	52%	48%	54%
Others want me to wear it	44%	48%	49%	52%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	47%	39%	39%	46%

Most Important Reason For Safety Belt Use

Although a majority of drivers who wore safety belts identified multiple reasons for usage, they tended to give greatest weight to safety considerations. Roughly two-thirds of drivers (66%) said that avoiding serious injury was the most important reason why they wore their safety belt. No other single factor garnered more than 7% of the driver population when drivers were asked which reason was most important.

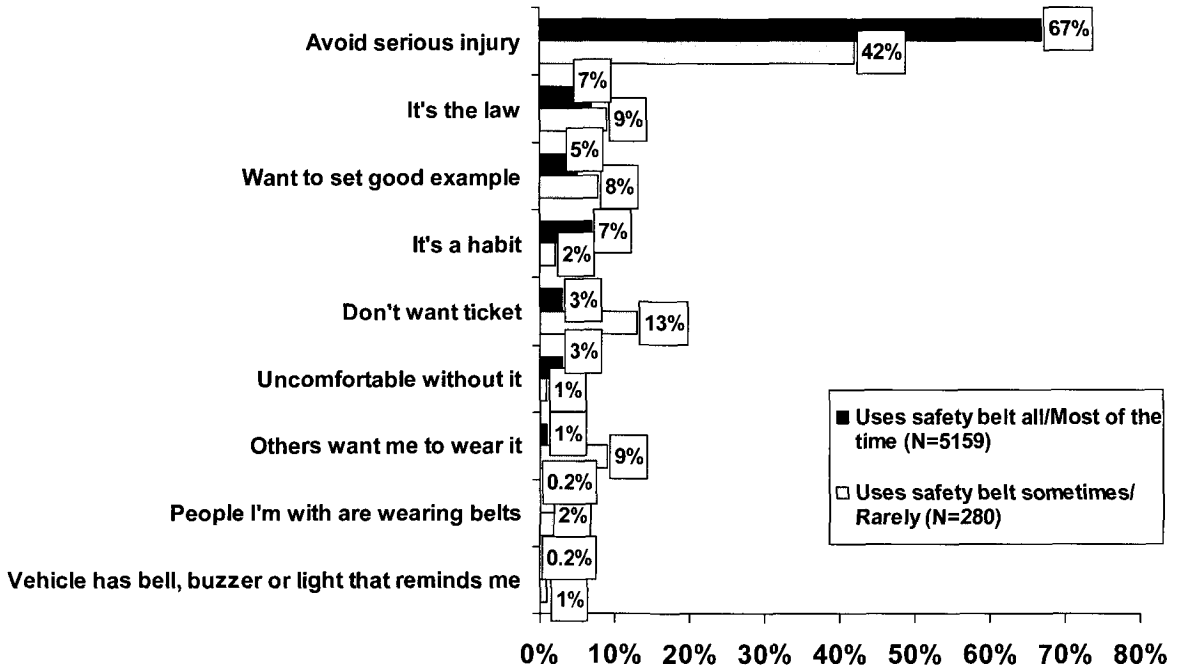
Figure 25
Most Important Reason For Safety Belt Use - Drivers



Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.
Unweighted N=5439

The primary reason drivers gave for wearing their safety belt differed according to the reported level of belt usage. Two-thirds (67%) of drivers who "always" or "most of the time" used their belts said that avoiding injury was their most important reason, compared to less than half of drivers who only "rarely" or "sometimes" wore their belts (42%). Just under one-third of the infrequent users (30%) indicated that not wanting a ticket, wanting to set a good example for others, or pressure from others was their primary reason for use, compared to 9% of those who said they usually wore their safety belt.

Figure 26
Most Important Reason For Driver Safety Belt Use By Reported Level Of Safety Belt Use



Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.
Unweighted N's listed above.

The survey found little difference between males and females in what they considered their most important reason for wearing safety belts. The youngest drivers were more likely than older drivers to say the most important reason they wear safety belts is to avoid serious injury (71% versus 66% and 62%).

Table 21
Most Important Reason For Driver Safety Belt Use By Gender And Age

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=2836)	(N=2603)	(N=415)	(N=4318)	(N=634)
Avoid serious injury	67%	64%	71%	66%	62%
It's a habit	6%	7%	7%	6%	6%
It's the law	7%	8%	5%	7%	11%
Want to set good example	5%	5%	2%	6%	3%
Don't want ticket	3%	5%	6%	4%	3%
Uncomfortable without it	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%
People I'm with are wearing belts	*	*	*	*	*
Others want me to wear it	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	*	*	*	*	*
Other	4%	4%	2%	4%	5%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	2%	2%	1%	2%	5%

*Less than 0.5%.

There was little difference between Blacks and Whites in their major reason for safety belt use. Hispanics (61%) were less likely to consider injury avoidance their primary reason for safety belt use compared to non-Hispanics (67%).

Table 22
Most Important Reason For Driver Safety Belt Use By Race And Ethnicity

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=434)	(N=4193)	(N=549)	(N=4861)
Avoid serious injury	65%	67%	61%	67%
It's a habit	6%	6%	7%	6%
It's the law	9%	6%	12%	7%
Want to set good example	4%	5%	4%	5%
Don't want ticket	4%	4%	3%	4%
Uncomfortable without it	5%	3%	2%	3%
People I'm with are wearing belts	--	*	1%	*
Others want me to wear it	1%	1%	*	1%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	*	*	--	*
Other	4%	4%	4%	4%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	1%	2%	5%	2%

*Less than 0.5%. -- No cases.

The more years of formal education that persons had, the more likely they were to attribute their safety belt use primarily to injury avoidance. At the same time, they were less likely than persons with fewer years of schooling to cite the law as their main reason for safety belt usage.

Table 23
Most Important Reason For Driver Safety Belt Use By Education

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=571)	(N=1532)	(N=1354)	(N=1956)
Avoid serious injury	61%	61%	64%	73%
It's a habit	6%	6%	6%	8%
It's the law	12%	10%	7%	4%
Want to set good example	4%	6%	6%	3%
Don't want ticket	5%	5%	4%	2%
Uncomfortable without it	4%	2%	4%	3%
People I'm with are wearing belts	*	*	*	*
Others want me to wear it	1%	1%	1%	1%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	1%	*	*	*
Other	3%	5%	4%	3%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	3%	3%	2%	2%

*Less than 0.5%.

Pickup truck drivers were slightly less likely than other drivers to attribute their belt use primarily to safety concerns.

Table 24
Most Important Reason For Driver Safety Belt Use By Primary Vehicle Driven

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

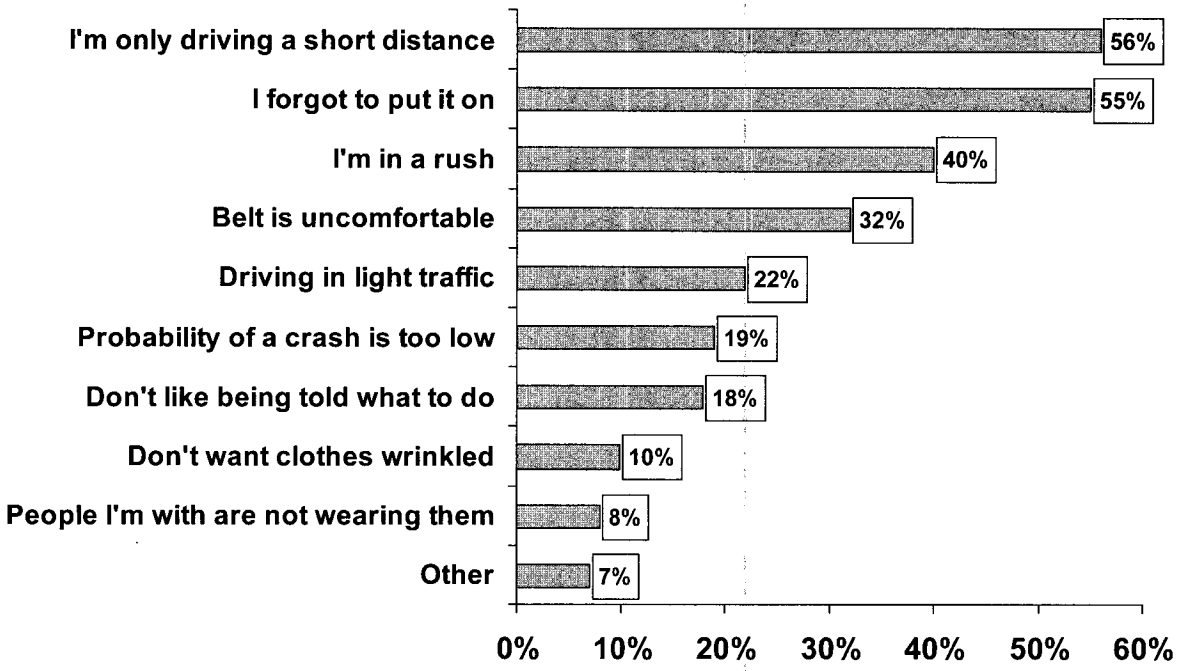
Reason	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=3242)	(N=552)	(N=818)	(N=735)
Avoid serious injury	67%	66%	62%	66%
It's a habit	6%	5%	6%	7%
It's the law	7%	8%	8%	6%
Want to set good example	4%	8%	5%	6%
Don't want ticket	4%	3%	6%	3%
Uncomfortable without it	3%	3%	3%	4%
People I'm with are wearing belts	*	--	*	*
Others want me to wear it	1%	2%	1%	2%
Vehicle has bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	*	--	1%	*
Other	4%	3%	4%	4%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	3%	2%	2%	2%

*Less than 0.5%. -- No cases.

Reasons For Non-Use Of Safety Belts

Drivers who did not always wear their safety belt during the past year were asked about their reasons for non-use, using methods identical to those described on page 46 (i.e., getting respondents to react to specific reasons, and then giving them the opportunity to add to the list). The most frequent reasons given for non-use by drivers were that they were only going a short distance (56%) or they forgot (55%). Two-in-five (40%) said that they were in a rush, while one-third (32%) attributed non-use at least in part to discomfort from the safety belt.

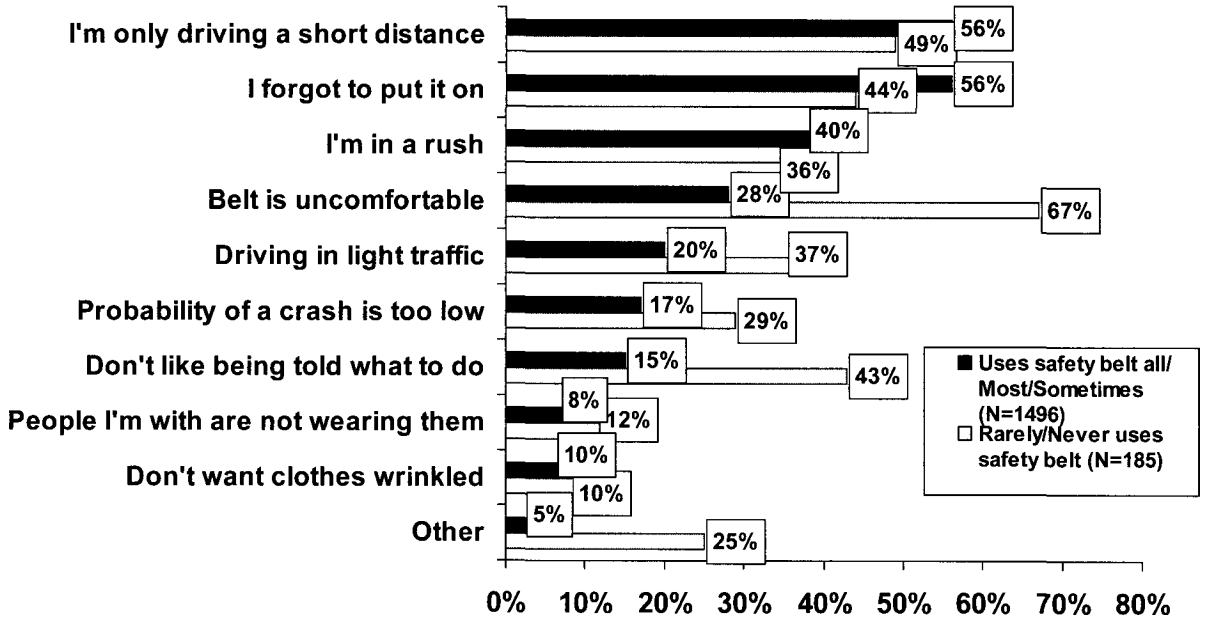
Figure 27
Reasons For Non-Use Of Safety Belts - Drivers



Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because…
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.
Unweighted N=1685

The vast majority of the non-use described on the previous page came from persons who indicated at least occasional use of safety belts. However, Figure 27 also included a small number of persons (185) who said that they rarely or never wore their safety belt while driving. Their reasons for non-use may differ from that of more frequent (i.e., part-time) users. Figure 28 suggests that is the case as it shows that discomfort (67%), resistance to being told what to do (43%), driving in light traffic (37%), and "Other" reasons (25%) were far more prevalent among those who rarely or never wore safety belts.

Figure 28
Reasons For Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Drivers: Rare/Never Users Versus Part Time Users



Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because…
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and at least occasionally do not wear their safety belt. Unweighted N's listed above.

Differences between males and females in reasons for non-use were small, with discomfort accounting for the largest gap between the two groups (females 36%; males 29%). Males were more likely than females to say non-use was a result of light traffic (24% versus 19%), low probability of a crash (21% versus 16%) and they don't like being told what to do (20% versus 15%).

With respect to age, the youngest drivers were more likely than older drivers to say they did not wear safety belts because they forgot (65%), were in a rush (44%), the safety belt was uncomfortable (39%), or they were driving in light traffic (26%). However, readers are cautioned that there are fewer than 200 cases in both the age 16-20 and 65+ subgroups that did not wear their safety belts.

Table 25
Driver Reasons For Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Gender And Age

Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because...
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

Reason	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=725)	(N=960)	(N=175)	(N=1351)	(N=147)
I'm only driving a short distance	54%	56%	56%	55%	56%
I forgot to put it on	52%	56%	65%	53%	53%
I'm in a rush	38%	40%	44%	40%	33%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	36%	29%	39%	31%	31%
I'm driving in light traffic	19%	24%	26%	22%	20%
The probability of being in a crash is too low	16%	21%	17%	19%	18%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	12%	9%	12%	9%	12%
People I am with are not wearing belts	7%	9%	11%	8%	9%
Don't like being told what to do	15%	20%	22%	18%	14%
Other	6%	8%	4%	8%	6%

As with some of the age groups, the number of Blacks and Hispanics in the survey who reported non-use of safety belts was small. Thus, caution should be exercised in interpreting the numbers. Whites were more likely than Blacks to attribute non-use to a dislike for being told what to do or they were in a rush. Hispanics were more likely than the comparison group to attribute non-use to low crash probability (24%). Hispanics were less likely than other groups to say they were only driving a short distance (43%).

Table 26
Driver Reasons For Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Race And Ethnicity

Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because…

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

Reason	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=145)	(N=1334)	(N=135)	(N=1541)
I'm only driving a short distance	55%	58%	43%	57%
I forgot to put it on	54%	55%	56%	55%
I'm in a rush	36%	41%	32%	40%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	28%	32%	25%	33%
I'm driving in light traffic	20%	23%	21%	22%
The probability of being in a crash is too low	18%	19%	24%	18%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	15%	10%	5%	10%
People I am with are not wearing belts	7%	8%	10%	8%
Don't like being told what to do	12%	19%	20%	18%
Other	7%	7%	6%	8%

Drivers who had twelve or fewer years of formal schooling were less likely than those who had gone to college to give "driving only a short distance" as a reason for their non-use of safety belts. Meanwhile, college graduates were less likely than those with fewer years of formal education to cite discomfort. Safety belt non-users who had not completed high school composed only 203 cases in the study, thus once again readers should exercise caution in interpreting the numbers.

Table 27
Driver Reasons For Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Education

Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because…

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

Reason	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=203)	(N=558)	(N=419)	(N=499)
I'm only driving a short distance	48%	52%	60%	60%
I forgot to put it on	59%	51%	55%	57%
I'm in a rush	38%	37%	43%	41%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	37%	34%	36%	23%
I'm driving in light traffic	21%	22%	24%	21%
The probability of being in a crash is too low	18%	18%	19%	19%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	7%	10%	10%	12%
People I am with are not wearing belts	9%	9%	9%	7%
Don't like being told what to do	19%	20%	19%	15%
Other	5%	8%	9%	7%

Driving only a short distance and forgetting to put it on were the most frequent reasons given for non-use of safety belts by all the driver groups listed below. Pickup truck drivers were more likely to say they do not wear their safety belt because they don't like being told what to do. Once again, there are subgroups in the Table that contain 200 cases or less.

Table 28
Driver Reasons For Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Primary Vehicle Driven

Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because...

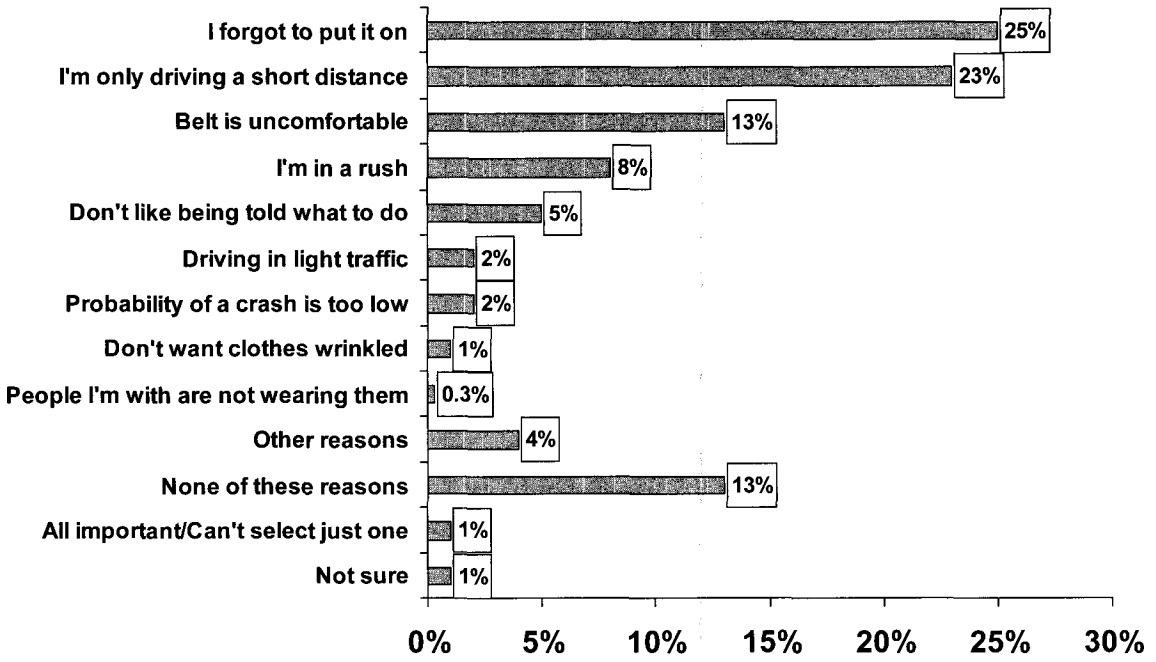
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

Reason	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=912)	(N=156)	(N=357)	(N=200)
I'm only driving a short distance	54%	60%	57%	58%
I forgot to put it on	56%	52%	53%	51%
I'm in a rush	36%	43%	43%	48%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	30%	30%	34%	33%
I'm driving in light traffic	20%	28%	24%	25%
The probability of being in a crash is too low	19%	23%	18%	17%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	10%	13%	9%	9%
People I am with are not wearing belts	8%	3%	11%	9%
Don't like being told what to do	16%	18%	24%	18%
Other	6%	8%	9%	8%

Most Important Reason For Non-Use Of Safety Belts

The most important reasons given for not wearing safety belts were usually that they forgot (25%) or were driving just a short distance (23%). About half as many drivers (13%) gave discomfort as their major reason for non-use. In addition, 13% of drivers did not agree that any of the listed reasons applied to them and also did not volunteer any reason for non-use. This inability or reluctance to provide a reason for non-use contrasts with data summarized earlier in this chapter showing that almost all drivers gave one or more reasons why they wore their safety belt.

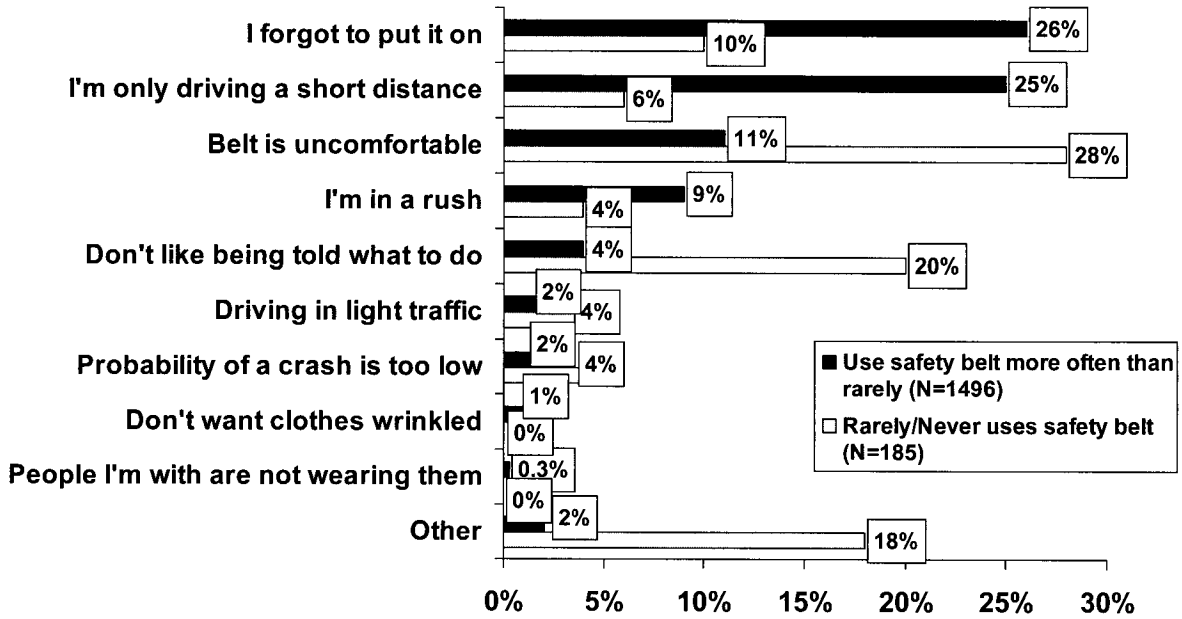
Figure 29
Most Important Reason For Non-Use Of Safety Belts - Drivers



Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.
Unweighted N=1685

As stated earlier, the vast majority of non-use occurred among persons who indicated at least some use of safety belts. Figure 30 shows that the most important reasons for non-use among part-time belt users were that they forgot (26%) or were only driving a short distance (25%). For those who rarely or never use their safety belt discomfort (28%) and the dislike of being told what to do (20%) predominated. "Other" reasons were mentioned by 18% of those rarely or never using safety belts. As in 2000, these "other" reasons tended to revolve around concerns about safety belts being dangerous, the absence of a habit of wearing safety belts, added complaints about discomfort, and the nonspecific argument that they just don't feel like wearing them.

Figure 30
Most Important Reason For Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Drivers: Rare/Never Users Versus Part-Time Users



Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Table 29 lists these "Other" reasons given by the rare and never users, as specified in the verbatim file constructed from the interviewers' notes. Bracketed words indicate a minor change made to what was written in the verbatim file, usually a grammatical correction. Otherwise, the listed statements duplicate what is in the verbatim file, including instances where sentences were not completed.

Table 29
Most Important Reason For Non-Use Of Safety Belt: Other Reasons Reported* By Rare/Never Users

Qx: *Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?*

Base: *Rare and never users of safety belts who said that some "other" reason besides those read to them was the most important reason for their non-use.*

I feel it [puts me] in danger sometimes.	Car crash and the belt would have killed me.
Don't want to [get] stuck in my car in case of an accident.	Seat belt held them in place and kept them in place and severed their spine.
I'm scared that if I am in a wreck I may not be able to get out of the car.	I load logs if they come through I need to hit the floor.
Got stuck in one when I was a child.	If you're in an accident you might get stuck.
Because I was in an accident.	It's dangerous to wear them.
I hate them. I think they are overrated. Been hurt by them.	Rather be thrown from vehicle than be stuck inside.
I don't feel like it.	I just don't like to.
Because I'm short and it hits me in the chin.	My mother was seriously injured in an accident as a result of seat belt use.
Doctor said I don't have to wear it.	Friend was killed by one.
Doesn't wear seatbelt due to accident which would have killed him.	If had a seat belt on when I got in my wreck it would have killed me.
I am a police officer and they are exempt, but now they want us to wear them so I am going to start putting them on.	Turned a tractor trailer over in Dec. and if I would have had it on I would have been injured (would have lost my head and upper torso).
I [have] seen too many people killed from wearing them.	Don't believe they work the way they claim because was in an accident.
I don't think about it.	I don't care for them.
I'm a large person and it's hard to make a size 10 belt fit a size 15 body.	When I started driving we didn't have to wear seat belts.
The school buses don't have them.	The seat belt gets stuck between the seats.
Not required to in a truck.	Just don't.
I don't want to.	Just don't want to.
I just don't feel like wearing it.	

**Because of their self-report nature, the statements may be inaccurate when they refer to specific incidents.*

The largest differences between the genders in the primary reason for non-use of safety belts was that males more often attributed non-use to forgetting (26% to 23%) and females more often than males (15% to 11%) said that the safety belt is uncomfortable. Differences were also small between the three specified age groups.

Table 30
Most Important Reason For Driver Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Gender And Age

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

Reason	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=725)	(N=960)	(N=175)	(N=1351)	(N=147)
I'm only driving a short distance	23%	23%	19%	23%	25%
I forgot to put it on	23%	26%	31%	24%	23%
I'm in a rush	7%	9%	9%	9%	6%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	15%	11%	13%	12%	14%
I'm driving in light traffic	2%	3%	2%	3%	--
The probability of being in a crash is too low	2%	2%	4%	2%	1%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	1%	1%	1%	1%	*
People I am with are not wearing belts	1%	*	*	*	*
Don't like being told what to do	5%	6%	6%	6%	4%
Other reason	2%	5%	2%	4%	4%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	1%	1%	--	2%	1%

*Less than 0.5%. --No cases.

There was little difference in percentages across the racial and ethnic groups listed in Table 31.

Table 31
Most Important Reason For Driver Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Race And Ethnicity

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

Reason	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=145)	(N=1334)	(N=135)	(N=1541)
I'm only driving a short distance	25%	23%	19%	23%
I forgot to put it on	27%	24%	29%	24%
I'm in a rush	9%	9%	5%	9%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	15%	13%	10%	13%
I'm driving in light traffic	--	2%	8%	2%
The probability of being in a crash is too low	2%	2%	4%	2%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	2%	1%	1%	1%
People I am with are not wearing belts	--	*	--	*
Don't like being told what to do	3%	6%	7%	5%
Other reason	2%	4%	2%	4%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	--	2%	1%	1%

*Less than 0.5%. --No cases.

College graduates were more likely than those who had not graduated college to say that "driving a short distance" was their primary reason for non-use of safety belts. Drivers who had not graduated high school were more likely than the other groups to identify "forgetting" or "discomfort" as their primary reason for non-use.

Table 32
Most Important Reason For Driver Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Education

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

Reason	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=203)	(N=558)	(N=419)	(N=499)
I'm only driving a short distance	16%	20%	22%	31%
I forgot to put it on	30%	22%	26%	25%
I'm in a rush	7%	9%	9%	8%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	18%	13%	11%	11%
I'm driving in light traffic	3%	2%	2%	2%
The probability of being in a crash is too low	2%	3%	2%	1%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	*	1%	1%	1%
People I am with are not wearing belts	*	*	1%	--
Don't like being told what to do	6%	6%	6%	3%
Other reason	2%	5%	4%	3%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	3%	1%	1%	1%

*Less than 0.5%. --No cases.

SUV drivers were more likely to give "only driving a short distance" (29%) as their primary reason for non-use of safety belts. Drivers of passenger cars were more likely than the other groups to attribute their non-use of safety belts primarily to "forgetting."

Table 33
Most Important Reason For Driver Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Primary Vehicle Driven

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

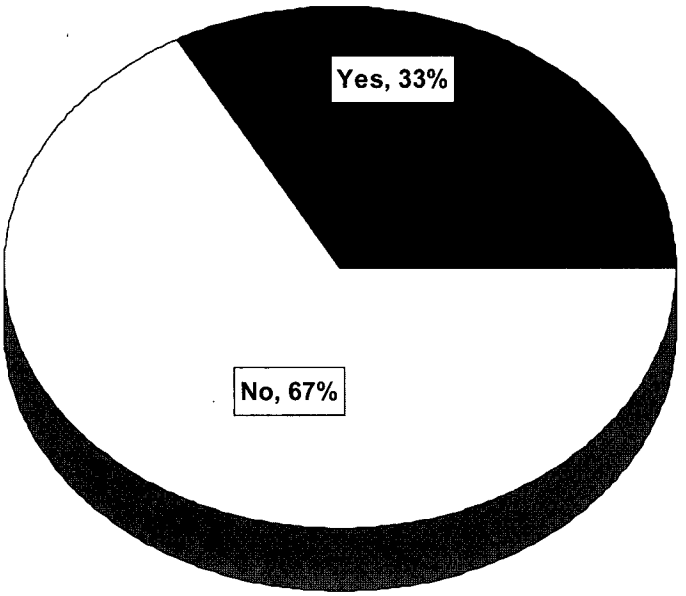
Reason	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=912)	(N=156)	(N=357)	(N=200)
I'm only driving a short distance	22%	24%	22%	29%
I forgot to put it on	28%	20%	23%	18%
I'm in a rush	7%	9%	9%	11%
The seat belt is uncomfortable	12%	14%	12%	14%
I'm driving in light traffic	2%	3%	2%	3%
The probability of being in a crash is too low	2%	1%	3%	1%
Don't want my clothes wrinkled	1%	--	1%	3%
People I am with are not wearing belts	1%	--	--	--
Don't like being told what to do	4%	5%	8%	4%
Other reason	3%	4%	5%	3%
Can't say one is most important/All are important	1%	2%	1%	--

*Less than 0.5%.

What Drivers Dislike Or Find Annoying About Safety Belts

All drivers, whether or not they wore their safety belts regularly, were asked if there was anything that they particularly disliked or found annoying about wearing them. One-third answered "Yes" (33%). Almost all of the rest responded that there was not any particular thing they disliked (67%). Less than 1 percent (0.1%) said they did not know.

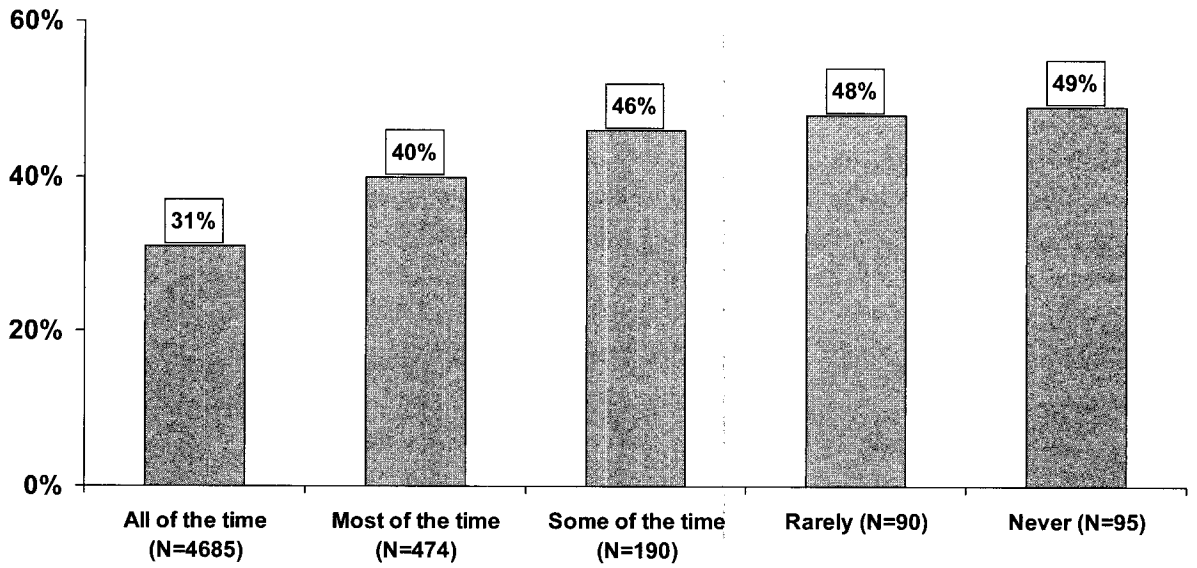
Figure 31
Dislike Or Find Safety Belts Annoying: Drivers



Qx: Is there anything that you particularly dislike or find annoying about wearing your seat belt?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle that has safety belts.
Unweighted N=5540

Not surprisingly, persons who infrequently wore their safety belt were most likely to report annoyances. Whereas 31% of drivers who reported wearing their safety belts "all of the time" while driving said there was something particularly annoying about the belt, 40% of "most of the time" users and 46% of "some of the time" users voiced similar complaints. About one-half of those who rarely (48%) or never (49%) wore their safety belt said that there was something they disliked or found annoying about it.

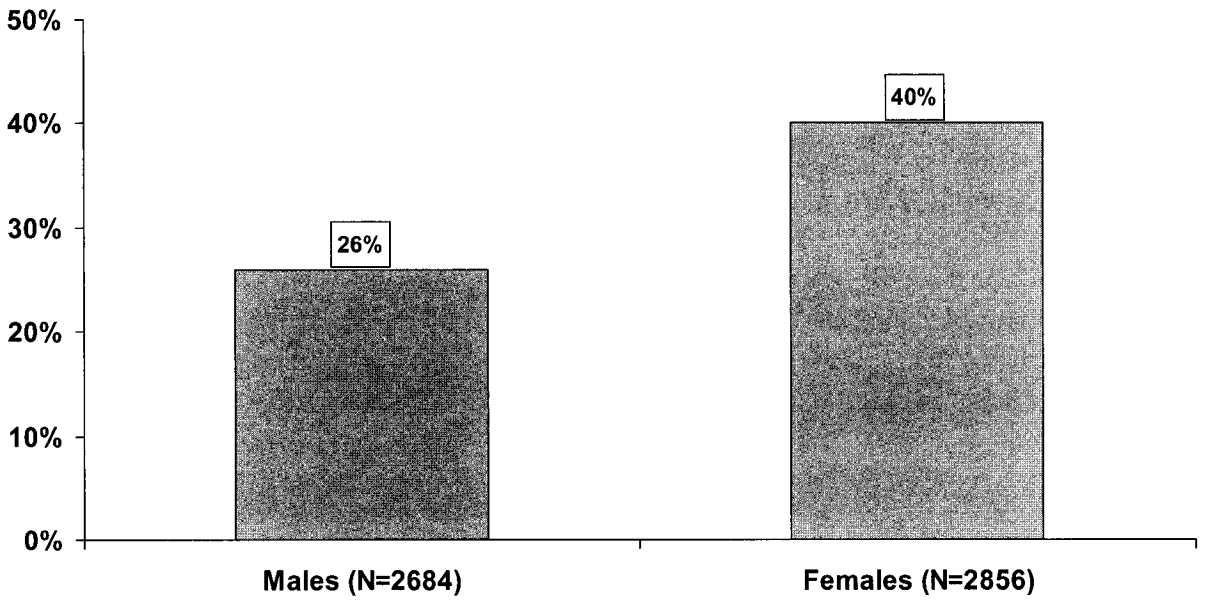
Figure 32
Dislike Or Find Safety Belts Annoying By Reported Belt Use: Drivers



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: Is there anything that you particularly dislike or find annoying about wearing your seat belt?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle that has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Although the previous chapter showed females more likely than males to wear safety belts, females also were more likely to complain about the devices. Four-in-ten females (40%) said there was something they particularly disliked or found annoying about wearing their safety belt compared to one-in-four males (26%).

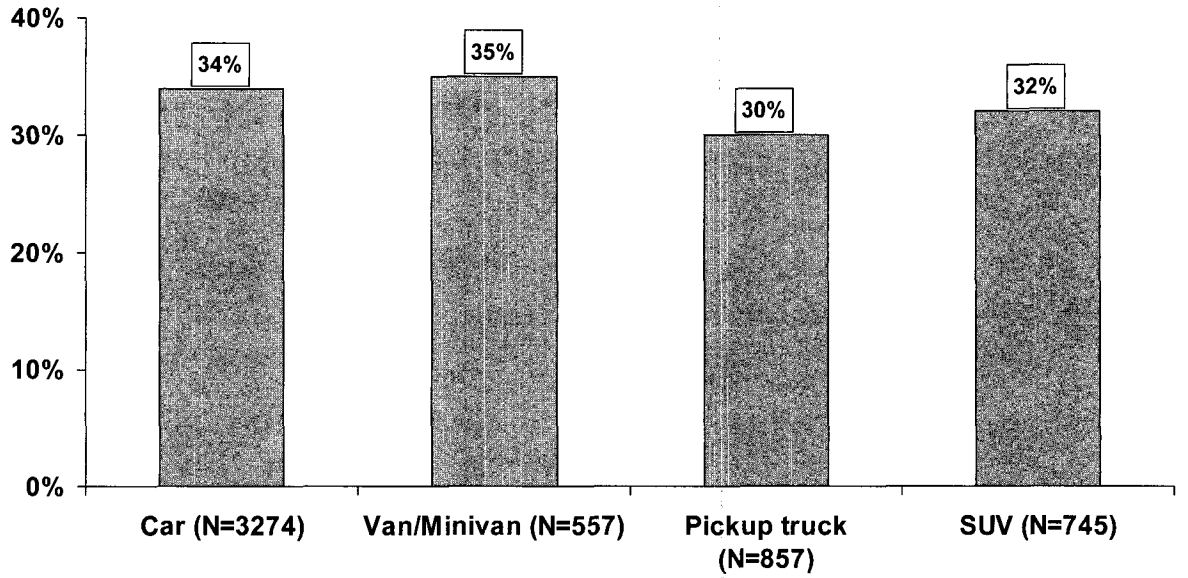
Figure 33
Dislike Or Find Safety Belts Annoying By Gender



Qx: Is there anything that you particularly dislike or find annoying about wearing your seat belt?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle that has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Pickup truck drivers had the fewest complaints about safety belts (30%) compared to the drivers of other passenger vehicle types.

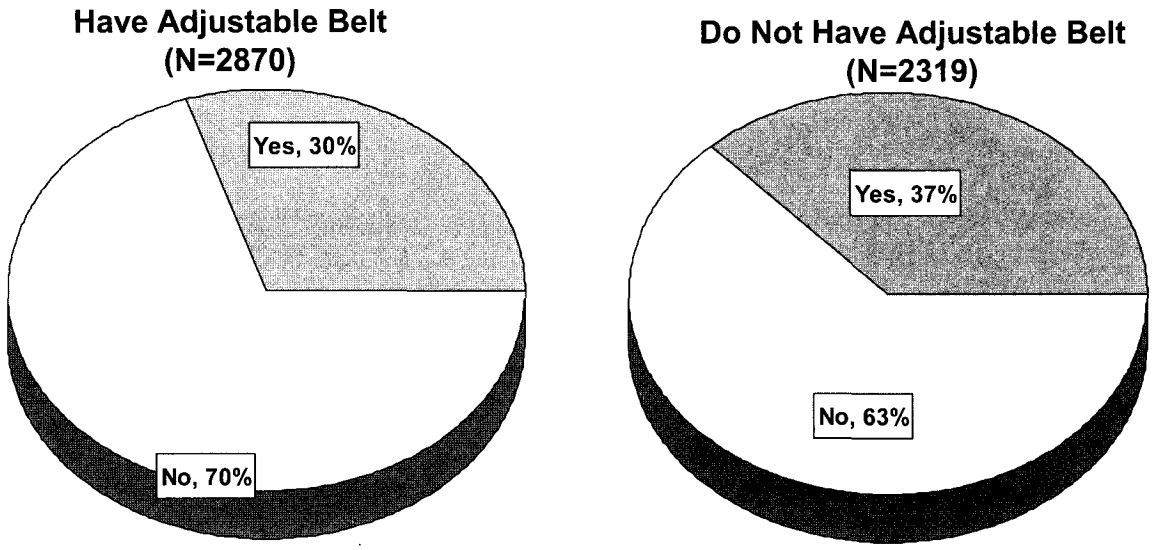
Figure 34
Dislike Or Find Safety Belts Annoying
By Type Of Primary Vehicle Driven



Qx: Is there anything that you particularly dislike or find annoying about wearing your seat belt?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle that has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

If drivers reported that the shoulder belt in their primary vehicle was adjustable, they were less likely to express annoyance about safety belts. Whereas 30% of respondents with adjustable shoulder belts in their primary vehicle said there was something they particularly disliked or found annoying about wearing their safety belt, 37% without adjustable shoulder belts did the same. When only the drivers who said they had actually used the adjustable feature of their shoulder belts are considered, 31% expressed annoyance with safety belts.

Figure 35
Dislike Or Find Safety Belts Annoying By Presence Of Adjustable Shoulder Belt In Primary Vehicle



Qx: Shoulder belts are usually attached to the door or frame behind the driver's left shoulder. In some vehicles, this attachment can be moved up or down to adjust the shoulder belt. Is this attachment adjustable in your vehicle?

Qx: Is there anything that you particularly dislike or find annoying about wearing your seat belt?

Base: Drives a motor vehicle that has safety belts across both the lap and shoulder or across the shoulder only. Unweighted N's listed above.

If respondents said there was something they particularly disliked or found annoying about safety belts, they were asked to specify what bothered them. The most common complaint involved pressure or pain on various parts of the body (52%). Females (61%) especially experienced this type of discomfort compared to males (38%), particularly being choked by the safety belt (48% to 25%). Males were more likely to say the safety belt was too confining (27%) than females (15%).

Table 34
What Drivers Dislike Or Find Annoying About Safety Belts

Qx: Is there anything that you particularly dislike or find annoying about wearing your seat belt?
Qx: What is it that you dislike or find annoying? Anything else?
Base: Drivers who dislike or find something annoying about seat belts.

Dislikes/annoyances	Total (N=1805)	Males (N=717)	Females (N=1088)
Discomfort: body pressure/pain	**52%**	**38%**	**61%**
Pressure on my neck/Chokes me/Cuts across my neck	39%	25%	48%
Pressure on my shoulder/Shoulder strap too tight	7%	7%	7%
Pressure on my chest/Strap doesn't fit my chest	5%	3%	6%
Pressure on my stomach/Lap belt is too tight	1%	2%	1%
Painful for body ailments	*	*	*
Seat belt is too tight (unspecified)	3%	4%	2%
Any other body pressure mentions	1%	1%	2%
Discomfort: body irritation	**12%**	**10%**	**13%**
Irritates/chafes my skin/Rash	11%	9%	12%
Makes me perspire/Perspire when it's hot outside	*	1%	*
Seat belt should be padded/Material is too harsh	*	*	*
Any other body irritation mentions	*	*	*
Discomfort: other	**10%**	**10%**	**10%**
Uncomfortable (unspecified)	5%	5%	4%
Uncomfortable during pregnancy	1%	--	1%
Claustrophobia/Claustrophobic	1%	1%	*
Heavy/bulky winter clothes make it uncomfortable to wear	3%	3%	3%
Any other discomfort mentions	2%	1%	2%

*Less than 0.5%. -- No cases. Numbers do not add to 100% due to multiple response.

Table 34 (Continued)
What Drivers Dislike Or Find Annoying About Safety Belts

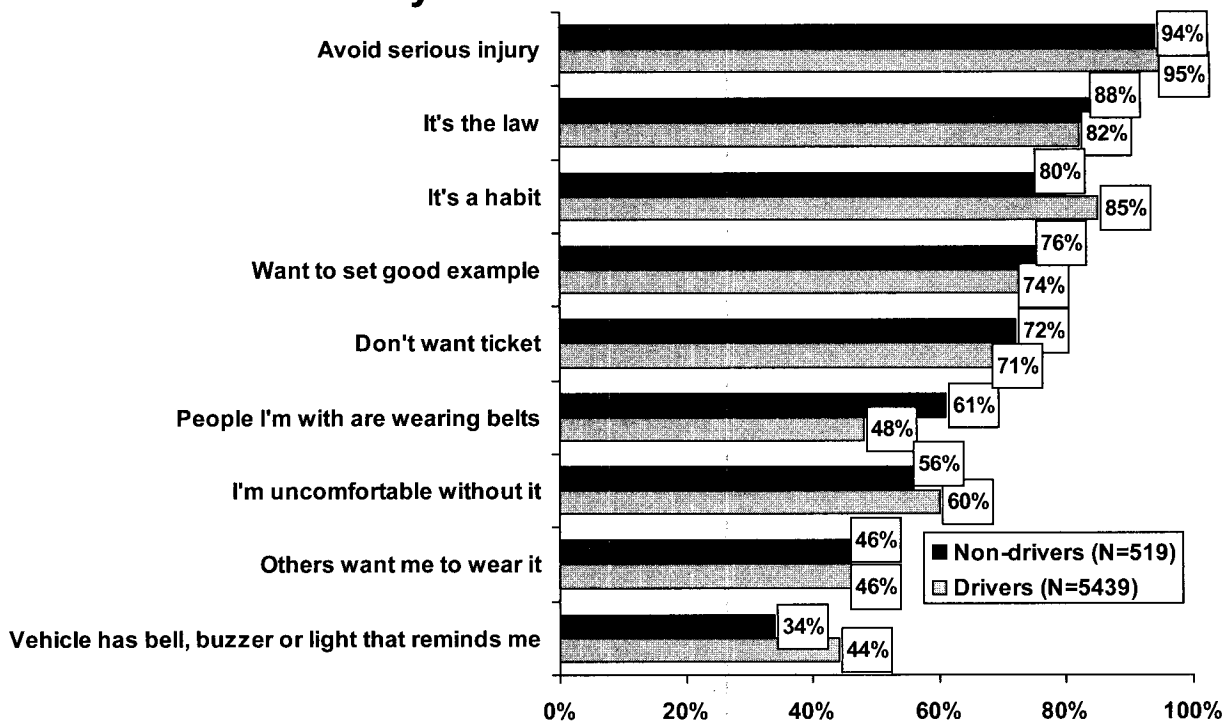
Dislikes/annoyances	Total (N=1805)	Males (N=717)	Females (N=1088)
Confining	**20%**	**27%**	**15%**
Feel restricted/Too confining/Constricting	14%	20%	10%
Hard to turn around/look behind me when backing up	1%	1%	1%
Hard to lean forward	3%	3%	3%
In case of crash/emergency it's hard to get out of car	2%	2%	2%
Any other movement restrictions mentions	1%	1%	1%
Other	**29%**	**35%**	**26%**
Wrinkles my clothes	7%	3%	10%
Need to adjust seat belt for my size	1%	1%	2%
Seat belt is loose fitting	1%	1%	*
Seat belts are a nuisance/hassle/annoyance	5%	8%	3%
Invasion of privacy/Taking away constitutional rights	3%	6%	1%
Takes too much time to fasten seat belt	2%	2%	2%
Manual buckling/Release it manually	*	--	*
Any other seat belt adjustment mentions	5%	5%	6%
Seat belt gets stuck (unspecified)	*	*	*
Seat belt gets stuck in door	*	*	*
Any other seat belt malfunction	1%	2%	1%
Automatic seat belt gets in the way	*	*	*
Don't like automatic seat belts	*	1%	*
Any other miscellaneous mentions	4%	6%	3%
Not sure/No answer	1%	2%	1%

*Less than 0.5%.

Reasons For Safety Belt Use By Non-Drivers

Interviewers asked non-drivers their reasons for safety belt use while riding as passengers in motor vehicles. The approach was the same as that used with drivers: nine different reasons were read, one at a time, and non-drivers were asked whether or not each reason was a factor in their use of safety belts. They were also given an opportunity to volunteer any reasons for their safety belt use. Drivers were more likely than non-drivers to say they wear their safety belt because the vehicle had a bell, buzzer, or light that reminded them, and because it was a habit. Non-drivers were more likely than drivers to say they wear their safety belt because it is the law and because other people in the vehicle were wearing safety belts.

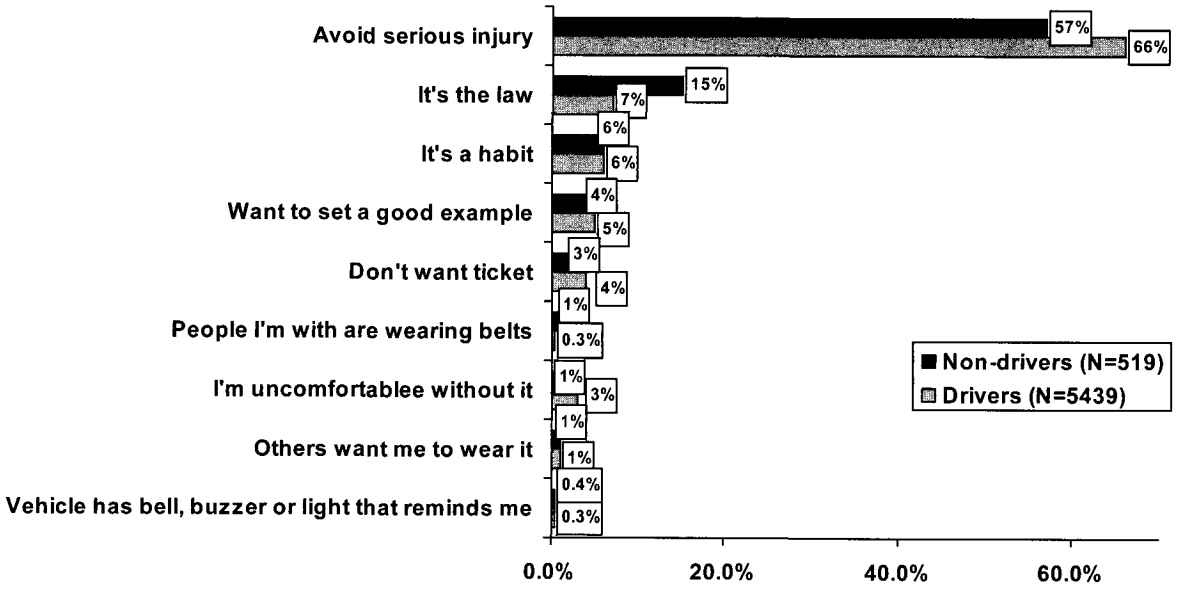
Figure 36
Reasons For Safety Belt Use: Non-Drivers Versus Drivers



Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because…
Base: Drivers and non-drivers who at least on occasion wear their safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

By far the most important reason for safety belt use by non-drivers (57%), as with drivers (66%), was to avoid serious injury. The "law" ranked a distant second for both groups.

Figure 37
Most Important Reason For Safety Belt Use: Non-Drivers Versus Drivers



Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?
Base: Drivers and non-drivers who at least on occasion wear their safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

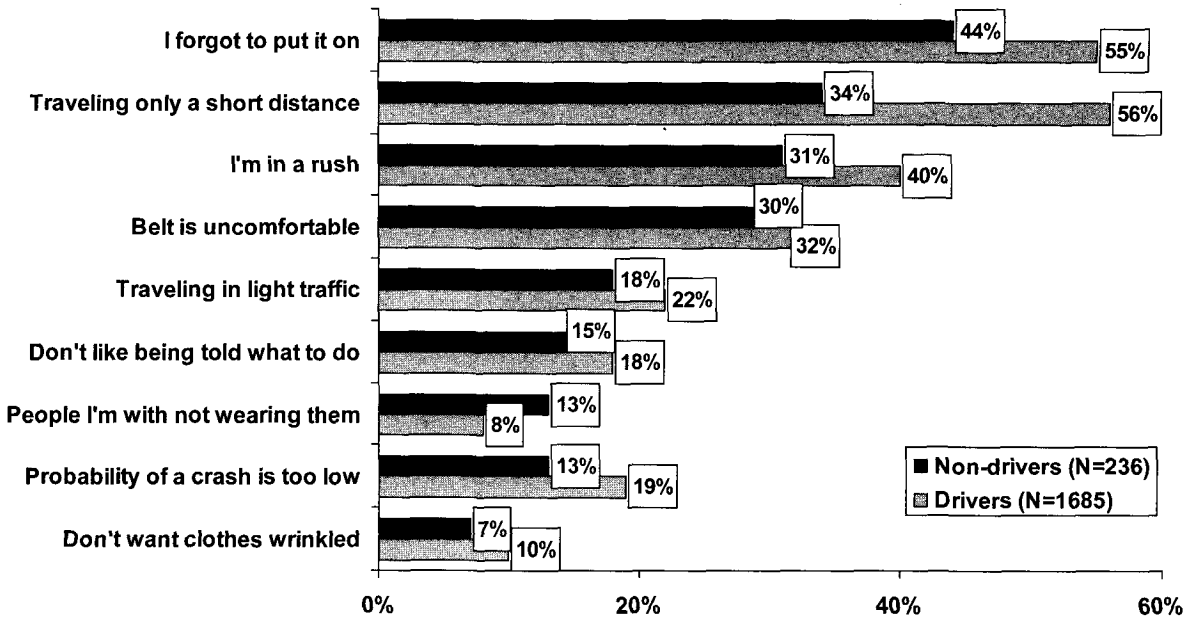
Non-Drivers' Reasons For Not Using Safety Belts

Non-drivers who at least sometimes did not wear a safety belt while riding were asked their reasons for non-use. As with drivers, interviewers read nine potential reasons to respondents. For each one, non-drivers were asked to agree or disagree that they sometimes did not wear their belt for that reason. They were then given an opportunity to volunteer other reasons why they did not use their safety belts. Readers are cautioned that the number of non-drivers (N=236) was relatively small in these analyses.

The most commonly cited reason was that they forgot to wear their safety belt (44%). Other frequently cited reasons were that they were only riding a short distance (34%), the safety belt was uncomfortable (30%), and they were in a rush (31%). Less than one-in-five non-drivers attributed at least some of their non-use to riding in light traffic (18%), they don't like being told what to do (15%), their companions were not wearing safety belts (13%), or the probability of a crash was too low (13%).

The largest differences between drivers and non-drivers in the reasons given for not wearing safety belts occurred in the "short distance," "forgot to put it on," and "rushed" response categories. Drivers were more likely to attribute non-use to traveling only a short distance (56% to 34%), forgetting to put it on (55% to 44%) and being in a rush (40% to 31%). Conversely, non-drivers (13%) were more likely than drivers (8%) to say they did not wear safety belts because the people they were with were not wearing them.

Figure 38
Reasons For Not Wearing A Safety Belt: Non-Drivers Versus Drivers

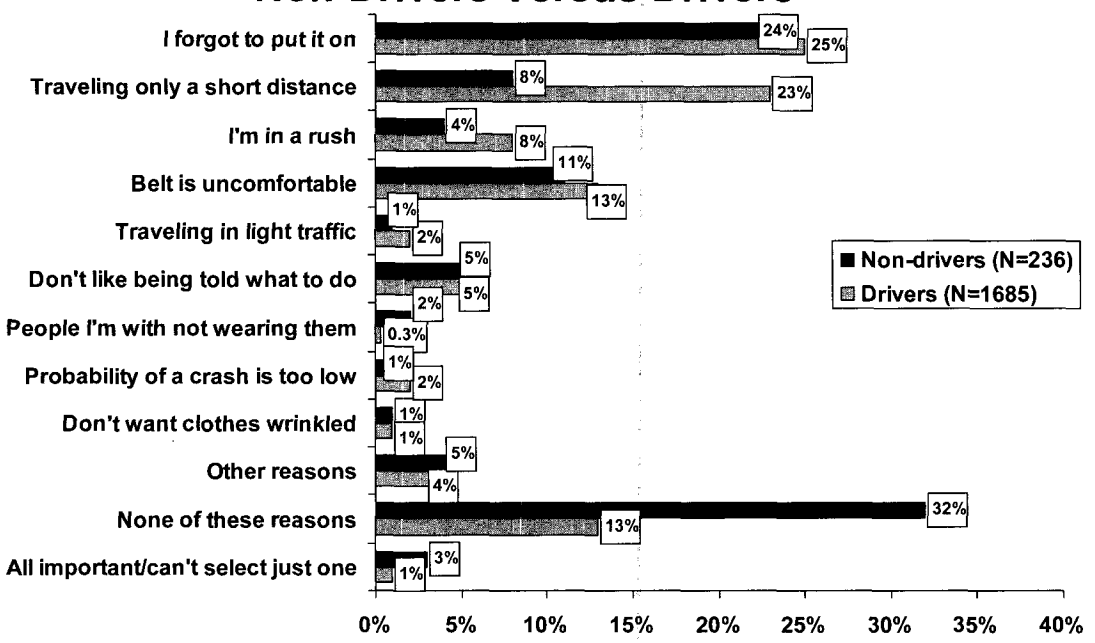


Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because…
Base: Drivers and non-drivers who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

When asked for the most important reason for not wearing safety belts, forgetting ranked first among non-drivers; about one-in-four (24%) gave it as the chief cause. Discomfort (11%), riding a short distance (8%), and disliking being told what to do (5%) followed in frequency. However, about one-in-three non-drivers (32%) did not agree that any of the listed reasons applied to them and also did not volunteer any reason.

Drivers were more than twice as likely as non-drivers to answer that the most important reason they did not wear their safety belt was because they were only going a short distance (23% versus 8%). Reluctance or inability to give a reason for non-use was more than twice as likely among non-drivers (32%) as among drivers (13%).

Figure 39
Most Important Reason For Not Wearing A Safety Belt: Non-Drivers Versus Drivers



Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?
Base: Drivers and non-drivers who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

2003 SURVEY RESULTS

CHAPTER 3: ATTITUDES CONCERNING THE UTILITY OF SAFETY BELTS, RISK PERCEPTIONS, AND FATALISM

Background On Attitude Section

In 1998, the Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey introduced a section on attitudes and perceptions related to safety belt use. For the 2003 survey, the section consisted of a series of nine statements that interviewers read to the respondents (one item from the 2000 version was replaced in the 2003 version of the survey). After reading each statement, the interviewers asked the respondents if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

The section served several purposes: to assess current messaging strategies, to corroborate and quantify with a large sample earlier focus group findings concerning impediments to safety belt use, and to provide other strategic information for addressing reasons for non-use. Thus the content for this section was derived from previous research as well as current program activity.

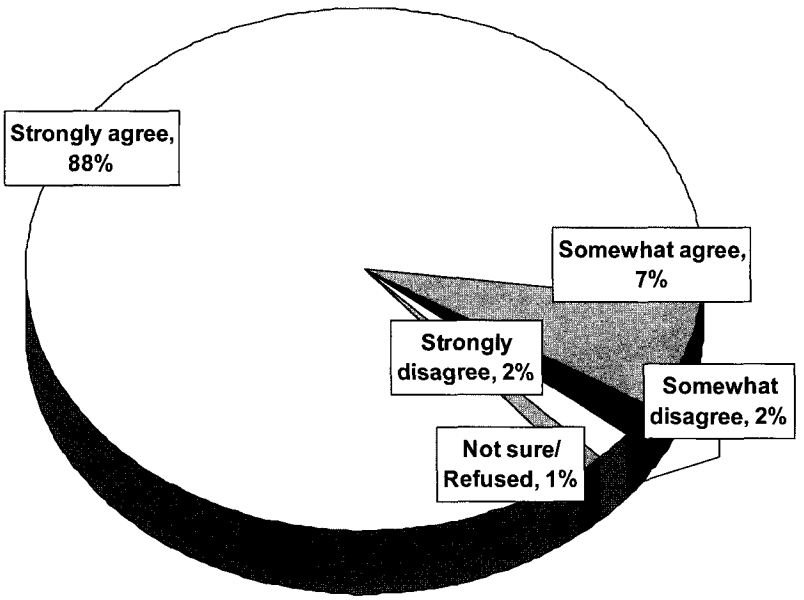
This chapter summarizes results from those items that explored the perceived utility of safety belts, and perceptions of risk related to safety belt use. Attitude items that involved perceptions of enforcement of safety belt laws are addressed in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

Since its inception in 1994, this survey has asked a question about fatalism.... the belief that all events are determined by fate and are therefore inevitable. Summarized responses to that question are included in this chapter because of similarities to other themes presented herein.

Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception And The Utility Of Safety Belts

The most basic question concerning the perceived usefulness of safety belts is whether the public believes they improve the chances of avoiding death or injury in a crash. The survey asked respondents their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement "If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on." Nearly nine-in-ten persons (88%) strongly agreed with the statement. Another 7% somewhat agreed, bringing the total level of agreement to 95%.

Figure 40
Would Want Safety Belt On In An Accident



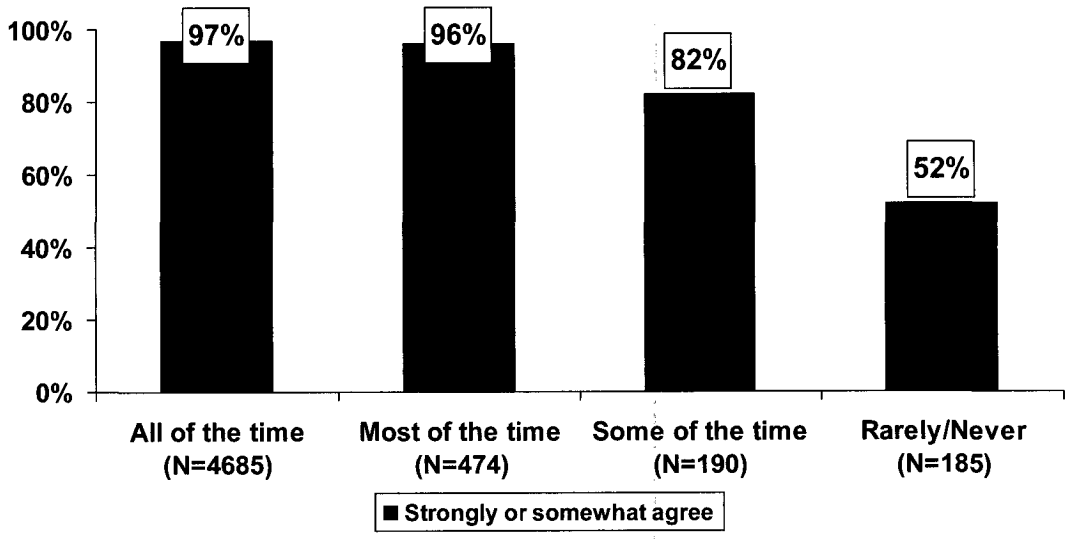
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.

Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

Drivers who regularly wore their safety belts were most likely to strongly or somewhat agree with the statement that they would want to have their safety belt on if they were in an accident. Yet even among drivers who said they never or only rarely wore their safety belts, more than half (52%) either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement.

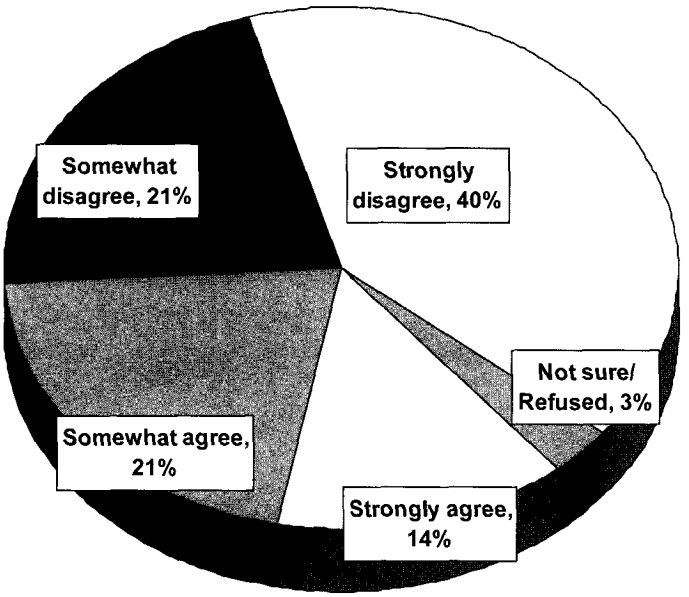
Figure 41
Would Want Safety Belt On In An Accident By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether your strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

NHTSA has conducted a number of focus groups with target populations characterized by low safety belt use. One of the more common sentiments expressed in these groups was that "seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you." According to the national data obtained in this survey, more than one-third (35%) of the general public agreed with this statement, with 14% strongly agreeing.

Figure 42
Safety Belts Are Just As Likely To Harm You As Help You



Qx: *Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.*

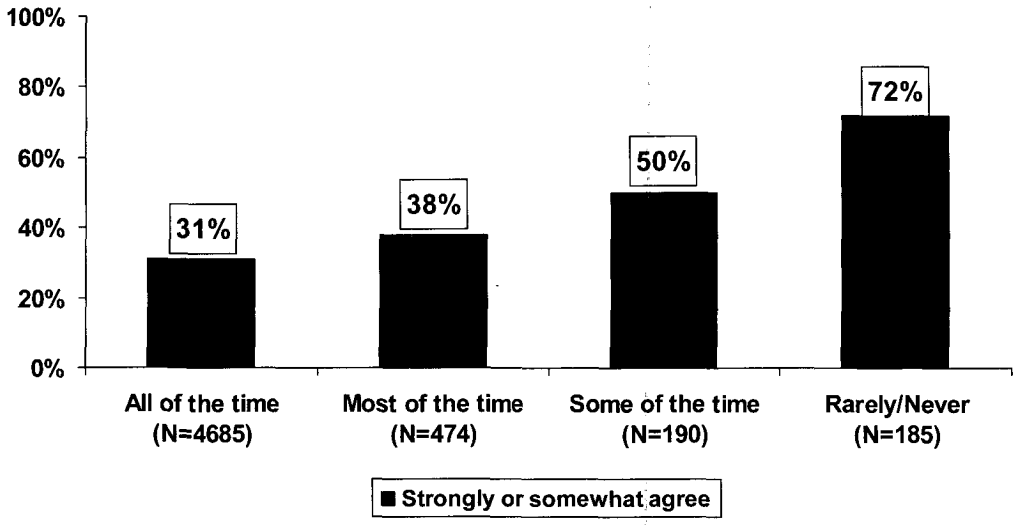
Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

Even among drivers who reported wearing their safety belt "all of the time" while driving, almost one-third (31%) either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that "seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you." For infrequent safety belt users, more than half held this opinion. Readers are reminded that one of the specific reasons given by non-users for not wearing safety belts was concern about their safety (page 66).

Figure 43
Safety Belts Are Just As Likely To Harm You As Help By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

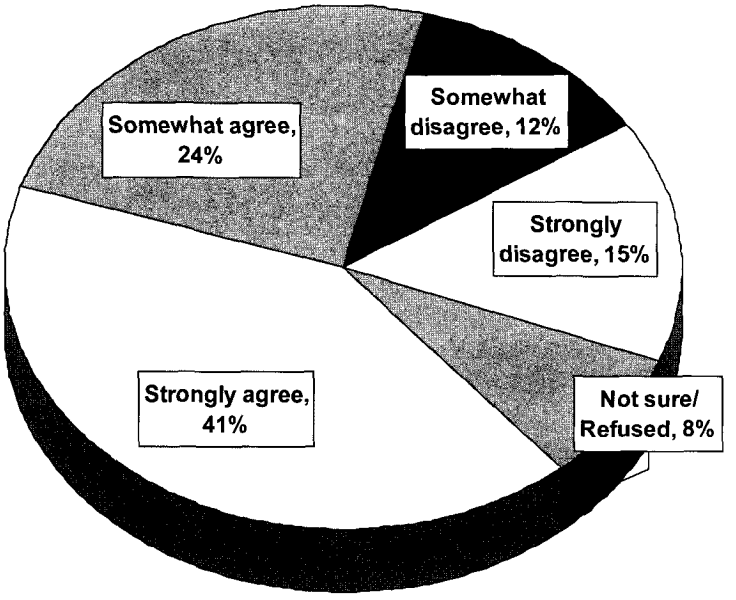
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether your strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

One of the messages that safety professionals have been communicating to the public is that non-use of safety belts translates into increased costs for everyone, as the greater number of fatalities and injuries resulting from non-use extracts more resources from society. This survey sought to determine if the public made the connection that non-use of safety belts results in more fatalities and injuries, and that some of the costs for those increased fatalities and injuries are passed on to them. The survey found that about two-thirds (65%) of the public either strongly or somewhat agreed that medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore their safety belts.

Figure 44
Medical Insurance Costs Would Be Lower If More People Wore Safety Belts



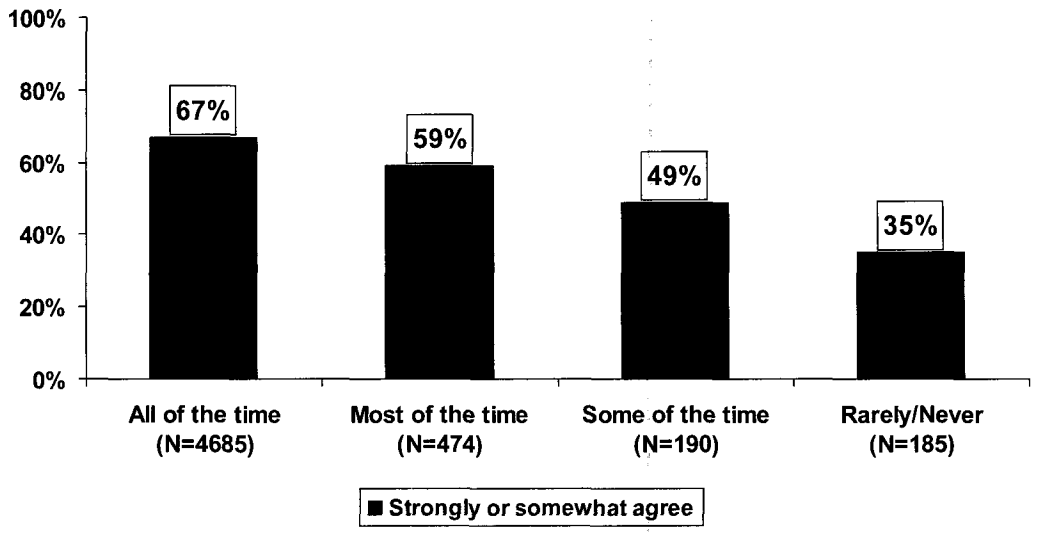
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.

Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

Two-thirds (67%) of drivers who reported wearing safety belts "all of the time" agreed that medical insurance costs would be lower with increased safety belt use. About three-fifths of "most of the time" users concurred.

Figure 45
Medical Insurance Costs Would Be Lower By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

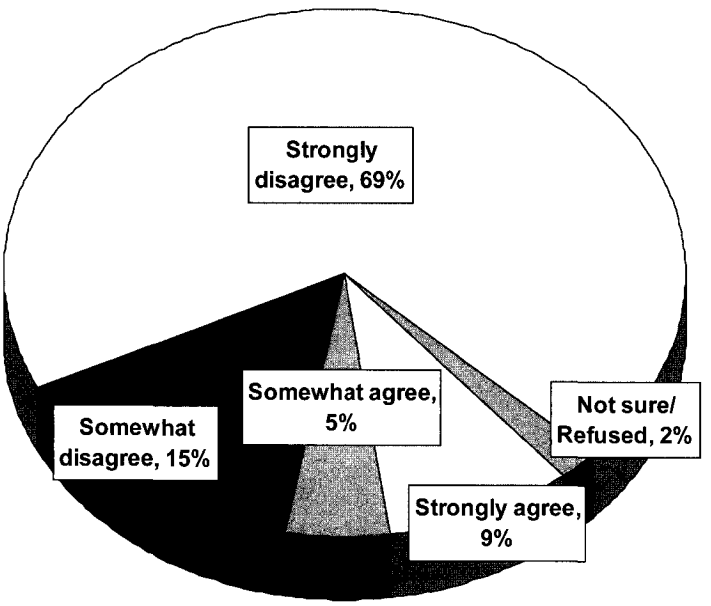
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether your strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Whereas public anxiety over potentially unsafe or unhealthy outcomes may lead to adoption of prescribed safety behaviors, there sometimes is a danger that the intervention itself becomes an anxiety-producing cue that people seek to avoid because of its connection to the negative outcome. This survey explored that issue by getting reactions to the statement "Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident." Most persons refuted the notion; over two-thirds (69%) strongly disagreed. However, 15%[6] of the population indicated some level of agreement with the statement.

Figure 46
Putting On A Safety Belt Makes Me Worry More About Being In An Accident



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.

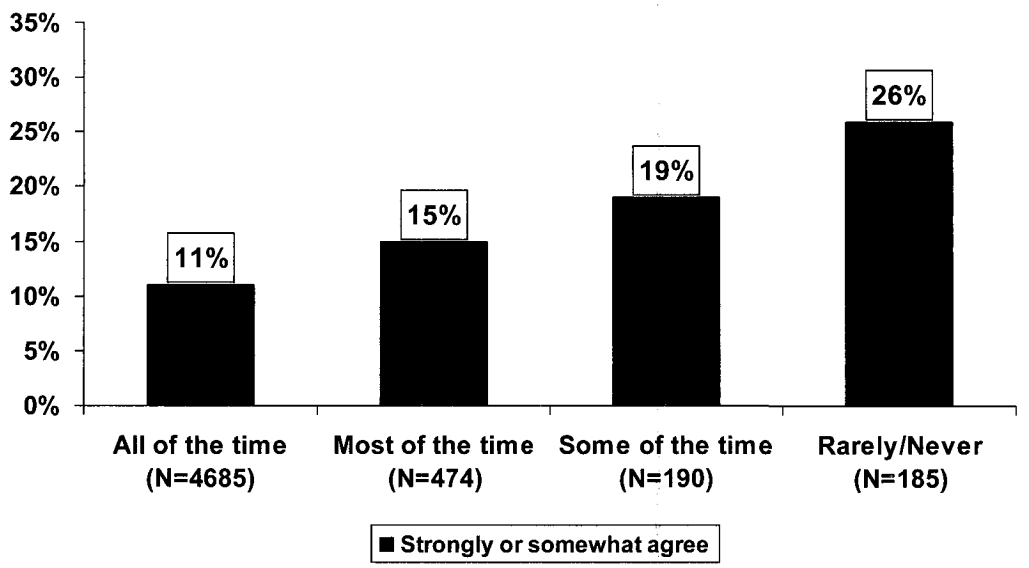
Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

[6] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

Reported anxiety from safety belts increased as reported usage decreased, with about one-fourth of infrequent users agreeing that they worried more about getting in an accident when they wore their safety belt.

Figure 47
Putting On A Safety Belt Makes Me Worry More By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

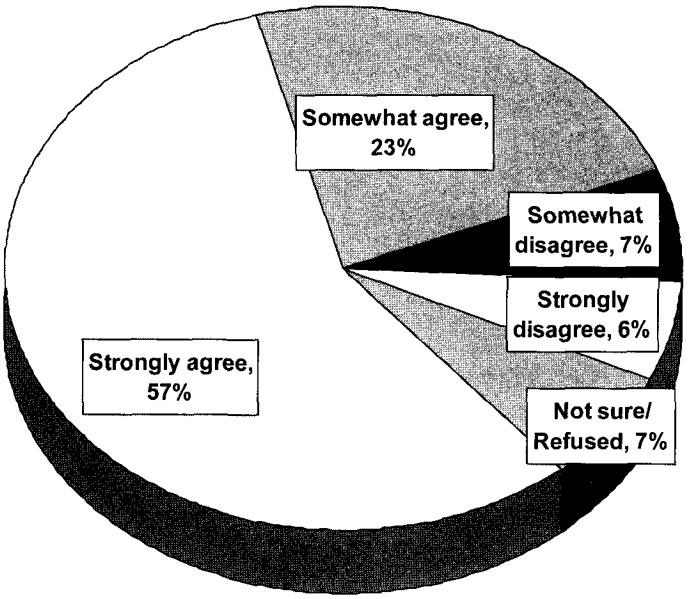
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether your strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Part-time safety belt users often said they did not use their safety belt because they were "driving just a short distance" (see page 59). The 2003 Survey added a question to see if driving close to home was considered a greater or lesser risk for being involved in a crash. The vast majority (80%) agreed with the statement "Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home."

Figure 48
Most Motor Vehicle Accidents Happen Within Five Miles Of Home



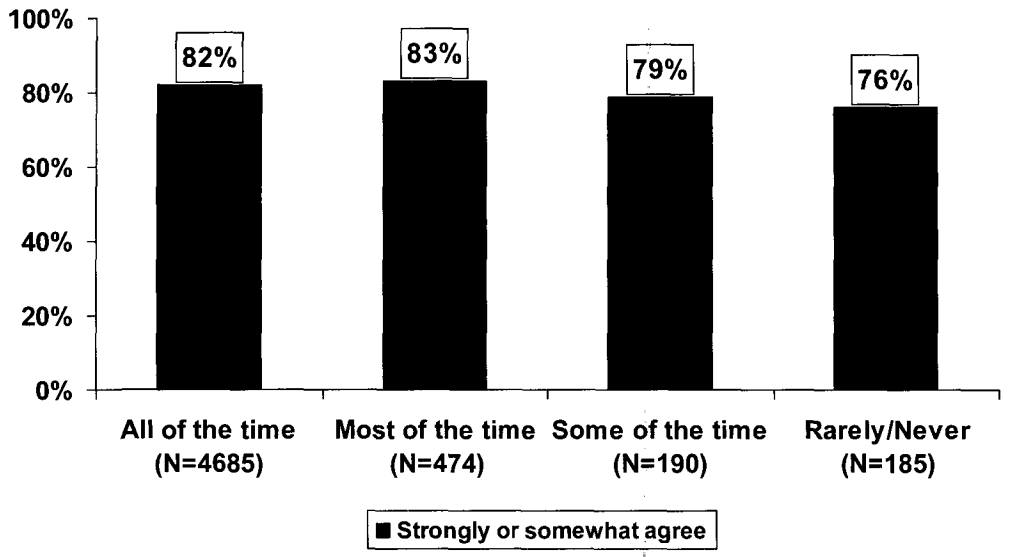
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.

Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6160

There was little difference across levels of reported safety belt use in the proportion who agreed with the statement "Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home."

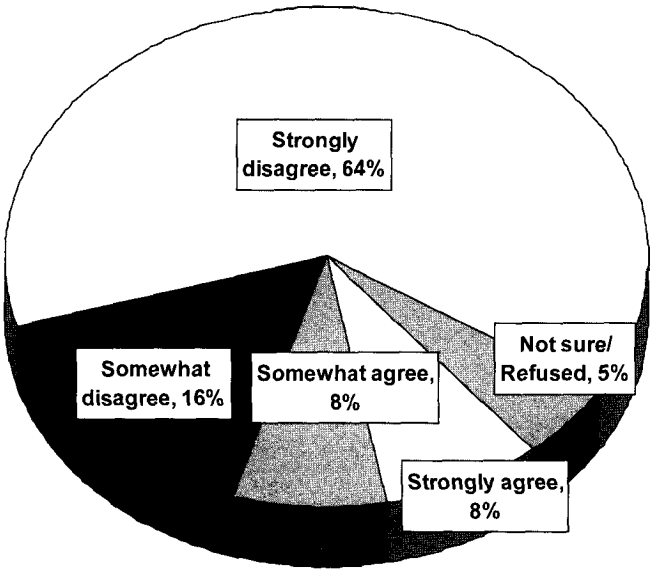
Figure 49
Most Motor Vehicle Accidents Happen Within Five Miles Of Home By Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether your strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Some focus group participants have commented that they thought crashes close to home would tend to involve "less energy" than those farther away. The survey explored whether this meant that the public was prone to discount the seriousness of potential crashes near where they live. The answer was generally "no" as only one-in-six persons (16%) either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that "An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away."

Figure 50
An Accident Close To Home Is Usually Not As Serious As An Accident Farther Away



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.

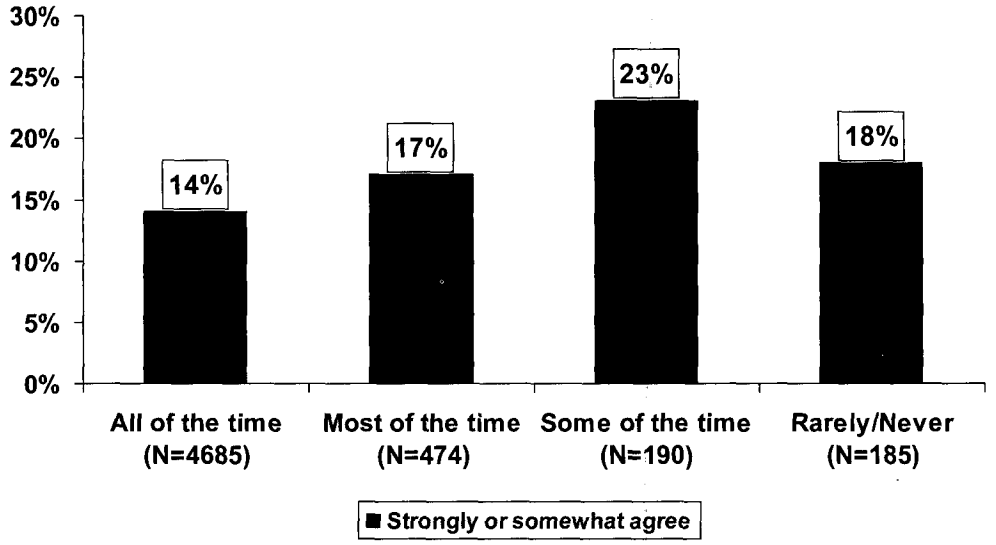
Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

No clear relationship emerged between agreement with the statement and reported belt use.

Figure 51
Accidents Close To Home Are Less Serious By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

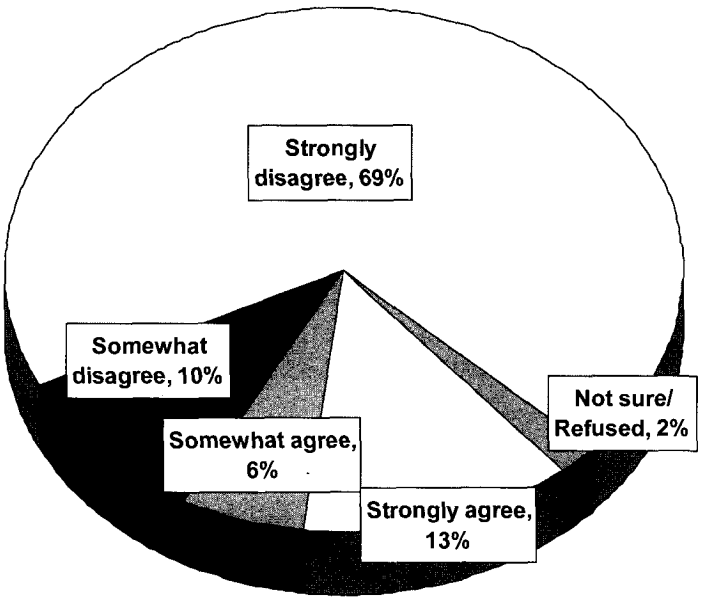
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether your strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

To this point, the discussion on perception of risk has revolved around perceived risk of injury. But there may be social risks involved in safety belt use if usage runs counter to the group norm. The survey included an attitude statement addressing this type of situational pressure. About one-in-five persons (19%) either strongly or somewhat agreed that they would feel self-conscious around their friends if they wore a safety belt and their friends did not.

Figure 52
Would Feel Self-Conscious Around Friends If Wore A Safety Belt And Friends Did Not



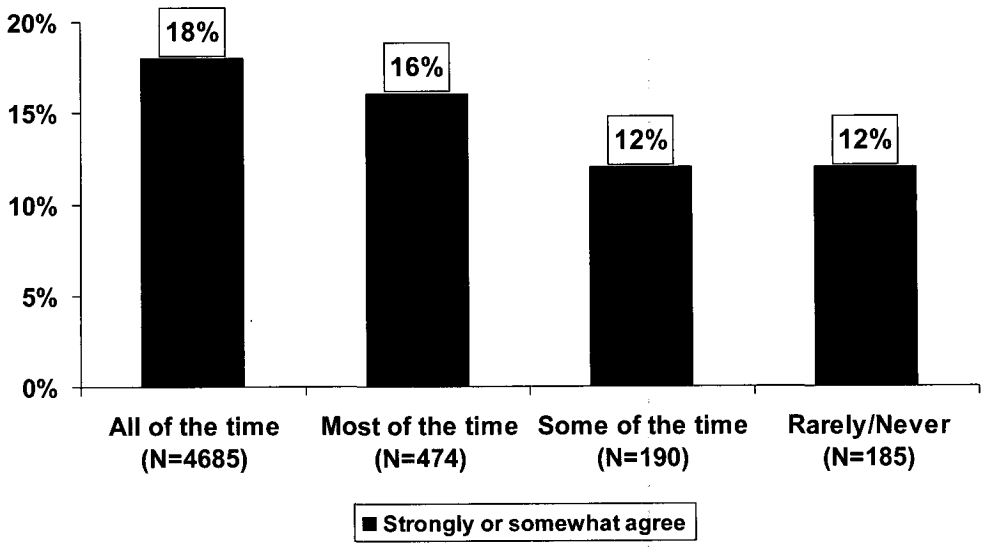
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.

Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

The percentage of respondents who acknowledged they would feel self-conscious if they wore their safety belts and their friends did not was highest among "all of the time" users (18%) and "most of the time" users (16%).

Figure 53
Would Feel Self-Conscious Around Friends By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

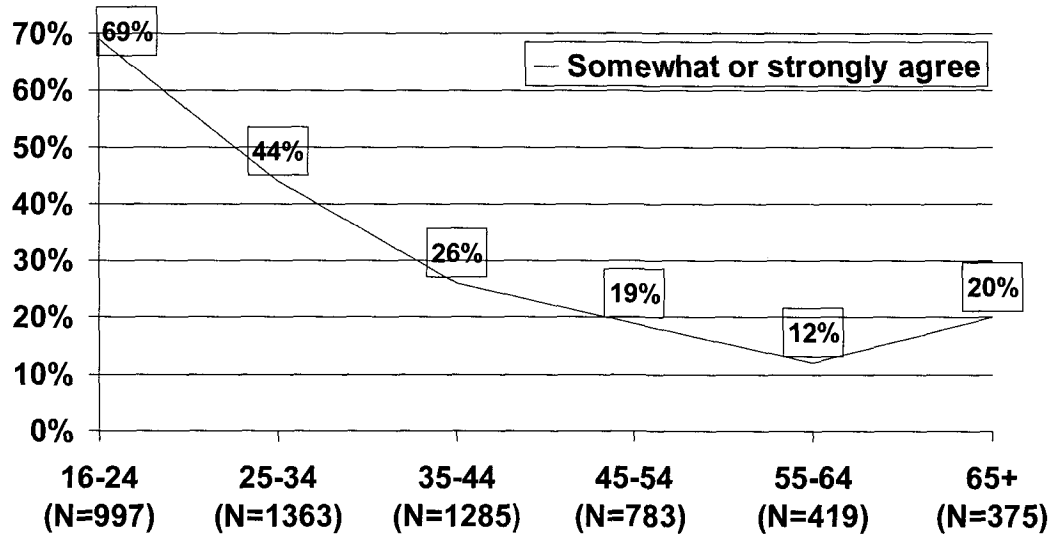
Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether your strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

The survey explored the parental influence issue by asking respondents their level of agreement with the statement "I have a habit of wearing a seat belt because my parents insisted I wear them when I was a child." Among persons 16 to 24, 51% strongly agreed and 18% somewhat agreed (69% when combined). The level of agreement dropped sharply for older age groups, reflecting the lower belt use rates during their childhood years. It is unclear what the oldest age groups were responding to, as safety belts were not in the vehicle fleet during their childhood years.

Figure 54
Have A Habit Of Wearing A Safety Belt Because Parents Insisted I Wear Them When I Was A Child By Age Group

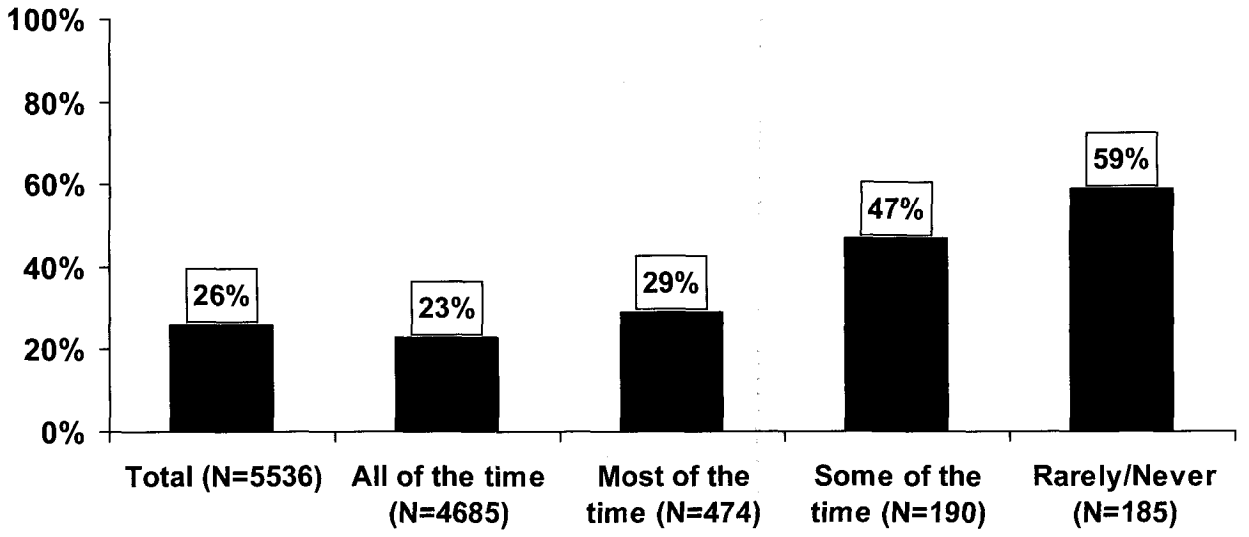


Qx: Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. I have a habit of wearing a seat belt because my parents insisted I wear them when I was a child.
Base: Population 16+ who answered the question (890 people were excluded from the base because they said when they were children there were no safety belts in parent's vehicle).
Unweighted N's listed above.

Attitudes Toward Fatalism

The survey also explored the role of fatalism in safety belt non-use. Since the primary reason for safety belt use is to avoid injury, there is a question as to whether those who do not wear belts on a regular basis do not recognize the danger, or simply don't believe they can avoid it. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt." About one-quarter of the total population age 16 and older agreed. Among drivers, the data showed an inverse relationship between agreement with the fatalistic statement and reported belt use.

Figure 55
Believe Wearing Safety Belt Doesn't Matter
By Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Gender And Age Differences In Attitudes

Few differences emerged between the genders in their levels of agreement with the attitude statements described in the previous sections of this Chapter. The data suggested that females are more likely than males to agree that safety belts are as likely to harm you as help you (39% to 31%).

Table 35
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Gender And Age

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?

Base: Total population age 16+.

	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=3244)	(N=2936)	(N=531)	(N=4805)	(N=764)
Strongly or somewhat agree:					
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	95%	94%	96%	94%	94%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	39%	31%	47%	34%	31%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	65%	65%	73%	64%	67%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	15%	15%	27%	14%	13%
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	14%	17%	30%	13%	19%

More substantial differences on the attitude statements appeared with age. Almost one-half (47%) of 16-to-20 year-olds agreed that safety belts were as likely to harm as to help, compared to 34% of those 21-to-64 and 31% of those 65 and older. The youngest age group also was more likely to agree that an accident close to home was usually not as serious (30%), that putting on a safety belt makes them worry about being in an accident (27%), and that they would feel self-conscious if they were going against the group norm in wearing safety belts (30%). Moreover, the youngest age group was more likely to agree that insurance costs would be lower if more people wore safety belts (73%).

Table 35 (Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Gender And Age

	Gender		Age		
	Female	Male	16-20	21-64	65+
	(N=3244)	(N=2936)	(N=531)	(N=4805)	(N=764)
Strongly or somewhat agree:					
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore my seat belt and they did not.	18%	21%	30%	18%	19%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	80%	80%	72%	83%	72%
Agree:					
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	26%	27%	25%	28%	21%

Racial And Ethnic Differences In Attitudes

Blacks and Hispanics differed markedly from Whites and non-Hispanics on perceived risk and the utility of safety belts. Whereas about one-third of Whites (31%) and non-Hispanics (33%) agreed that safety belts were just as likely to harm as help you, about half of Blacks (48%) and Hispanics (52%) agreed with the statement. Blacks and Hispanics also were more likely than Whites and non-Hispanics to agree that putting on a safety belt made them worry more about being in a crash, or that a crash close to home would not be as serious as one farther away.

Table 36
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Race And Ethnicity

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.
Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?
Base: Total population age 16+.

	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=537)	(N=4591)	(N=757)	(N=5386)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	95%	95%	96%	94%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	48%	31%	52%	33%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	66%	64%	71%	64%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	24%	10%	39%	11%

Blacks (26%) and Hispanics (36%) were about twice as likely as Whites (15%) and non-Hispanics (16%) to say they would feel self-conscious about using safety belts if their friends were not wearing them. Blacks (39%) and Hispanics (37%) were also more likely to agree with the fatalistic statement that wearing a safety belt did not matter because if it was your time to die, you'll die.

Table 36(Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Race And Ethnicity

	Race		Ethnicity	
	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
	(N=537)	(N=4591)	(N=757)	(N=5386)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	20%	12%	34%	13%
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	26%	15%	36%	16%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	71%	84%	65%	82%
Agree:				
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	39%	23%	37%	25%

Differences In Attitudes By Educational Level

Education level also showed a relationship to the various attitudes. Generally, people with more years of formal schooling tended to be less fatalistic, less ambivalent about the injury reduction benefits of safety belts, and less self-conscious about going against group norms of non-use.

Table 37
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Education

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?

Base: Total population age 16+.

	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=806)	(N=1791)	(N=1474)	(N=2072)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	94%	92%	95%	97%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	52%	44%	32%	21%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	71%	61%	62%	68%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	34%	16%	11%	7%
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	33%	16%	12%	10%

Table 37 (Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Education

	Education			
	Grade 11 or less	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	(N=806)	(N=1791)	(N=1474)	(N=2072)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	33%	21%	16%	13%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	67%	80%	83%	85%
Agree:				
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	39%	33%	26%	15%

Differences In Attitudes By Type Of Primary Vehicle Driven

Since pickup truck drivers were less likely to report safety belt use compared to other drivers (see page 17), analyses were conducted to assess whether vehicle type corresponded with any differences in attitudes toward belt utility or fatalism. The results showed pickup truck drivers less likely than other motorists to agree there is a connection between medical insurance costs and belt use, and a slightly greater tendency among SUV drivers to report attitudes supportive of safety belt use.

Table 38
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Type Of Primary Vehicle Driven

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?

Base: Total population age 16+.

	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=3276)	(N=558)	(N=860)	(N=745)
Strongly or somewhat agree:				
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	96%	95%	91%	96%
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	33%	34%	36%	30%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	67%	65%	57%	66%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	13%	13%	11%	10%

Table 38 (Continued)
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts By Primary Vehicle Driven

	Primary vehicle			
	Car	Van/Minivan	Pickup truck	SUV
	(N=3276)	(N=558)	(N=860)	(N=745)
Strongly or Somewhat Agree:				
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	14%	17%	14%	12%
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	18%	21%	17%	14%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	81%	80%	84%	87%
Agree:				
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	24%	28%	29%	24%

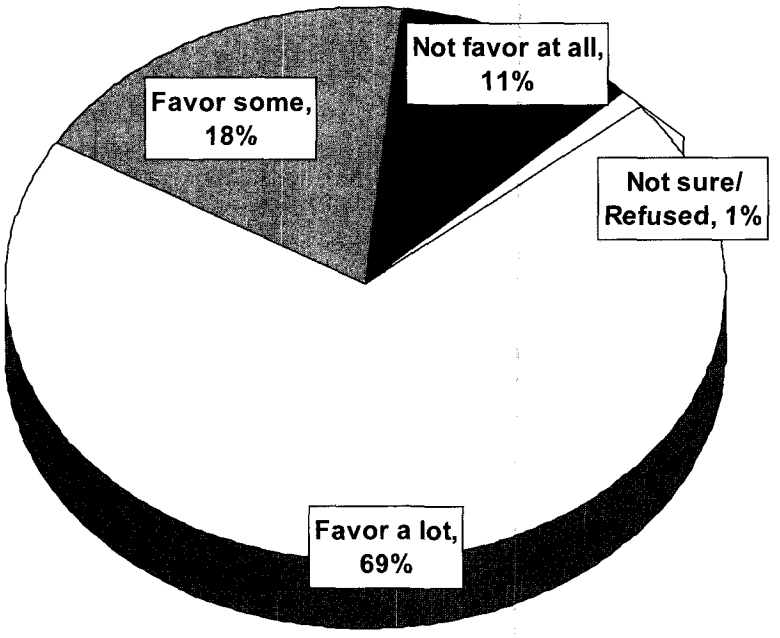
2003 SURVEY RESULTS

CHAPTER 4: ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE, AND EXPERIENCE WITH SAFETY BELT LAWS AND THEIR ENFORCEMENT

Attitudes Toward Safety Belt Laws

At the time the survey was conducted, 49 states plus the District of Columbia had laws requiring safety belt use that were applicable to adults, New Hampshire being the exception (see Appendix B). Respondents were asked their attitudes about enactment and enforcement of the laws, their knowledge of the safety belt laws in their own State, and their personal experience with safety belt law enforcement. Most persons age 16 and older (88%)[7] favored requiring drivers and front seat passengers to wear safety belts. More than two-thirds (69%) favored such laws a lot, and an additional 18% favored them somewhat. Eleven percent did not favor such laws at all while 1% was unsure.

Figure 56
Support For Front Seat Safety Belt Laws

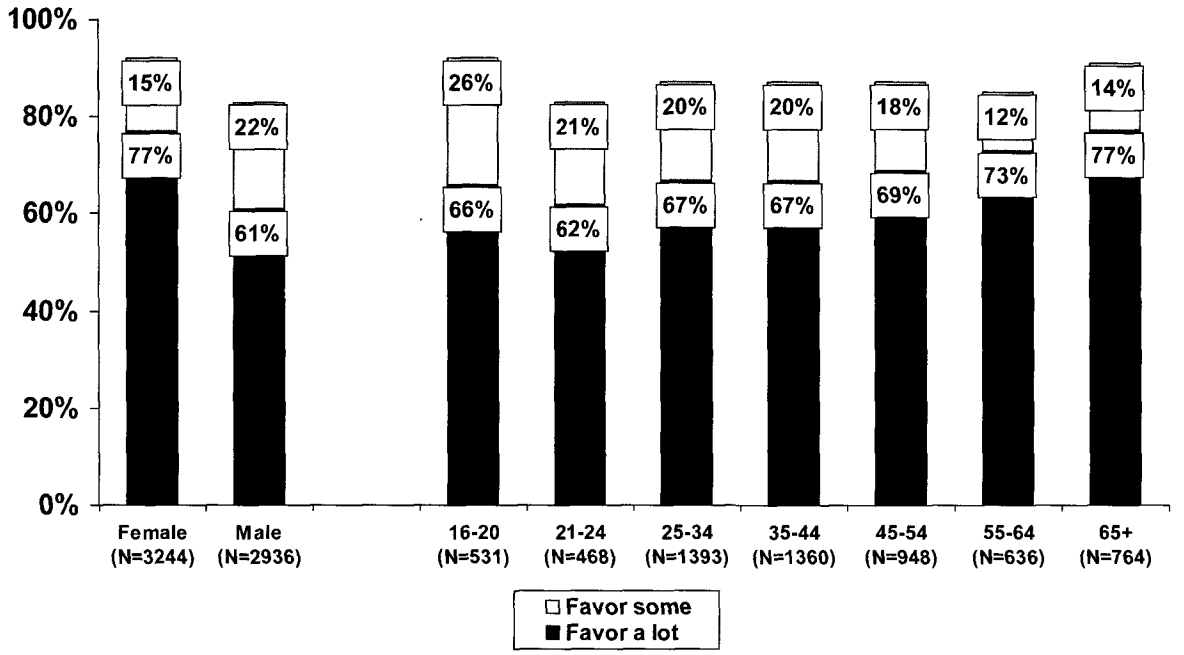


Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these at all?
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N=6180
**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

[7] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

Females (92%) voiced stronger support for front seat safety belt laws than did males (82%)[8]. The oldest and youngest age groups were most likely to say that they supported front seat safety belt laws.

Figure 57
Favor Front Seat Safety Belt Laws By Gender And Age



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor them at all?

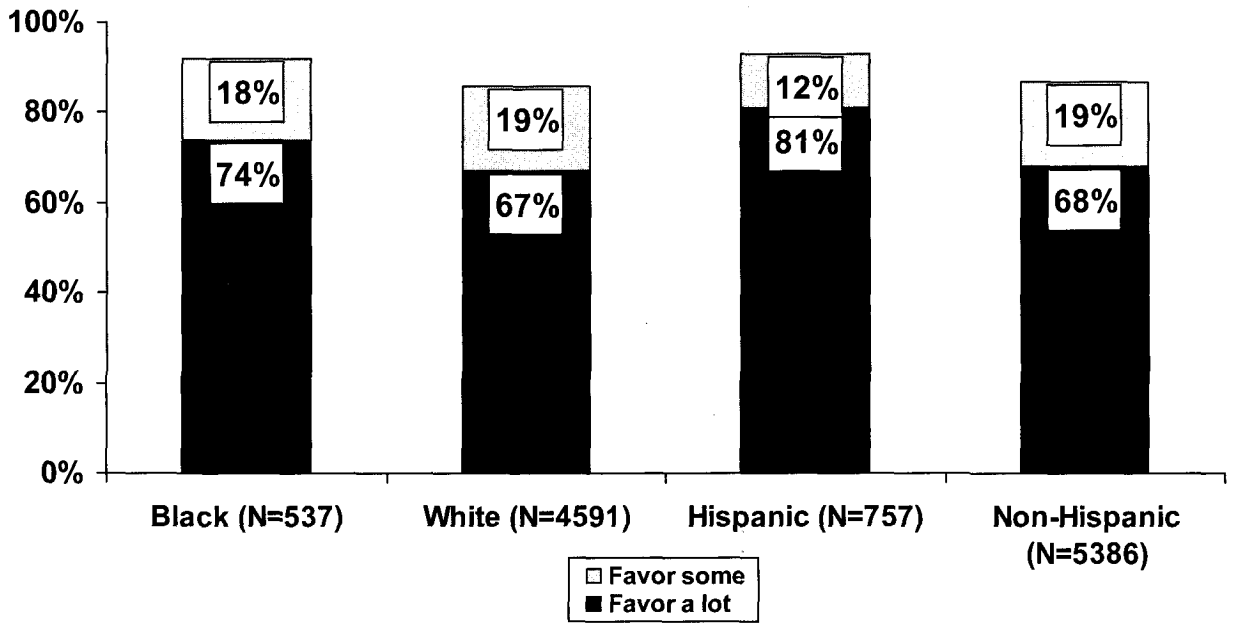
Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

[8] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

Blacks (92%) and Hispanics (93%) were more likely to express support for front seat safety belt laws than Whites (86%) and non-Hispanics (87%). This pattern of greater support among minority groups for legislation and enforcement was repeated on other questionnaire items addressed in this Chapter.

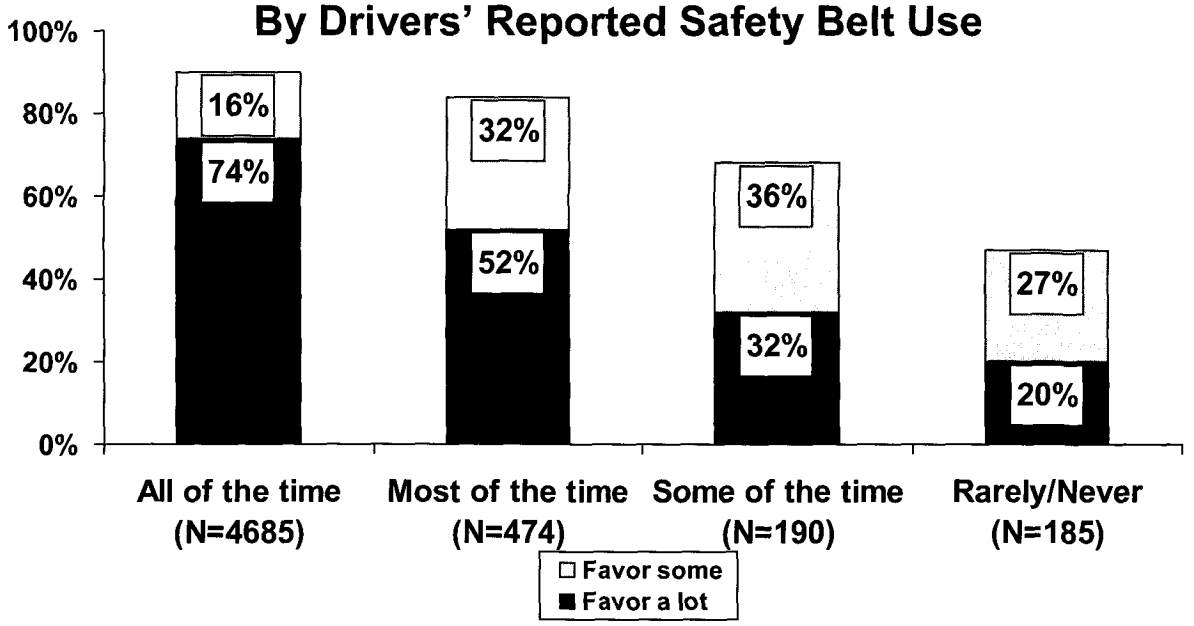
Figure 58
Favor Front Seat Safety Belt Laws By Race And Ethnicity



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor them at all?
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N's listed above.

As expected, support for safety belt laws was strongest among those who used their safety belt most often. Nine-in-ten drivers (90%) who said they used their safety belt "*all* of the time" favored front seat safety belt laws "a lot" or "some." The figure dropped to 83%[9] of "most of the time" safety belt users, and 69% of "some of the time" users. Among drivers who rarely or never wore safety belts, 47% said they favored laws requiring safety belt use by drivers and front seat passengers.

Figure 59
Favor Front Seat Safety Belt Laws
By Drivers' Reported Safety Belt Use

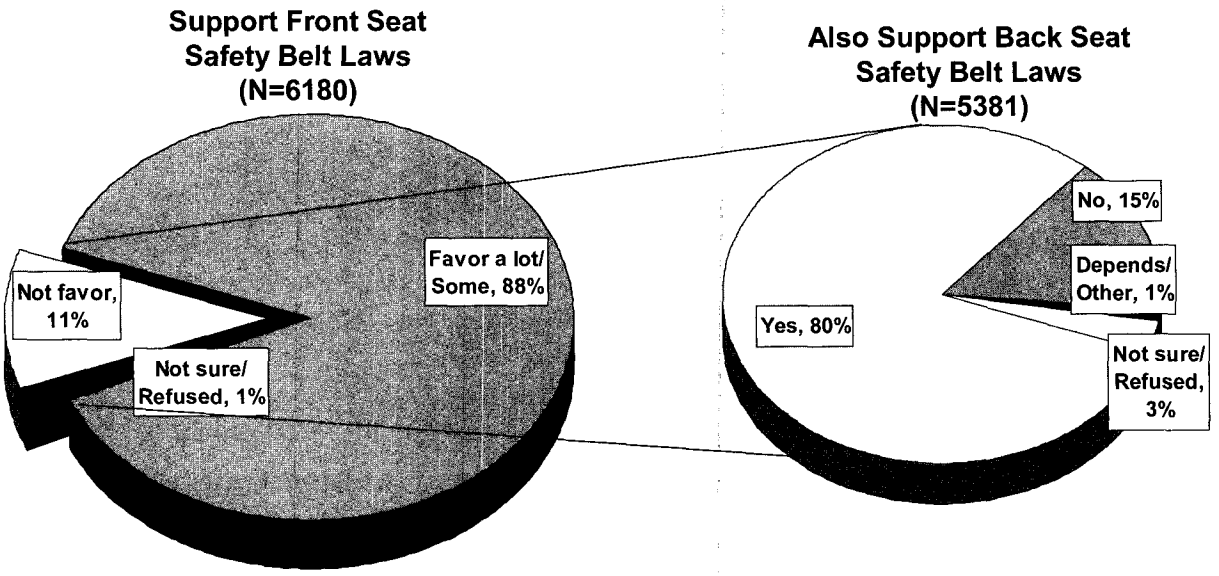


Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor them at all?
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N's listed above.

[9] The numbers in this paragraph may not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

If respondents said that they favored front seat safety belt laws (either somewhat or a lot), the interviewers then asked them if they also supported laws that applied to the back seat as well. Four-fifths (80%) said yes. This equates to more than two-thirds (70%) of the total population age 16 and older supporting safety belt laws that apply to both the front and back seats (80% of the 88% who favored front seat laws).

Figure 60
Support For Safety Belt Laws That Apply To Back Seat Adult Passengers



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

Qx: Do you think that seat belt laws should also apply to back seat adult passengers?

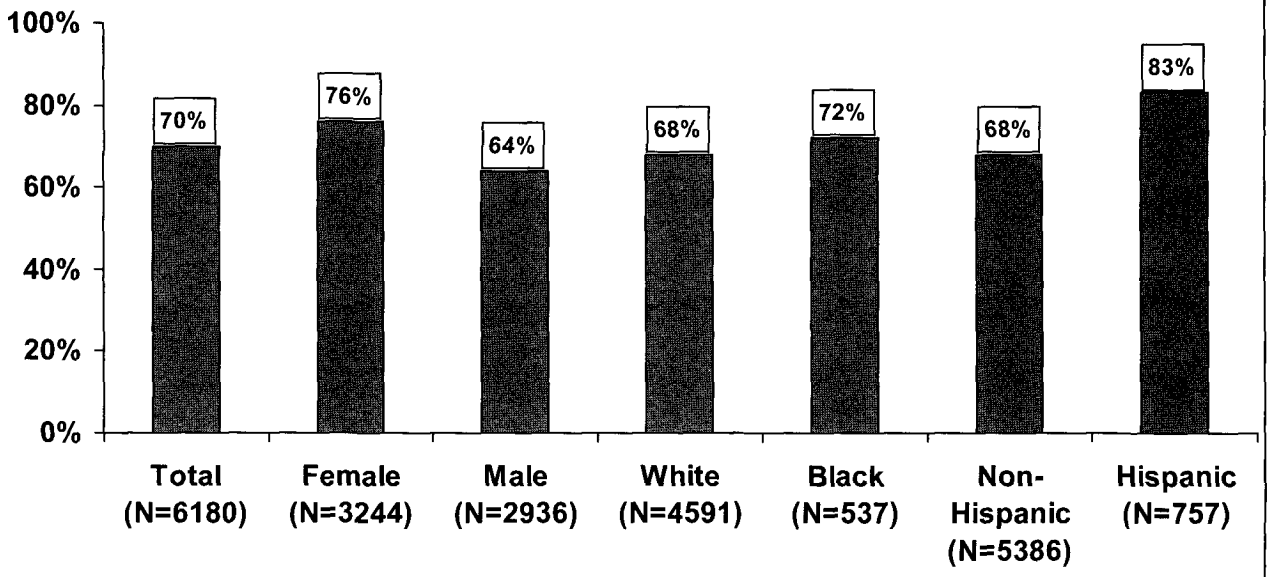
Base: Pie 1: Total population age 16+. Pie 2: Those who favor front safety belt laws.

Unweighted N's listed above.

**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

As noted on the previous page, 70% of persons believed that safety belt laws should apply to vehicle occupants in both the front and back seats. The percentage was higher among females (76%) than males (64%), and higher among Hispanics (83%) than non-Hispanics (68%).

Figure 61
Favor Safety Belt Laws For Adult Front And Back Seat Passengers By Gender, Race, And Ethnicity



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

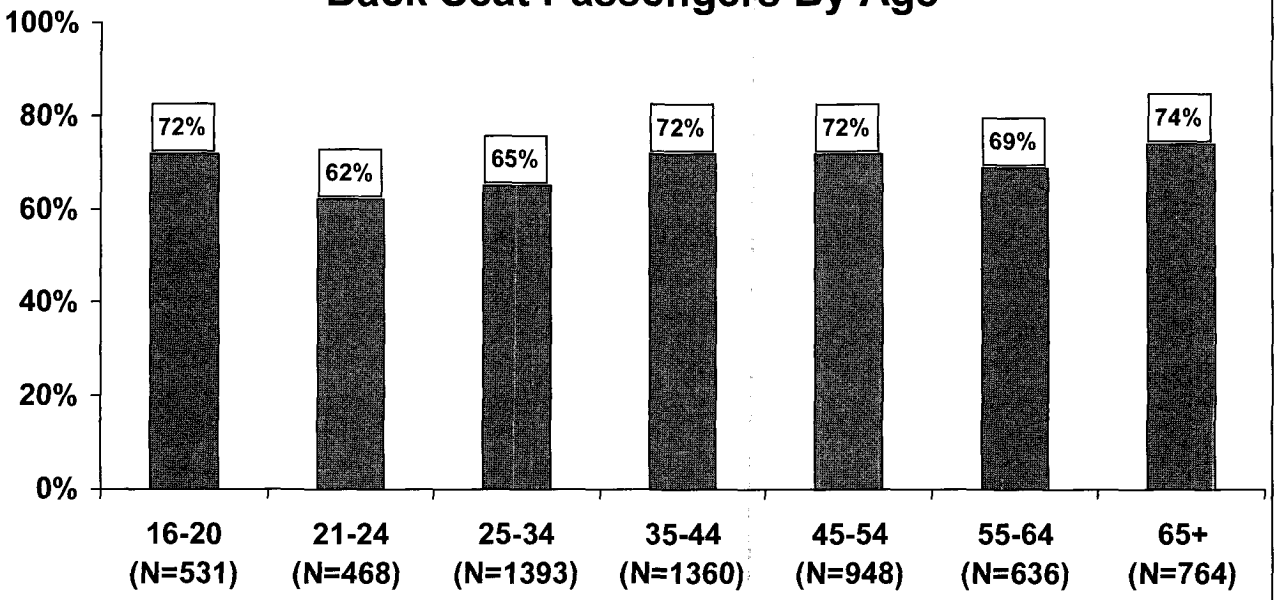
Qx: Do you think that seat belt laws should also apply to back seat adult passengers?

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

The least support across age groups for both front and back seat laws was recorded for persons ages 21 through 24 (62%).

Figure 62
Favor Safety Belt Laws For Adult Front And Back Seat Passengers By Age



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

Qx: Do you think that seat belt laws should also apply to back seat adult passengers?

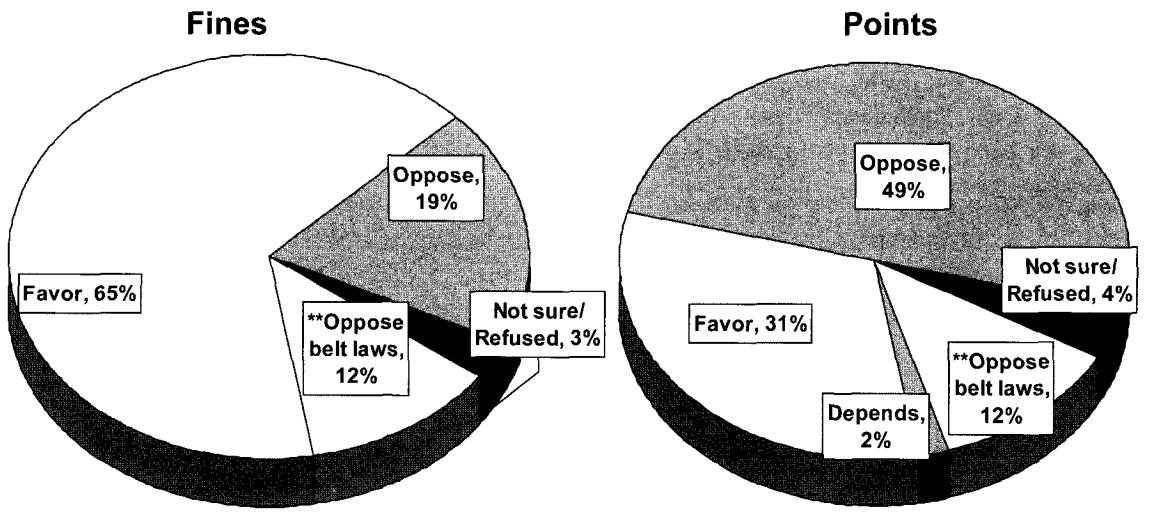
Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Attitudes Toward Enforcement Of Safety Belt Laws

The public tended to favor enforcing safety belt laws with fines, but not with points on the driver's license. About two-thirds (65%) of the population age 16 and older supported fines for drivers who did not wear safety belts. Less than half that many (31%) supported points against the license as a penalty; another 2% said it depended on past violations. As indicated on page 110, 12% of the population opposed front seat safety belt laws entirely or did not know if they did (they did not receive the fines/points questions and therefore are separated from those who did).

Figure 63
Support For Fines And Points



** Includes 1% not sure/refused on support for front seat safety belt laws.

Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

Qx: Do you favor or oppose fines for drivers who do not wear seat belts?

Qx: Do you favor or oppose receiving points against a license as a penalty for seat belt violations?

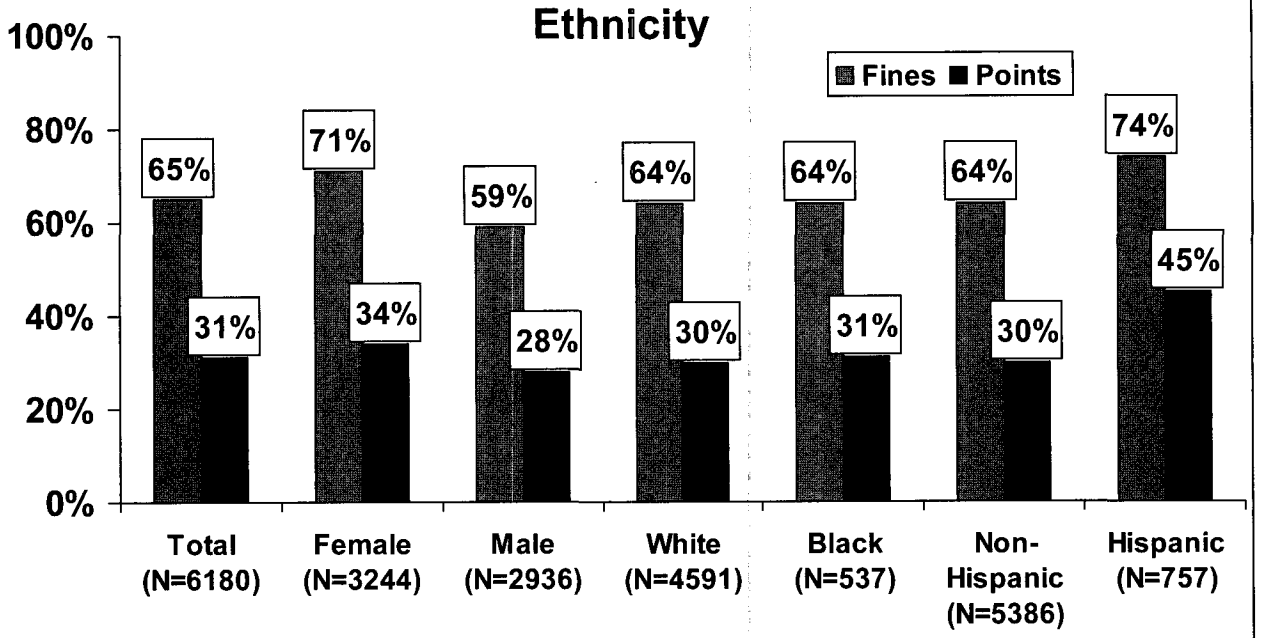
Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

**The percentages in the pies do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

Females were more likely to support fines and points against a license for safety belt violations than males (fines: 71% to 59%, points: 34% to 28%). Blacks and Whites were equal in their support for fines (64%) and points (31% to 30%). However, Hispanics were much more likely to support both fines (74% to 64%) and points (45% to 30%) for safety belt violations than non-Hispanics.

Figure 64
Support For Fines And Points By Gender, Race, And Ethnicity



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

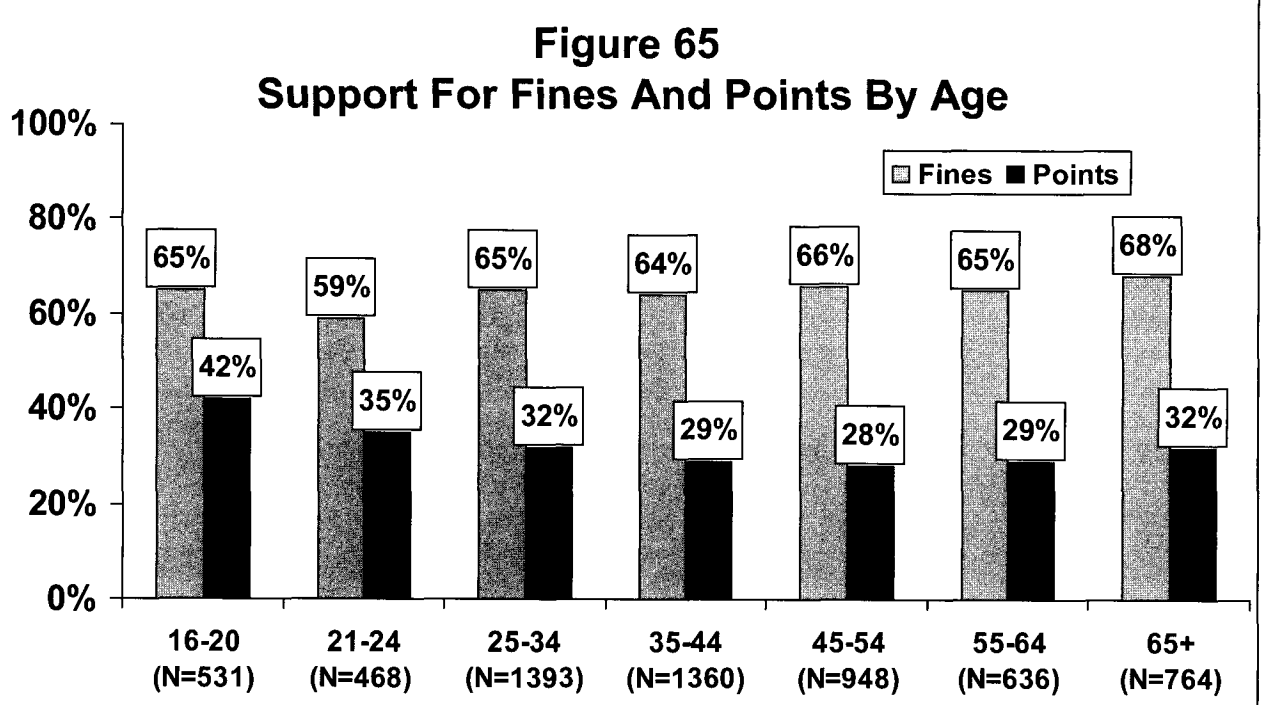
Qx: Do you favor or oppose fines for drivers who do not wear seat belts?

Qx: Do you favor or oppose receiving points against a license as a penalty for seat belt violations?

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

There was little difference in support for fines for safety belt violations by age. However, younger persons (under 25) were more likely to support points than older persons.



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

Qx: Do you favor or oppose fines for drivers who do not wear seat belts?

Qx: Do you favor or oppose receiving points against a license as a penalty for seat belt violations?

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

Support for points was highest among those who had not graduated high school and those with incomes under $15,000.

Table 39
Support For Fines And Points
By Demographic Characteristics

Qx: Do you favor or oppose fines for drivers who do not wear seat belts?

Qx: Do you favor or oppose receiving points against a license as a penalty for seat belt violations?

Base: Total population age 16+.

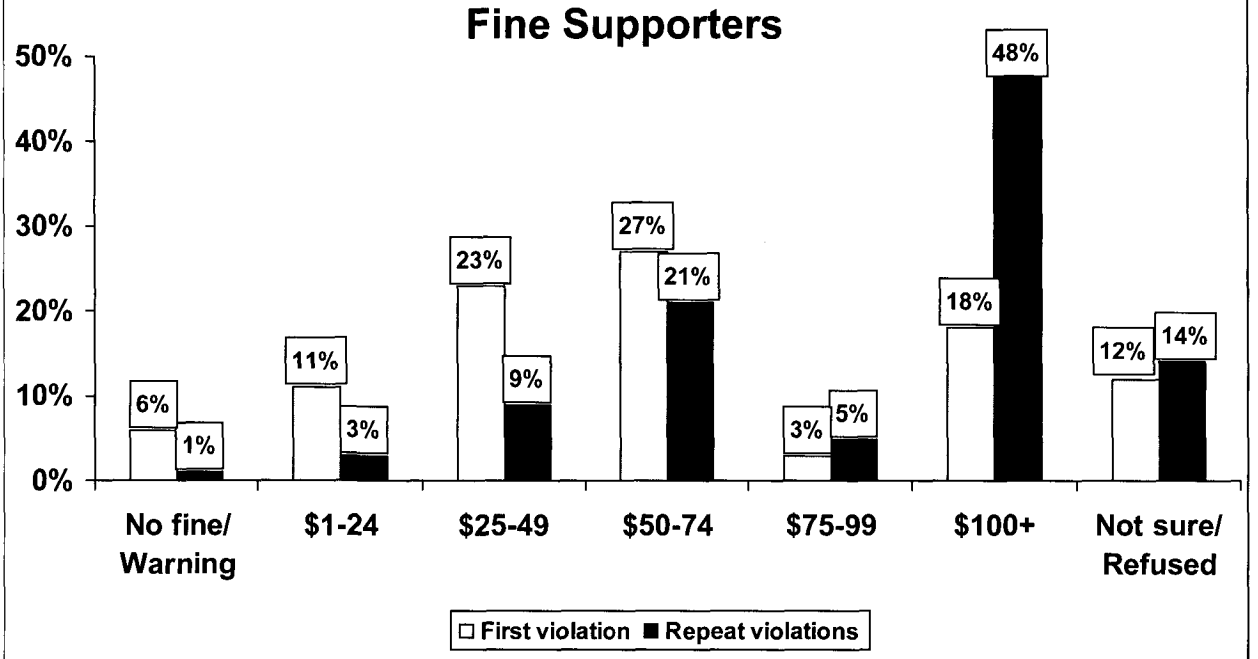
		*Fines			*Points		
	Unweighted N	Favor	Oppose	**Oppose belt laws	Favor	Oppose	**Oppose belt laws
Total	(6180)	65%	19%	12%	31%	49%	12%
Education							
11 or less	(806)	66%	19%	11%	43%	38%	11%
HS grad/GED	(1791)	63%	21%	13%	28%	52%	13%
Some college	(1474)	64%	19%	14%	29%	51%	14%
College grad	(2072)	67%	19%	11%	31%	51%	11%
Income							
<$15,000	(643)	67%	19%	9%	39%	44%	9%
$15,000-29,999	(957)	63%	20%	13%	35%	45%	13%
$30,000-49,999	(1278)	66%	19%	12%	30%	51%	12%
$50,000-74,999	(1064)	66%	19%	12%	30%	52%	12%
$75,000-99,999	(615)	63%	19%	16%	28%	52%	16%
$100,000+	(702)	66%	19%	13%	30%	51%	13%
Vehicle type							
Car	(3276)	67%	19%	11%	32%	50%	11%
Van/Minivan	(558)	69%	20%	9%	32%	55%	9%
Pickup truck	(860)	55%	21%	21%	26%	49%	21%
SUV	(745)	69%	15%	12%	30%	53%	12%

**The three response categories (favor/oppose/oppose belt laws) do not sum to 100% because persons who answered DK/Refused or Depends to the questions on fines or points are not shown in the table.*

***Includes those who did not know, or refused to say, if they supported front seat safety belt laws (they were not asked the questions on fines or points). This was about 1 percentage point for almost all groups*

Interviewers asked those who supported fines as a sanction what they thought the minimum fine should be for the first safety belt violation. They then asked the same respondents what they thought the fine should be for repeat safety belt violations. If it was a first time violation, 40% supported fines under $50 (or no fine at all) while 18% supported fines of $100 or more. However, the respondents generally favored stiffer fines if it was a repeat violation: only 13% supported fines under $50 while 48% supported fines of $100 or more.

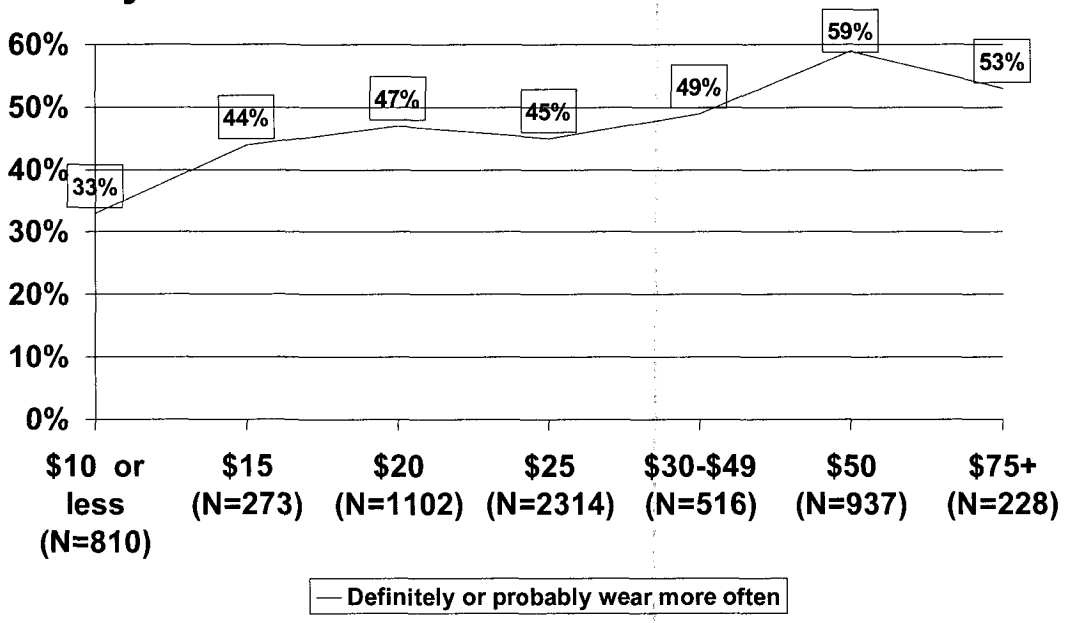
Figure 66
Suggested Minimum Fine For Violation Of Safety Belt Law: Fine Supporters



Qx: What do you think the minimum fine should be for the first seat belt violation?
Qx: What do you think the minimum fine should be for repeat seat belt violations?
Base: Support fines for safety belt law violations.
Unweighted N=3978

The survey sought to determine whether the public believed that existing fine amounts can affect behavior. Respondents were asked if someone they knew who didn't use safety belts all of the time would wear them more often if assessed the amount of the fine in their State (in the one State not having a belt law applicable to adults an amount of $25 was used; in States where the fine amount was within a designated range an amount of $50 was used). When the general level of the fines increased, the expectations for behavior change did as well. If fined $10 or less, 33% thought that someone they knew would probably or definitely wear safety belts more often. This increased to 47% with fines of $20, 49% with fines of $30-$49, and to 59% with fines of $50.

Figure 67
Someone They Know Would Probably Or Definitely Wear Safety Belts More Often If Assessed The State Fine



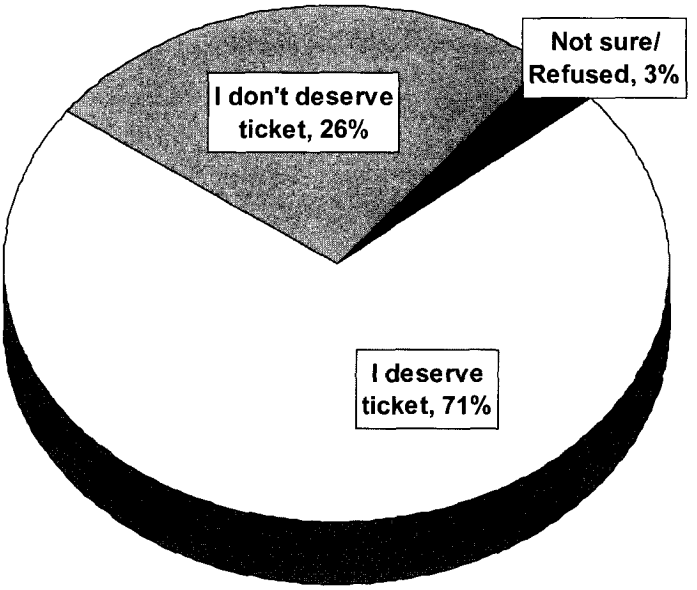
Qx: I'd like you to think about someone you know who doesn't wear seat belts all of the time. If that person were stopped and fined (amount of fine in state) for not wearing seat belts, would this person definitely wear seat belts more often, probably wear seat belts more often, or probably not change his or her seat belt wearing habits?

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Respondents were asked how they would likely react to getting a ticket for a safety belt violation. The interviewers gave respondents two choices and asked which was more likely; that they would believe they deserved the ticket because they broke the law, or they would believe the ticket was undeserved because wearing a safety belt should be a personal choice. This question was designed to enable comparison of the public's views about safety belt laws from the societal perspective (support for belt laws in principle) and the personal perspective (reaction to personally receiving some punishment for violating the laws). According to the data, 71% would be more likely to believe that they deserved the ticket.

Figure 68
Likely Reaction To Receiving Ticket For Safety Belt Violation



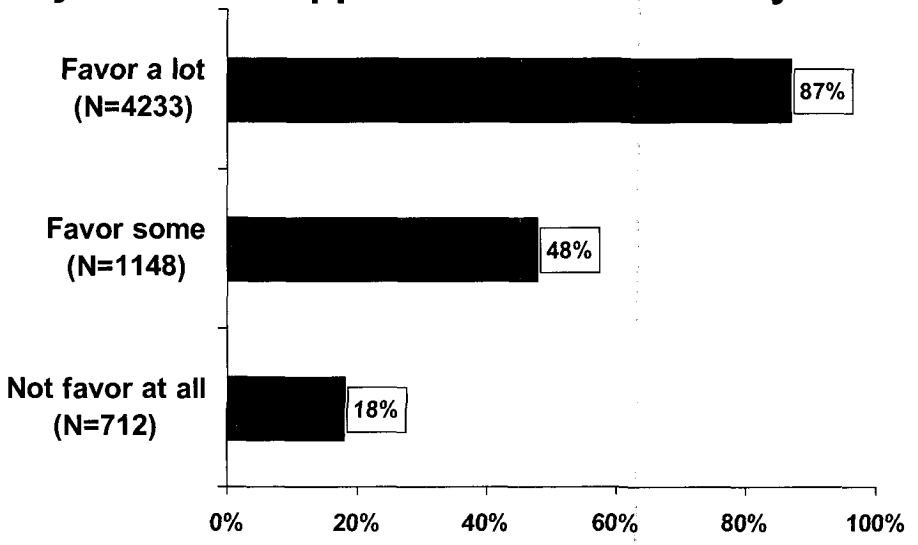
Qx: Suppose you get a ticket for not wearing your seat belt. Which of the following statements better describes your likely reaction? I deserve the ticket because I broke the law, or I do NOT deserve the ticket because wearing a seat belt should be a personal choice.

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

The survey found attitudes toward safety belt laws in general, and attitudes about the fairness of personally receiving a ticket for a safety belt violation, to be somewhat consistent with one another although not entirely so. About six-in-seven persons (87%) who said they favored front seat safety belt laws "a lot" also said they would deserve the ticket for breaking the law. This figure dropped to 48% for those who favored the laws "some". Still, 11% who favored the laws "a lot" responded that they would not deserve the ticket because it should be a personal choice (about 2% "did not know" their likely reaction or did not answer). Conversely, 18% of those who did not favor the laws at all said they would deserve the ticket.

Figure 69
Deserve Safety Belt Ticket
By Favor Or Oppose Front Seat Safety Belt Laws



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor them at all?

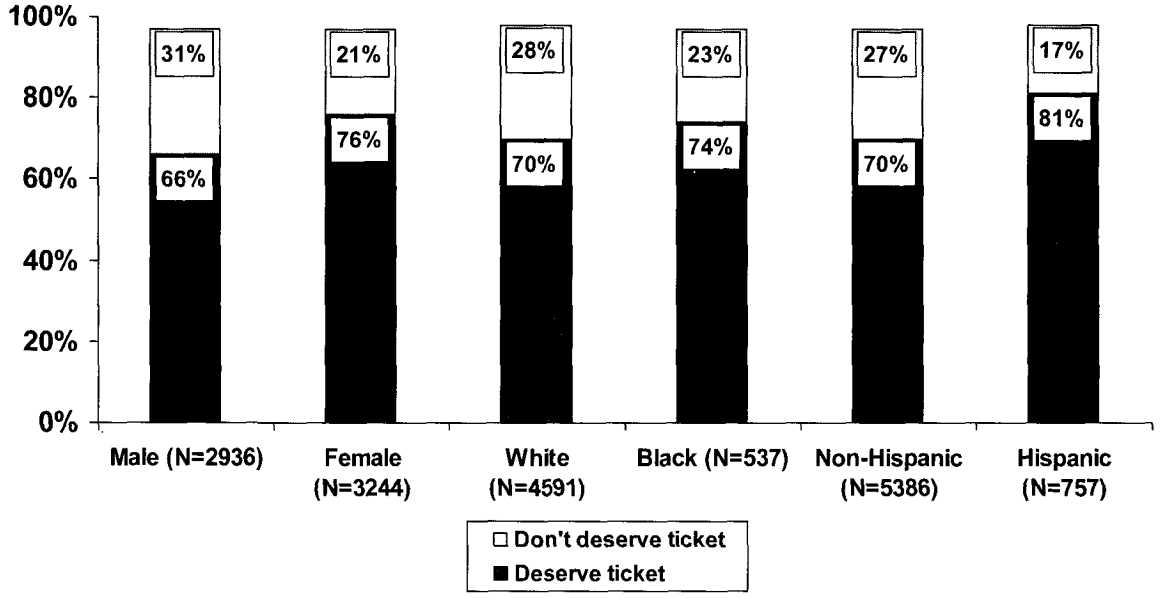
Qx: Suppose you get a ticket for not wearing your seat belt. Which of the following statements better describes your likely reaction? I deserve the ticket because I broke the law, or I do NOT deserve the ticket because wearing a seat belt should be a personal choice.

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Females (76%) were more likely than males (66%) to believe that their probable reaction would be that they deserved the ticket. Almost one-third of males (31%) instead chose the argument that they did not deserve the ticket because it should be a personal choice. In addition, Hispanics (81%) and Blacks (74%) were more likely than non-Hispanics (70%) and Whites (70%) to answer that they likely would feel that they deserved the ticket.

Figure 70
Likely Reaction To Receiving Safety Belt Ticket By Gender, Race, And Ethnicity



Qx: Suppose you get a ticket for not wearing your seat belt. Which of the following statements better describes your likely reaction? I deserve the ticket because I broke the law, or I do NOT deserve the ticket because wearing a seat belt should be a personal choice.

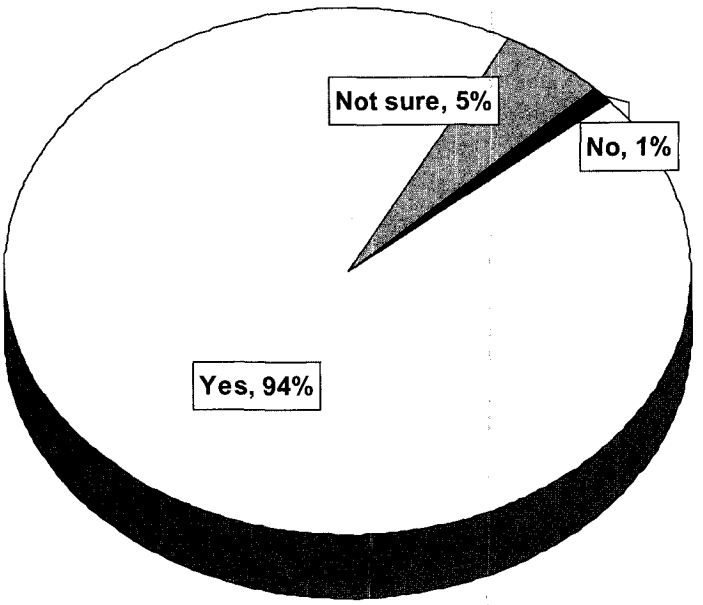
Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Knowledge Of State Safety Belt Laws

Interviewers asked respondents whether or not their State had a safety belt law, and then asked questions about the law's coverage and enforcement guidelines. Most people (94%) *believed their State did indeed have a safety belt law. Those that didn't were* usually uncertain about the existence of a State law. At the time of the survey, New Hampshire was the only State not having a safety belt law applicable to adults. When the few survey cases from New Hampshire (30) were excluded from the analysis, the percentage of those who believed there was a State law remained unchanged at 94%.

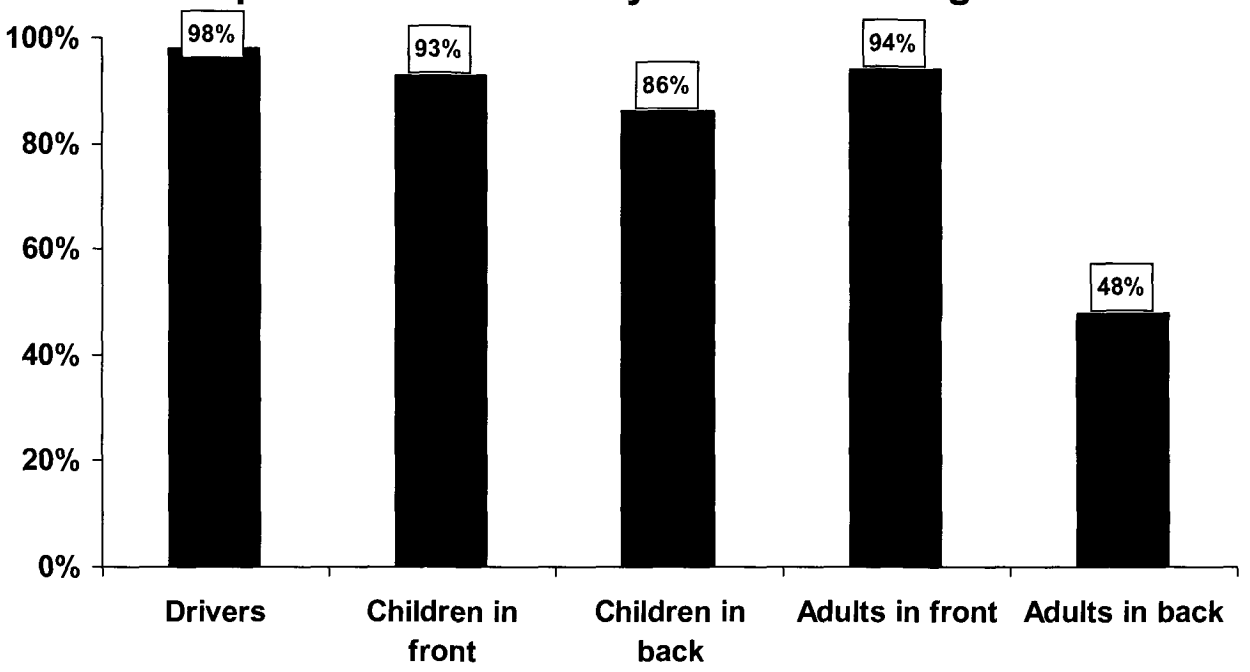
Figure 71
Believe Their State Has A Law Requiring Safety Belt Use



Qx: Does (STATE) have a law requiring seat belt use?
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N=6180

Those persons who believed their State had a law requiring safety belt use were asked who the law covered. The interviewers asked the respondents if each of the following groups was required to wear safety belts: drivers, children in the front seat, children in the back seat, adult passengers in the front seat, and adult passengers in the back seat. Almost everyone believed the law covered drivers (98%), children in the front (93%), and adult passengers in the front (94%). Many thought the law also covered children in the back (86%). Fewer that half (48%) assumed that adults were required to wear safety belts in the back seat.

Figure 72
Who Is Required To Wear Safety Belts According To State Law



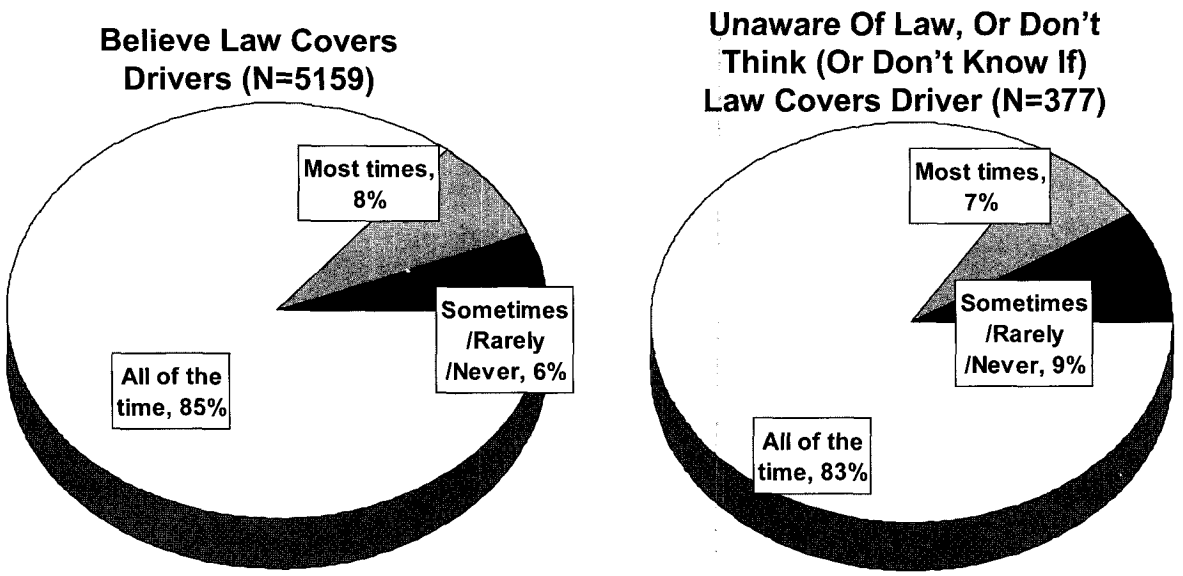
Qx: Who is required to wear seat belts according to your state law? Are (READ ITEM) required to wear seat belts?

Base: Believe their state has a safety belt law.

Unweighted N=5805

The next three pages show self-reported belt use for a specific seating position for persons who believed there was a law requiring usage in that seating position. For purposes of comparison, these pages also present self-reported belt use for persons who did not know there was a law, or did not believe that seating position was covered by the law, or were unsure if that seating position was covered by the law. Among drivers who thought there was a law requiring drivers to wear safety belts, 85% said they used their safety belt "all of the time" while driving. If they did not say that drivers were covered by a law, 83% said they wore safety belts "all of the time" while driving.

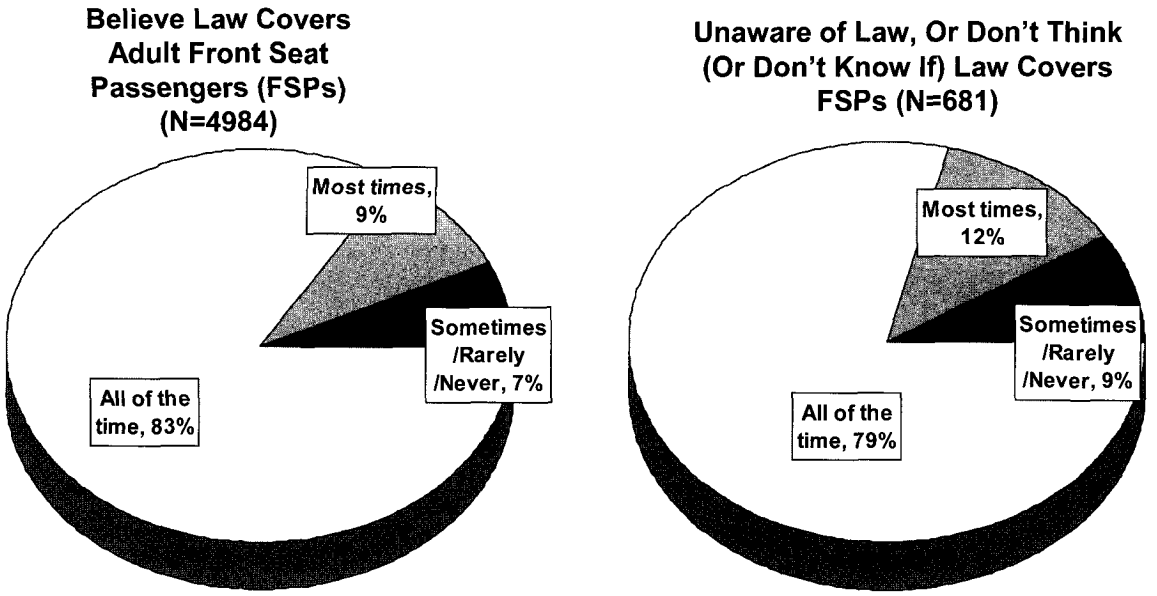
Figure 73
Driver Reported Safety Belt Use
By Whether Driver Believes Law Covers Drivers



Qx: Who is required to wear seat belts according to your state law? Are (Drivers) required to wear seat belts?
Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.
**The percentages in the pies do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

Eighty-three percent of those who said there was a safety belt law that covered adult front seat passengers also reported that they always wore their safety belt when sitting as passengers in the front seat. This compared to 79% of those who were unaware of a law, or did not say it covered front seat adult passengers.

Figure 74
Adults' Reported Front Passenger Safety Belt Use By Whether Believe Law Covers That Position



Qx: Who is required to wear seat belts according to your state law? Are (adult passengers in the front seat) required to wear seat belts?

Qx: When riding as a passenger in the front seat how often do you wear your seat belt?

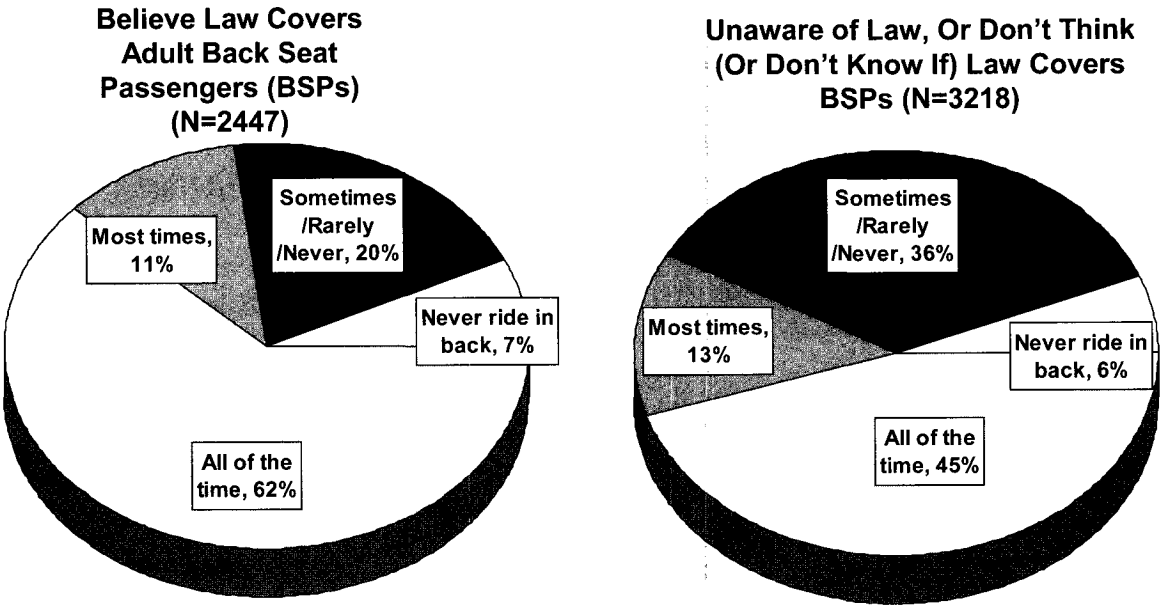
Base: Persons who at least on occasion ride as passengers.

Unweighted N's listed above.

**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

The law appeared to make the greatest difference for safety belt use in the rear seating position. Among those who thought there was a law that covered the back seat, 62% said they used their safety belt "all of the time" when riding in the back. Only 45% of those who did not think or did not know if there was a law said that they wore their safety belt "all of the time" while riding in the back seat.

Figure 75
Adults' Reported Back Passenger Safety Belt Use By Whether Believe Law Covers That Position



Qx: Who is required to wear seat belts according to your state law? Are (adult passengers in the back seat) required to wear seat belts?

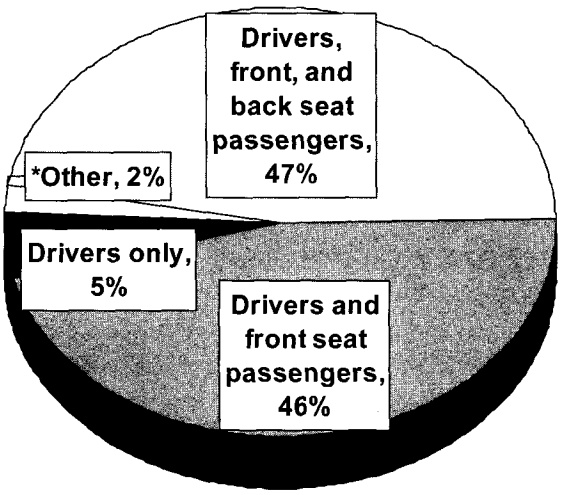
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the back seat how often do you wear your seat belt?

Base: Persons who at least on occasion ride as passengers.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Figure 76 segments those persons who thought there was a State law into groups based on the extent they believed that the law covered adults. Forty-seven percent believed that the law applied to all adults in the vehicle (drivers, passengers in the front, and passengers in the back). About the same percentage (46%) thought that the law applied to only drivers and front seat passengers. Five percent said that the law applied to drivers only. The remainder of the respondents (2%) either provided a different permutation from the combinations possible, or else indicated that they did not know who the law covered.

Figure 76
Beliefs About Which Adults Are Required To Wear Safety Belts



Qx: Who is required to wear seat belts according to your state law? Are (READ ITEM) required to wear seat belts?

Base: Believe their state has a safety belt law.

Unweighted N=5805

** Other includes Don't know/Refused and other combinations not shown in the pie.*

The greater the coverage of the law, the more likely that persons correctly identified who in the vehicle was required to wear safety belts. In States where all seating positions were covered, 72% of the respondents correctly agreed that drivers, adult front seat passengers, and adult back seat passengers were required to wear safety belts. If the State law only covered the front seating positions, then fewer (55%) correctly agreed that drivers and adult front seat passengers, but not adult back seat passengers, were required to wear safety belts. Another 37% in these States believed that all seating positions were covered.

Table 40
Beliefs About Who Is Required To Wear Safety Belts By Seating Positions Covered By State Law

Qx: Who is required to wear seat belts according to your state law? Are (READ ITEM) required to wear seat belts?

Base: Believe that state has a safety belt law.

Who public believes is required to wear safety belts	What state law requires	
	Driver and all passengers to wear safety belts	Only driver and front seat passengers to wear safety belts
	(N=1695)	(N=4095)
Driver and all passengers	72%	37%
Driver only	4%	6%
Driver and front seat passengers	22%	55%
Other/Not sure/Refused	2%	2%

Pages 128-130 examined self-reported safety belt use according to beliefs about which seating positions were covered by the State law. Table 41 summarizes self-reported safety belt use according to the actual provisions of the State law. The results were similar in that the major difference occurred in the back seat. Without a law covering the back seating position, people were far less likely to report wearing their safety belt while riding in the back seat.

Table 41
Self-Reported Safety Belt Use By Seating Positions Covered By State Law

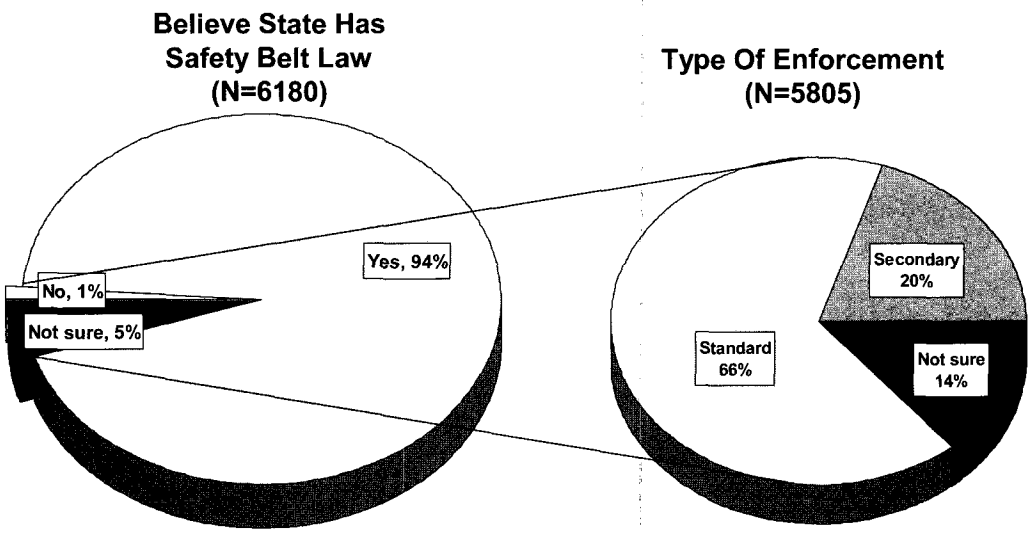
Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van), how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the front seat how often do you wear your seat belt
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the back seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts/Persons who at least on occasion ride as passengers.

Self-reported safety belt use for different seating positions	What state law requires	
	Driver and all passengers to wear safety belts	Only driver and front seat passengers to wear safety belts
Seat belt use as driver	(Drivers only/N=1611)	(Drivers only/N=3900)
All of the time	88%	84%
Most of the time	7%	9%
Some of the time	2%	4%
Rarely	1%	2%
Never	1%	2%
Seat belt use in front seat	(N=1642)	(N=3998)
All of the time	86%	82%
Most of the time	9%	10%
Some of the time	3%	4%
Rarely	1%	2%
Never	1%	2%
Seat belt use in back seat	(N=1642)	(N=3998)
All of the time	67%	47%
Most of the time	11%	13%
Some of the time	6%	9%
Rarely	5%	9%
Never	7%	15%
Never ride in back	4%	7%

Standard Or Secondary Enforcement Provisions Of Safety Belt Laws

State safety belt laws contain either standard or secondary enforcement provisions. Under standard enforcement (also known as primary enforcement), law enforcement officers can stop a vehicle on the basis of observing a safety belt violation. Under secondary enforcement an officer must observe some other violation first before stopping a vehicle. At the time of the survey 18 States plus the District of Columbia had standard enforcement provisions, and 31 State laws required secondary enforcement. Among persons who thought their State had a law, 66% believed it permitted standard enforcement. This equates to 62% of the total population age 16 and older (66% of the 94% who believed there was a State law).

Figure 77
Beliefs About Whether State Law Permits Standard Or Secondary Enforcement



Qx: Does (STATE) have a law requiring seat belt use?

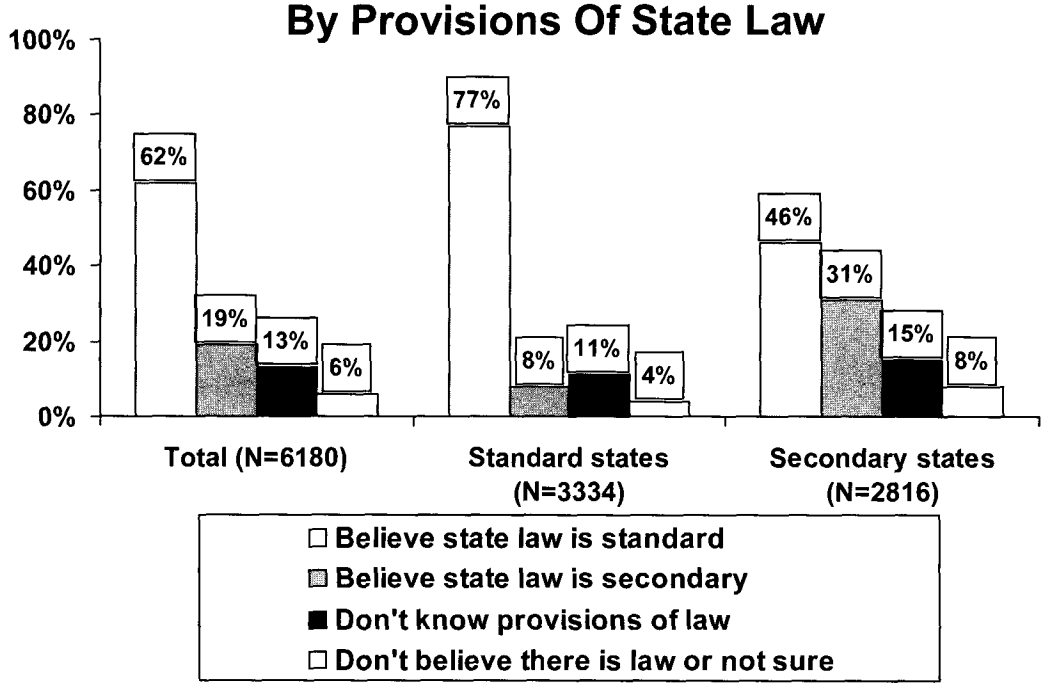
Qx: According to your state law, can police stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation or do they have to observe some other offense first in order to stop the vehicle?

Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Among persons living in States having safety belt laws with standard enforcement provisions, over three-quarters (77%) reported that police could stop vehicles on the basis of observing safety belt violations (this figure is based on the total population; not just those who thought there was a law). In States having secondary enforcement provisions, there actually were more persons who incorrectly believed that police could stop a vehicle based on observing a safety belt violation (46%) than those who correctly knew that some other violation must be the basis for stopping the vehicle (31%).

Figure 78
Knowledge Of Standard Versus Secondary Enforcement By Provisions Of State Law



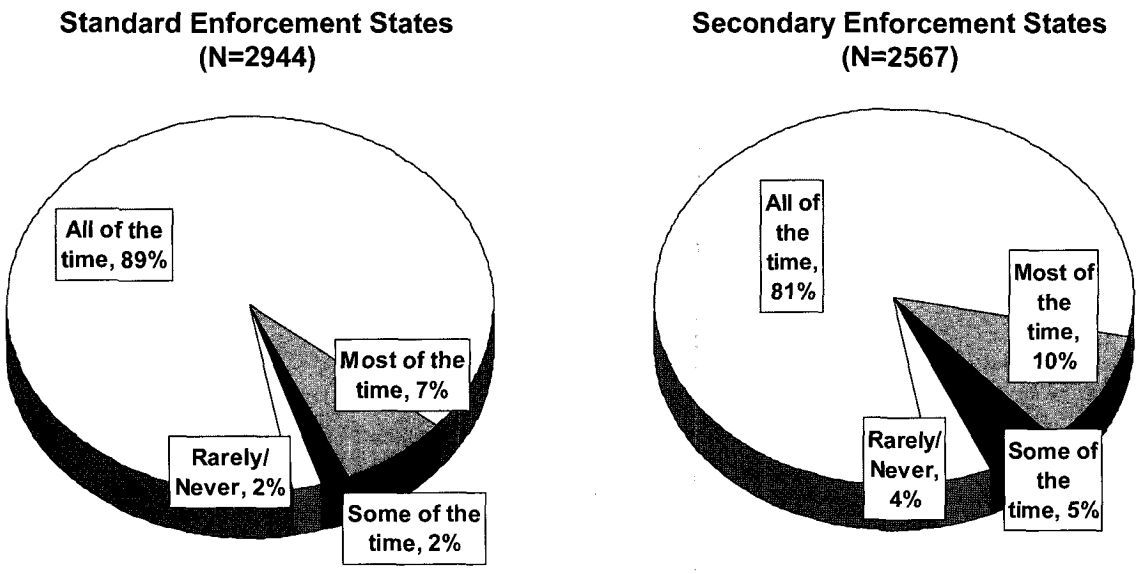
Qx: According to your state law, can police stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation or do they have to observe some other offense first in order to stop the vehicle?

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Drivers in States having standard enforcement provisions reported more frequent safety belt use than did those in secondary enforcement States. In States where law enforcement officers could stop motor vehicles on the basis of observing safety belt violations, 89% of drivers said that they wore their safety belt "all of the time" while driving. The comparable figure for drivers in secondary enforcement States was 81%.

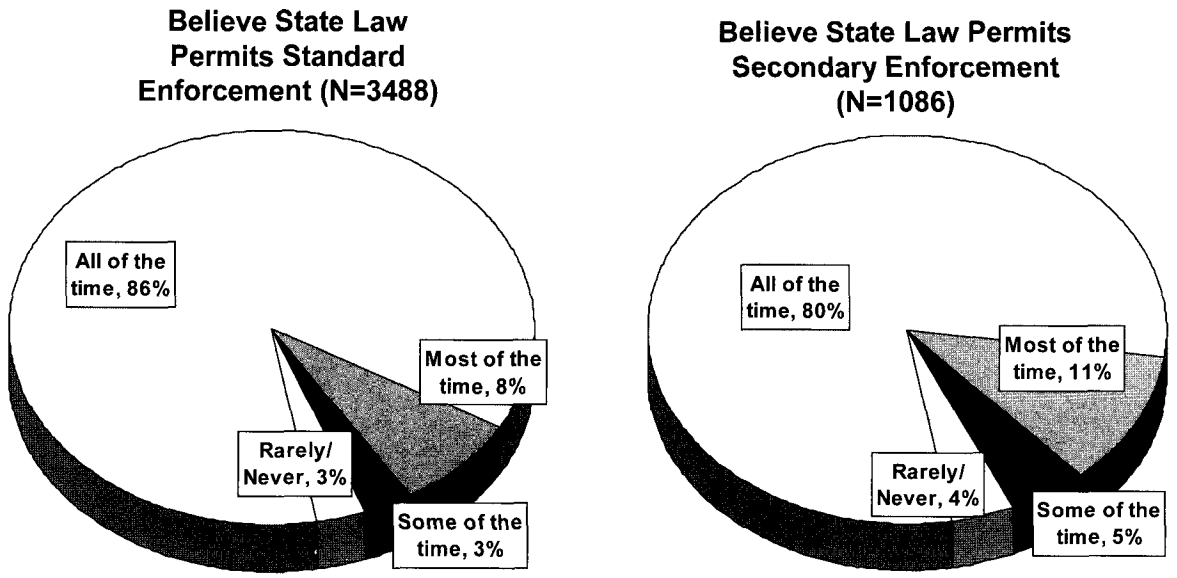
Figure 79
Reported Safety Belt Use By Whether Driver Lives In Standard Or Secondary Enforcement State



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.
**The percentages in the pie do not sum to 100% because of rounding.*

The previous page looked at differences in safety belt use based on whether the State law called for standard or secondary enforcement. Presented below is drivers' reported safety belt usage separated according to their beliefs about the provisions of the State law. The results were similar to the previous analysis. If drivers thought that their State law permitted standard enforcement, then they were more likely to answer that they wore their safety belt "all of the time" (86%) compared to drivers who did not think their State allowed this (80%).

Figure 80
Reported Safety Belt Use By Whether Driver Believes Law Allows Standard Or Secondary Enforcement



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

Qx: According to your state law, can police stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation or do they have to observe some other offense first in order to stop the vehicle?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

While reported safety belt usage was higher in standard enforcement States, there did not appear to be major differences between standard and secondary enforcement States in the perceived utility of safety belts. Table 42 compares respondents in the two groups of States on several belt utility items, as well as other attitudes. Comparison of those attitudes directly associated with enforcement are addressed later in this Chapter.

Table 42
Attitudes Concerning Utility Of Safety Belts By Whether State Safety Belt Law Permits Standard Or Secondary Enforcement

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

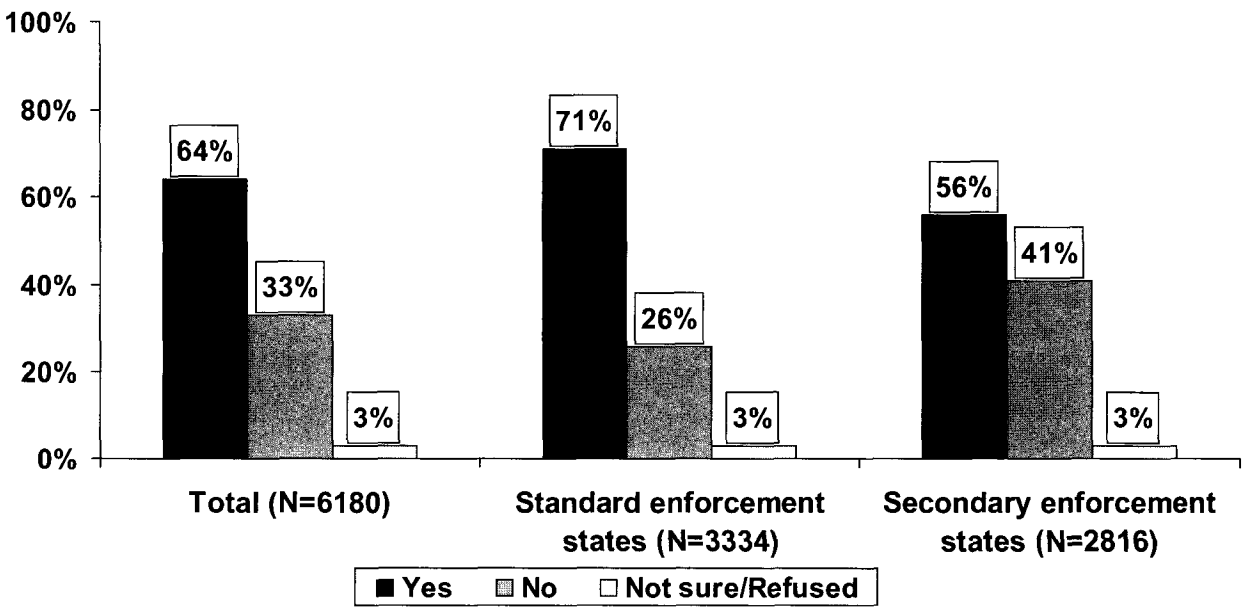
Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt?

Base: Total population age 16+.

	Provisions of state law	
	Standard	Secondary
	(N=3334)	(N=2816)
Strongly or somewhat agree with statement:		
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	34%	37%
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	17%	14%
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	95%	94%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	79%	82%
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	21%	17%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	65%	65%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	17%	12%
Agree with statement:		
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	26%	27%

Besides exploring respondents' awareness of the enforcement provisions of their State law, the survey collected data on whether or not respondents supported standard enforcement. More than six-in-ten (64%) agreed that police should be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observed a safety belt violation when no other traffic laws were being broken. The figure was higher (71%) in States currently permitting standard enforcement of safety belt laws. Yet even in States with secondary enforcement provisions, more than half of the public (56%) supported standard enforcement.

Figure 81
Support For Standard Enforcement
By Whether State Allows It



Qx: In your opinion, should police be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being broken?

Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Support for standard enforcement provisions was greater among females (68%) than males (59%), greater among Blacks (67%) than Whites (62%), and greater among Hispanics (74%) than non-Hispanics (62%). Persons age 21 through 24 showed the least support (57%) compared to any other age range listed below.

Table 43
Support For Standard Enforcement By Gender, Age, Race, And Ethnicity

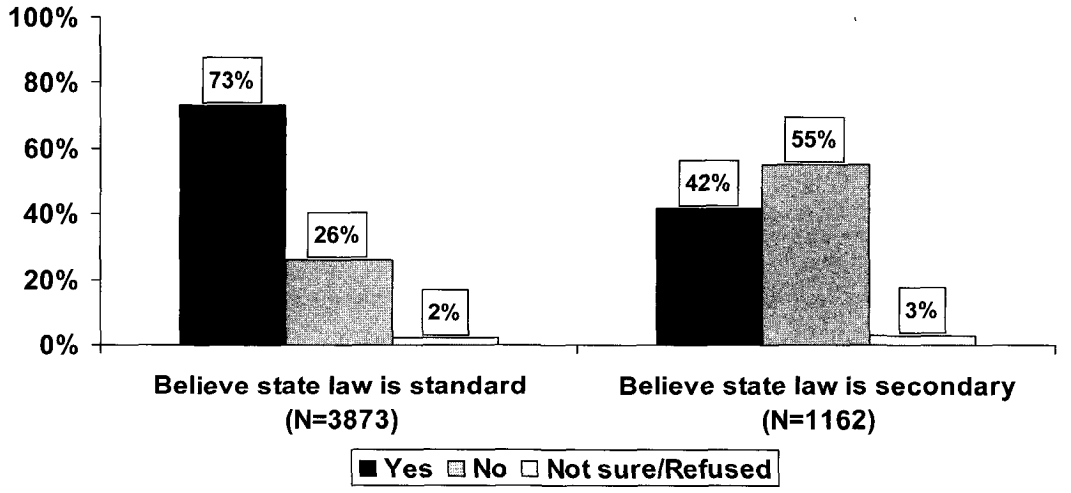
Qx: In your opinion, should police be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being broken?

Base: Total population age 16+.

	Unweighted N	Yes	No	Not sure/ Refused
Total	(6180)	64%	33%	3%
Gender				
Female	(3244)	68%	28%	4%
Male	(2936)	59%	38%	2%
Age				
16-20	(531)	64%	34%	3%
21-24	(468)	57%	41%	3%
25-34	(1393)	63%	34%	3%
35-44	(1360)	62%	35%	3%
45-54	(948)	62%	35%	3%
55-64	(636)	67%	31%	2%
65+	(764)	70%	24%	6%
Race				
Black	(537)	67%	30%	3%
White	(4591)	62%	35%	3%
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	(757)	74%	22%	4%
Non-Hispanic	(5386)	62%	34%	3%

In general, people's beliefs and attitudes about enforcement provisions tended to agree. Among persons who believed their State safety belt law permitted standard enforcement, 73% agreed that police should be able to stop the vehicle if they observe a safety belt violation but no other infraction. But if they believed their State law only allowed secondary enforcement, then the majority (55%) supported secondary enforcement provisions.

Figure 82
Support For Standard Enforcement By Whether Respondent Thinks Law Is Standard Or Secondary



Qx: According to your state law, can police stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation or do they have to observe some other offense first in order to stop the vehicle?

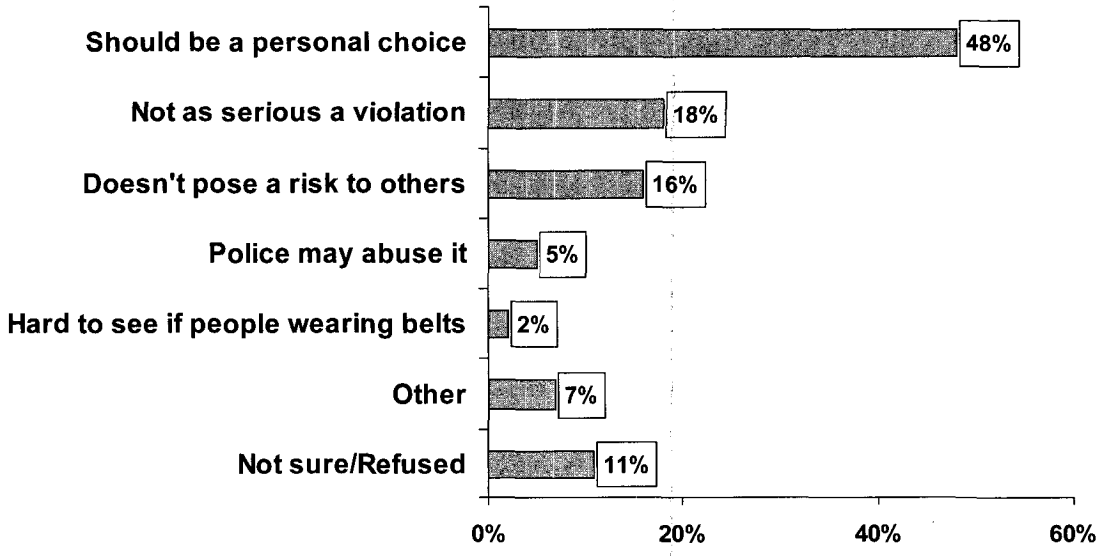
Qx: In your opinion, should police be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being broken?

Base: Believe their State has a safety belt law, and identified it as having standard or secondary enforcement provisions.

Unweighted N's listed above.

If a respondent said that police should not be allowed to stop a vehicle based on observing a safety belt violation, the interviewer stated that "Most other traffic laws allow police to stop the vehicle whenever they see a violation," and then asked why the respondent thought safety belt violations should be treated differently from other violations. The predominant reason mentioned was that wearing safety belts should be a personal choice (48%). Less than one-in-five said it was not a serious violation (18%) or that it does not pose a risk to others (16%).

Figure 83
Reasons People Believe Safety Belt Violations Should Be Treated Differently From Other Violations



Qx: Most other traffic laws allow police to stop the vehicle whenever they see a violation. Why do you think seat belt violations should be treated differently from other traffic violations?

Base: Those who think that police should not be allowed to stop a vehicle for a safety belt violation.

Unweighted N=2106

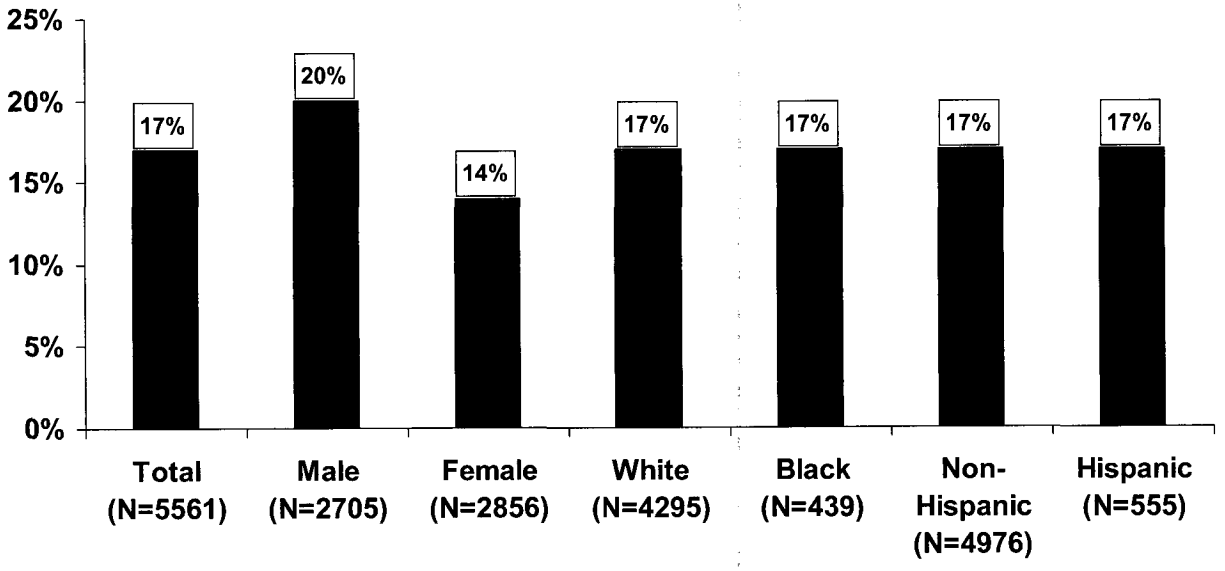
Stopped For Traffic-Related Reason In Past Year

The number of States having safety belt laws that contain standard enforcement provisions has risen over the years. However, most States at this time continue to require secondary enforcement (see Appendix B for listing of enforcement provisions of State laws at the time of the survey). One of the major objections raised in efforts to convert from secondary to standard enforcement has been the concern expressed by some groups that an upgraded law would be differentially enforced against them.

This survey examined whether certain groups are subjected to traffic stops at different rates by law enforcement officers. Interviewers asked drivers if they had been stopped by police in the past twelve months for any traffic-related reason while driving. If they had been stopped, the interviewers asked the respondents if they were wearing their safety belt at the time of the stop. Lastly, interviewers questioned the respondents about the outcome of the stop. Specifically, the interviewers asked the respondents if they received a ticket for a traffic violation.

Seventeen percent of drivers said they had been stopped by police for a traffic-related reason in the past year. Males (20%) were more likely to have been stopped than females (14%). No differences were evident between Blacks (17%) and Whites (17%) or between Hispanics (17%) and non-Hispanics (17%).

Figure 84
Drivers Stopped In Past Year By Police For Traffic-Related Reason By Gender, Race, And Ethnicity



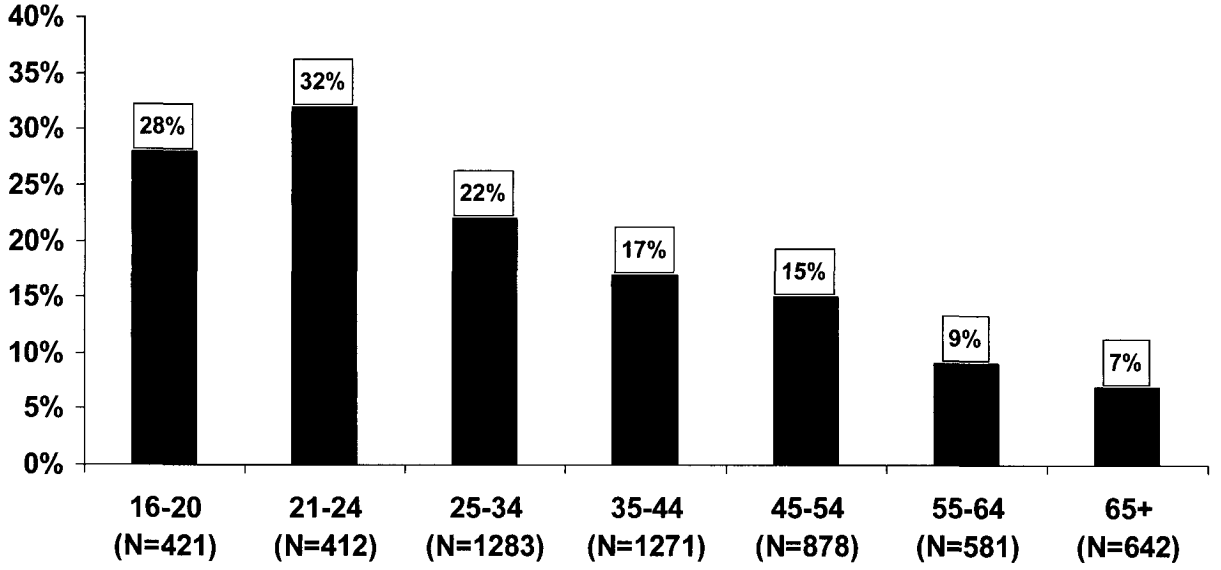
Qx: In the past twelve months, since (MONTH) of last year, have you been stopped by police for any traffic-related reason while driving?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Differences occurred when segmenting the sample of drivers by age group. Drivers were most likely to have been stopped by the police in the past year for a traffic-related reason if they were ages 21 through 24 (32%) or younger (28%). The figure declined to 22% of drivers ages 25-34, 17% of drivers ages 35-44, 15% of drivers ages 45-54, 9% of drivers ages 55-64, and 7% of drivers age 65 and older.

Figure 85
Drivers Stopped In Past Year By Police For Traffic-Related Reason By Age



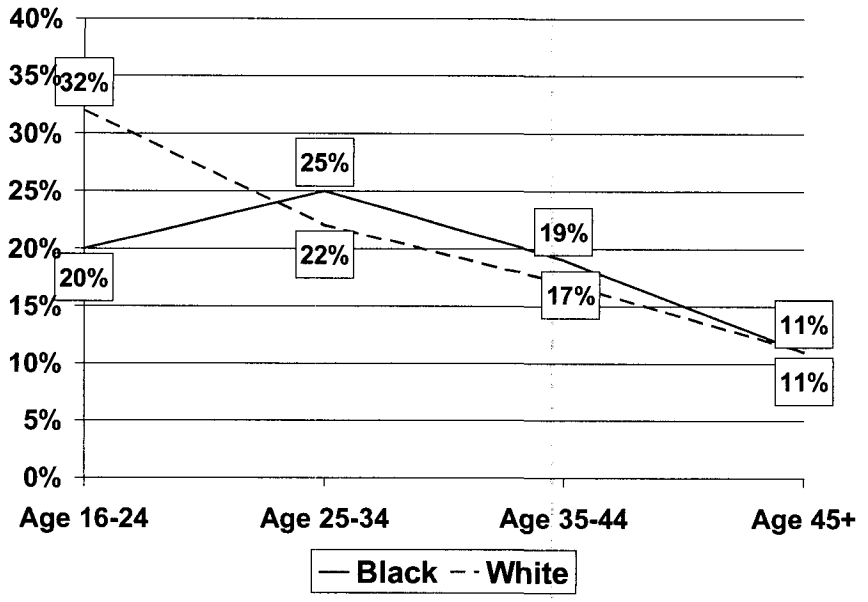
Qx: In the past twelve months, since (MONTH) of last year, have you been stopped by police for any traffic-related reason while driving?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

While young White drivers were more likely than young Black drivers to have been stopped by police in the past year, rates by race and age are similar for those 25 years and older.

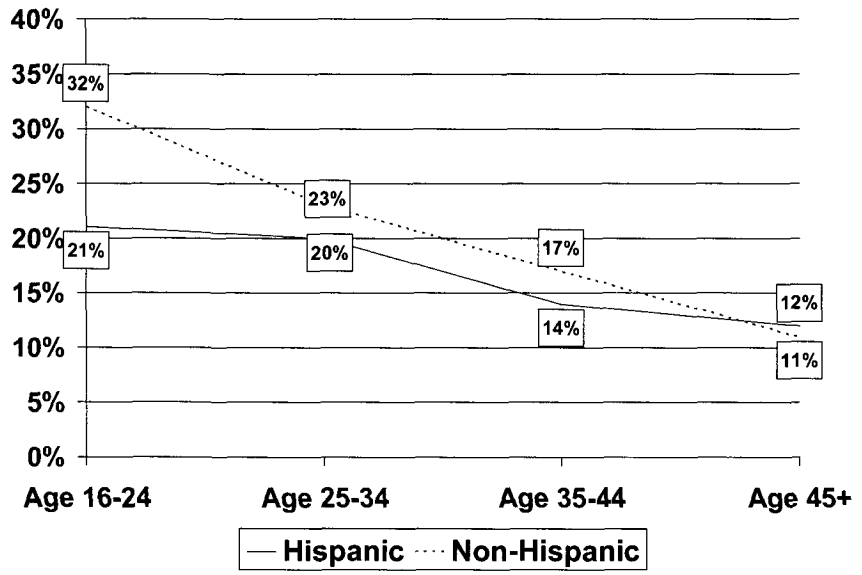
Figure 86
Drivers Stopped By Police In Past Year By Age And Race



Qx: In the past twelve months, since (MONTH) of last year, have you been stopped by police for any traffic-related reason while driving?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's:
Black: Age 16-24 N = 92, Age 25-34 N = 111, Age 35-44 N = 98, Age 45+ N = 135
White: Age 16-24 N = 578, Age 25-34 N = 940, Age 35-44 N = 969, Age 45+ N = 1767

As with Blacks, there were relatively few Hispanic drivers in the specified age ranges. Figure 87 suggests little difference in police stops between Hispanics and non-Hispanics except for the youngest age group, where the percentage stopped was higher for non-Hispanics than Hispanics.

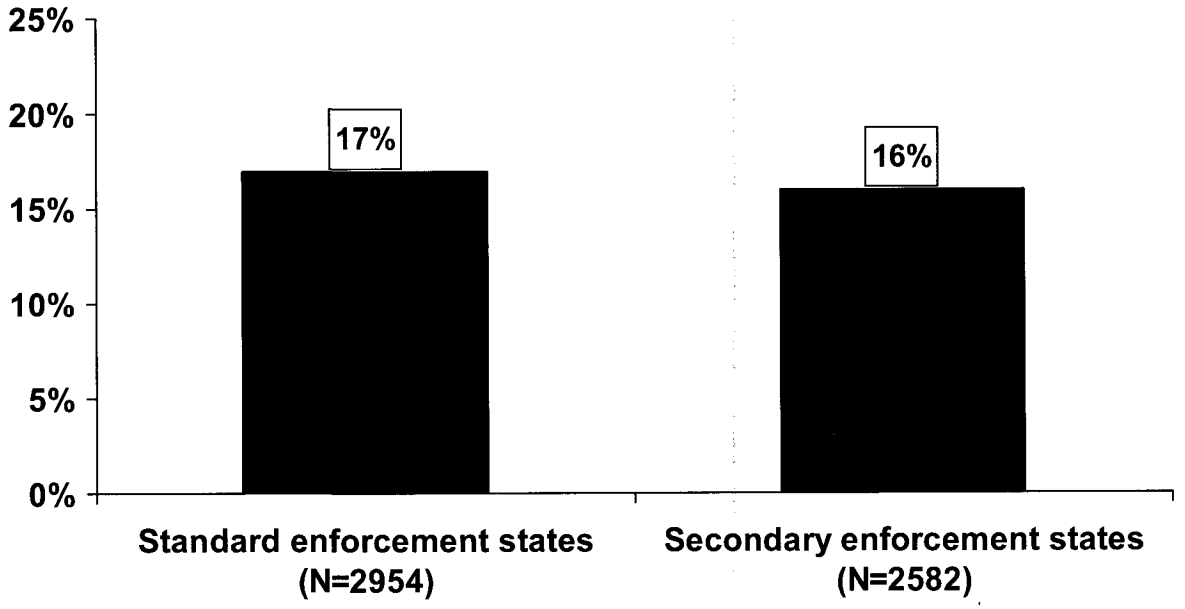
Figure 87
Drivers Stopped By Police In Past Year By Age And Ethnicity



Qx: In the past twelve months, since (MONTH) of last year, have you been stopped by police for any traffic-related reason while driving?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's:
Hispanic: Age 16-24 N = 123, Age 25-34 N = 179, Age 35-44 N = 150, Age 45+ N = 96
Non-Hispanic: Age 16-24 N = 708, Age 25-34 N = 1102, Age 35-44 N = 1119, Age 45+ N = 1991

Drivers in standard enforcement States were just as likely to have been stopped in the past year by police for a traffic-related reason as those in secondary enforcement States. Seventeen percent of those in standard enforcement States had been stopped, compared to 16% in secondary enforcement States.

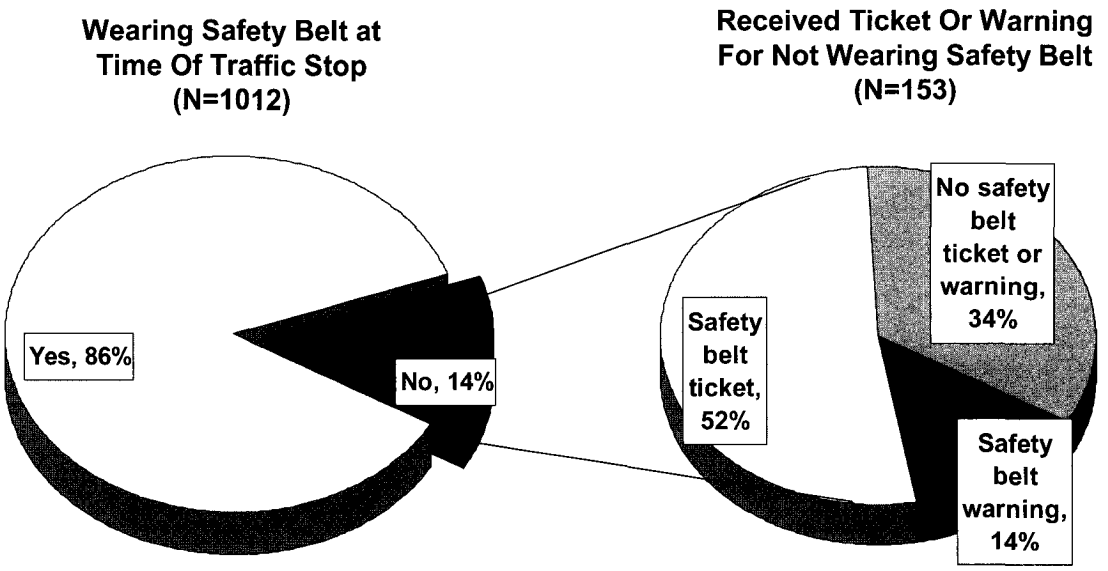
Figure 88
Drivers Stopped In Past Year For Traffic-Related Reason By Enforcement Provisions Of State Law



Qx: In the past twelve months, since (MONTH) of last year, have you been stopped by police for any traffic-related reason while driving?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Of those persons who said that they had been stopped by police in the past year for a traffic-related reason while driving, the vast majority (86%) answered that they were wearing a safety belt at the time. The majority of those not wearing a safety belt when stopped had received a ticket (52%) for violating safety belt laws.

Figure 89
Whether Driver Was Wearing Safety Belt At Traffic Stop



Qx: Were you wearing a seat belt when you were stopped? (IF STOPPED MORE THAN ONCE IN PAST 12 MONTHS, ASK ABOUT MOST RECENT TIME)

Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?

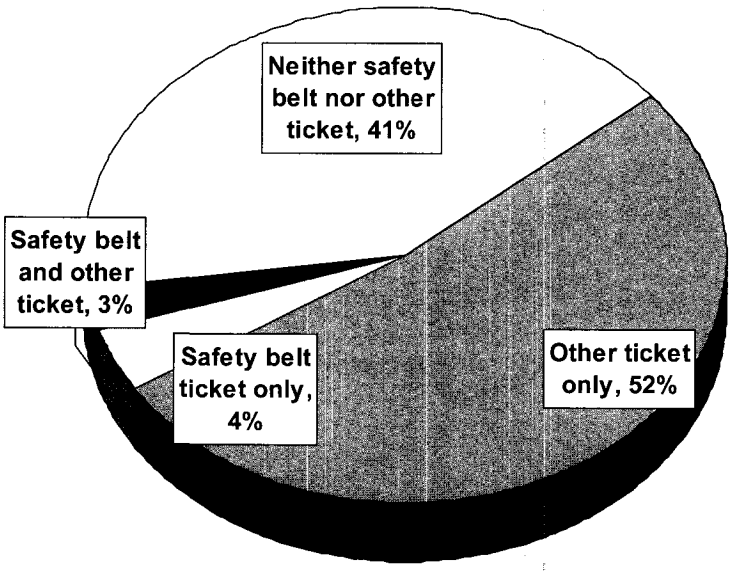
Qx: Did you receive a warning for violating seat belt laws?

Base: Stopped by police in past 12 months for a traffic-related reason while driving.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Among all drivers who were stopped for a traffic-related reason, 59% received a ticket for some type of traffic violation. Most often, they did not get a ticket for a safety belt violation (understandable since most were wearing their safety belts) but received a ticket for something else (52%). In a few cases (4%), they received a safety belt ticket but no other citation. About four-in-ten (41%) reported that they did not receive any type of ticket.

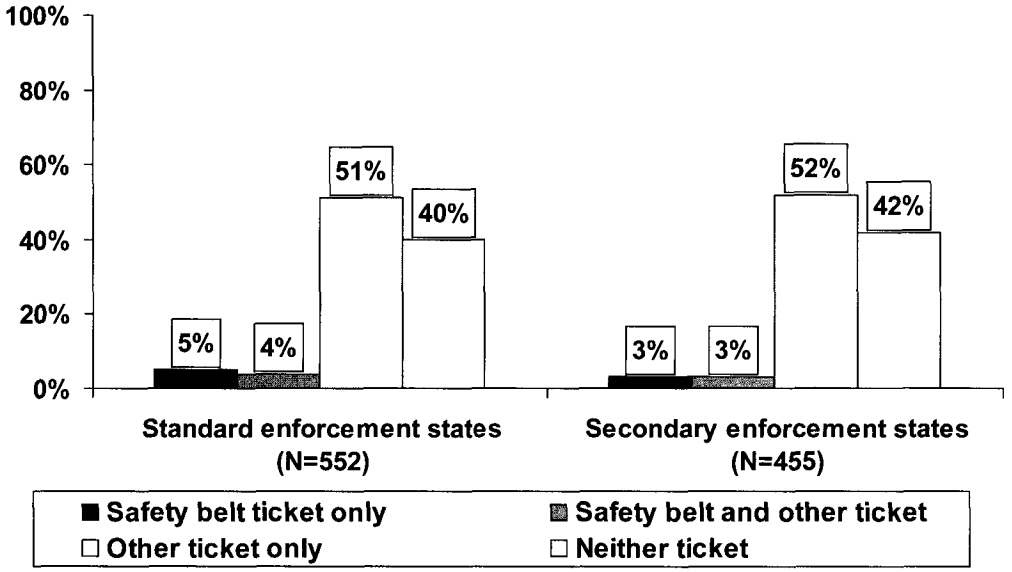
Figure 90
Outcome Of Traffic Stop



Qx: In the past twelve, since (MONTH) of last year, have you been stopped by police for any traffic-related reason while driving?
Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Did you receive a ticket for some other traffic violation?
Qx: Did you receive a ticket for any traffic violation?
Base: Stopped by police in past 12 months for a traffic-related reason while driving.
Unweighted N=1012

Sixty percent of the drivers in primary enforcement States received a ticket when they were stopped by the police, compared to 58% of the drivers in secondary enforcement States.

Figure 91
Outcome Of Traffic Stop
By Enforcement Provisions Of State Law

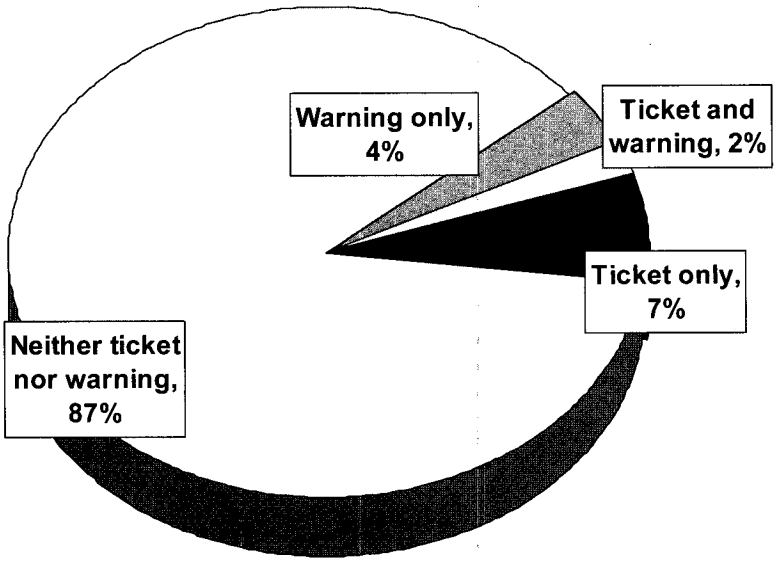


Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Did you receive a warning for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Have you ever received a ticket for not wearing seat belts?
Qx: Have you ever received a warning for not wearing seat belts?
Base: Stopped by police in past 12 months for a traffic-related reason while driving.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Ever Received Ticket Or Warning For Safety Belt Violation

Thirteen percent of the population age 16 and older has received a ticket and/or warning for violating the safety belt laws. Specifically, 7% have received a ticket only, 2% have received both a ticket and a warning, and 4% have received only a warning. The vast majority, 87%, have received neither a ticket nor warning.

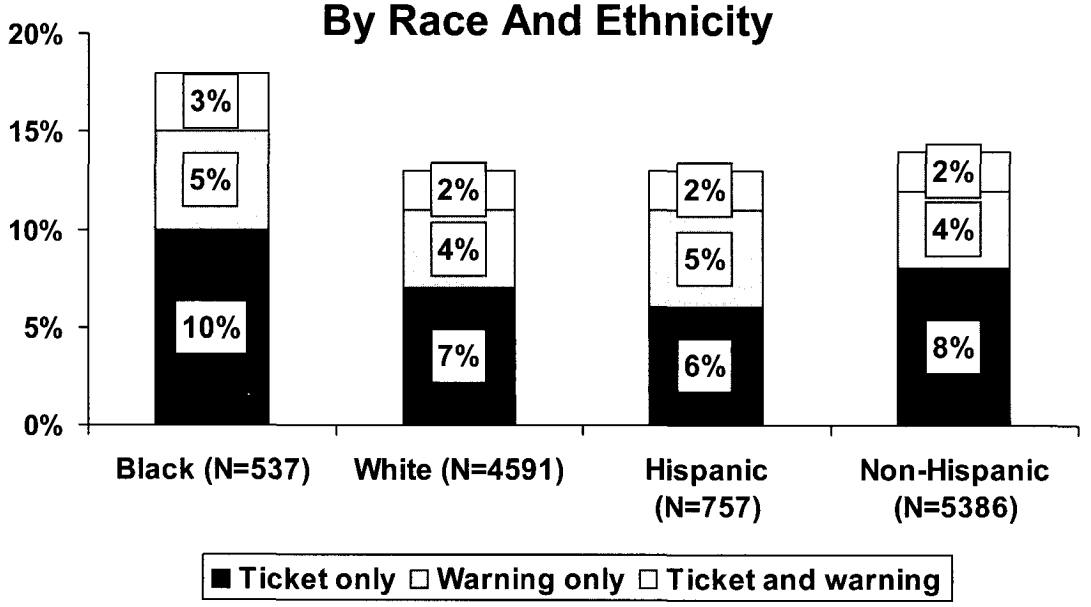
Figure 92
Ever Received Ticket Or Warning For Safety Belt Violation



Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Did you receive a warning for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Have you ever received a ticket for not wearing seat belts?
Qx: Have you ever received a warning for not wearing seat belts?
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N=6180

Overall, 13% of the population age 16 and older had received a ticket and/or warning at some time in the past for a safety belt violation. The figure was 17%[10] for Blacks, 13% for Whites, 13% for Hispanics, and 13% for non-Hispanics. Specifically regarding tickets (either ticket only or ticket and warning), 12% of Blacks, 9% of Whites, 9% of Hispanics, and 9% of non-Hispanics had received safety belt citations.

Figure 93
Ever Received Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning By Race And Ethnicity

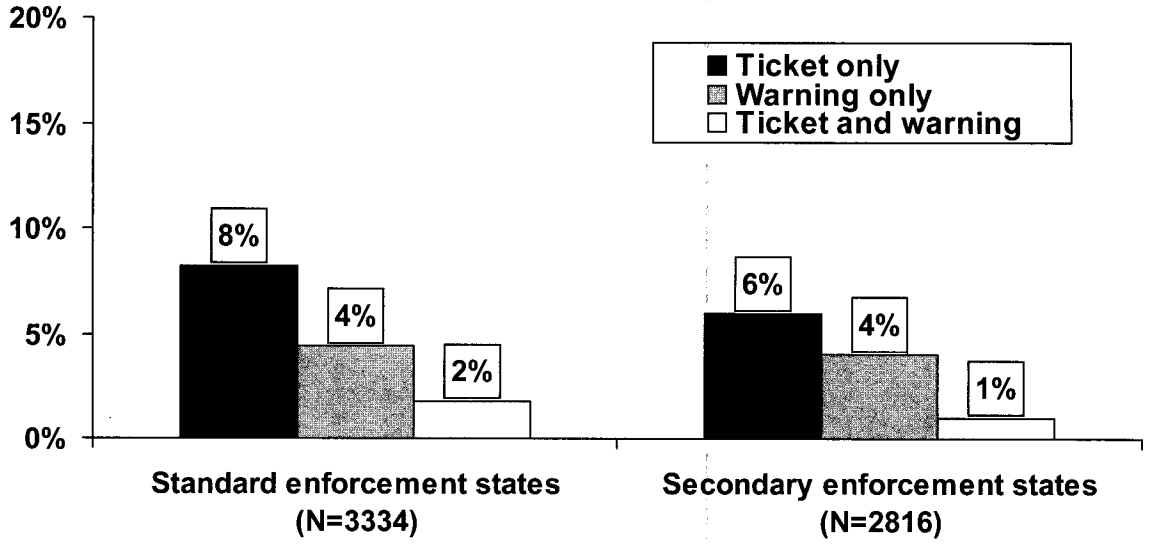


Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Did you receive a warning for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Have you ever received a ticket for not wearing seat belts?
Qx: Have you ever received a warning for not wearing seat belts?
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N's listed above.

[10] The numbers in this paragraph may not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

In States having safety belt laws with standard enforcement provisions, 14% of the population age 16 and older had received a ticket and/or warning for a safety belt violation. In secondary enforcement States, 12%[11] had received a ticket and/or warning.

Figure 94
Ever Received Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning By Enforcement Provisions Of State Law

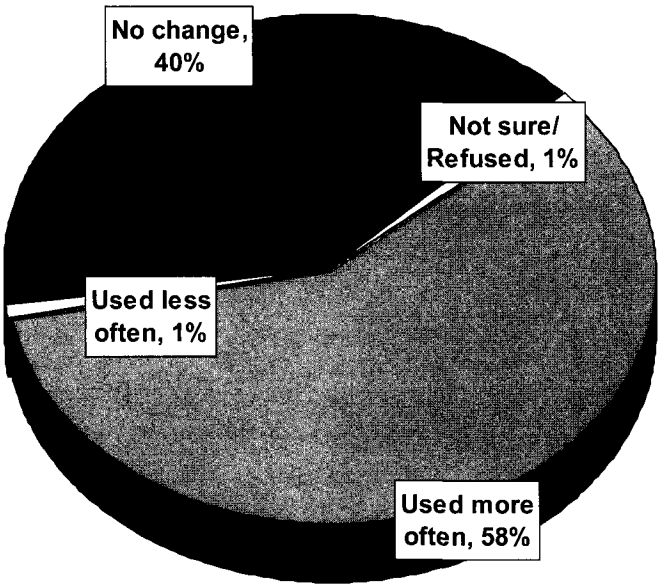


Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Did you receive a warning for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Have you ever received a ticket for not wearing seat belts?
Qx: Have you ever received a warning for not wearing seat belts?
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N's listed above.

[11] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

When asked if their frequency of safety belt use had changed after they received the safety belt ticket or warning, most persons (58%) said that they started using their safety belts more often while 40% indicated that there was no change.

Figure 95
Reported Change In Frequency Of Safety Belt Use After Receiving Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning



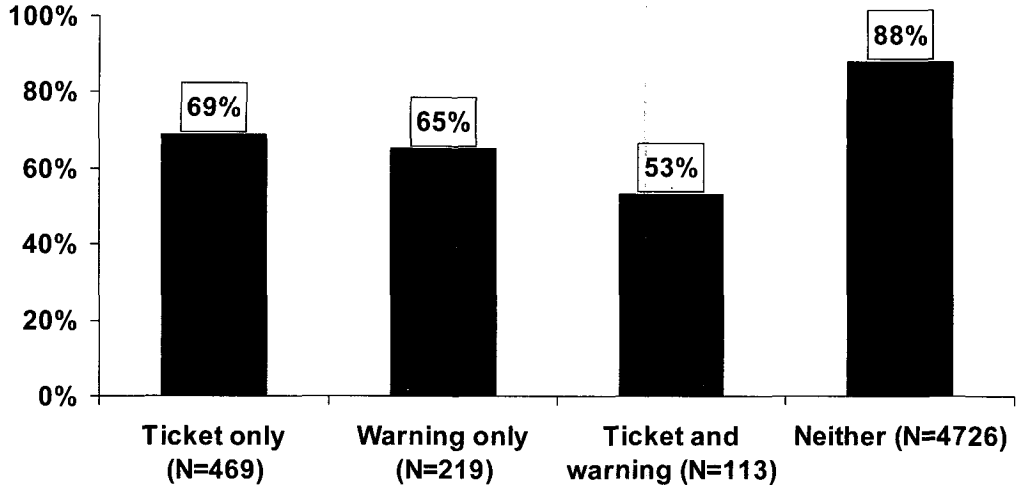
Qx: After you received the seat belt (ticket/warning), did you start wearing your seat belts more often, less often, or was there no change in how often you wore them?

Base: Had received a ticket and/or warning for a safety belt violation at some time in the past.

Unweighted N=899

Although most persons who had received a safety belt ticket or warning said that their use of safety belts increased afterwards, their reported level of current safety belt use still tended to be lower than that of persons who had received neither a ticket nor a warning. Among drivers, 69% of those who had received a ticket only, 65% of those who had received a warning only, and 53% of those who had received a ticket and warning said that they used their safety belt "all of the time" while driving. In contrast, 88% of drivers who had received neither a safety belt ticket nor warning reported wearing their safety belt "all of the time" while driving.

Figure 96
Driver "All The Time" Safety Belt Use By Whether Ever Received Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning

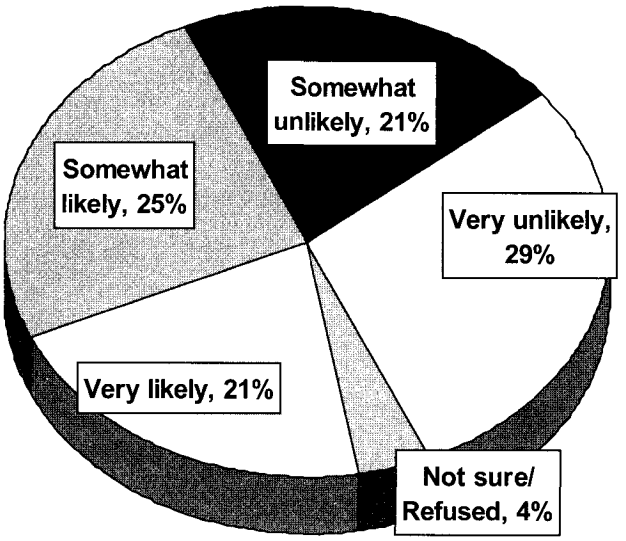


Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Did you receive a warning for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Have you ever received a ticket for not wearing seat belts?
Qx: Have you ever received a warning for not wearing seat belts?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.
Unweighted N's listed above.

Perceived Risk Of Being Ticketed For Non-Use Of Safety Belts

Drivers were asked their likelihood of being ticketed if they did not wear a safety belt at all during the next six months while driving. A minority (46%) considered it likely; only one-in-five (21%) considered it very likely. Just under one-third of drivers (29%) thought they would be very unlikely to be ticketed. Readers are reminded that most non-use occurs among persons who use safety belts at least on occasion (see Chapter 1). Thus the question wording took the most extreme form of non-use, and removed the option taken by many drivers of responding to their own assessments of risk.

Figure 97
Likelihood Of Receiving A Safety Belt Ticket If Safety Belts Were Not Worn For Six Months



Qx: Assume that you do not wear your seat belt AT ALL while driving over the next six months. How likely do you think you will be to receive a ticket for not wearing a seat belt?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle.
Unweighted N=5561

Drivers who previously had received a safety belt ticket and/or warning were more likely than non-cited drivers to view themselves at-risk of being ticketed if they did not wear their safety belt at all over the next six months. About one-third of those who had received a ticket (31%), a warning (30%), or both (32%) considered themselves to be very likely to be ticketed, compared to fewer than one-fifth (19%) of drivers who had experienced neither enforcement action.

Table 44
Perceived Risk Of Being Ticketed
By Whether Ever Received A Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning

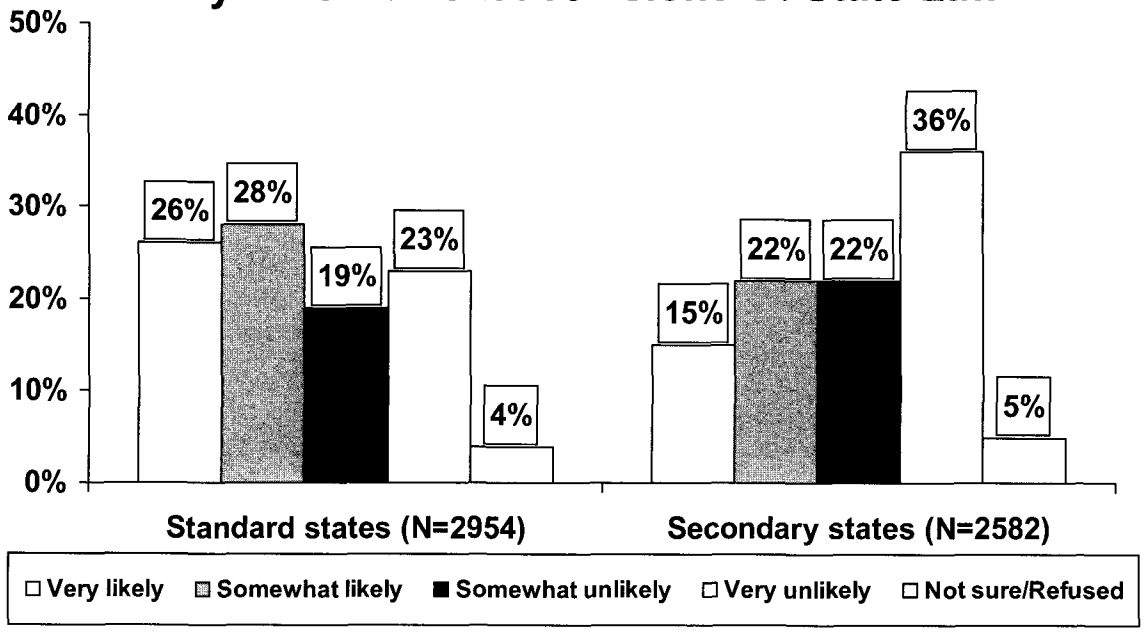
Qx: Assume that you do not wear your seat belt AT ALL while driving over the next six months. How likely do you think you will be to receive a ticket for not wearing a seat belt?

Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

	Ever received ticket or warning			
	Ticket only	Ticket and warning	Warning only	Neither ticket nor warning
Perceived risk of being ticketed	(N=473)	(N=115)	(N=221)	(N=4743)
Very likely	31%	32%	30%	19%
Somewhat likely	25%	25%	24%	25%
Somewhat unlikely	20%	21%	20%	21%
Very unlikely	20%	21%	24%	30%
Not sure/Refused	3%	1%	2%	5%

The perceived risk of being ticketed differed substantially according to the enforcement provisions of the State law. In States permitting standard enforcement of safety belt laws, more than one-half of drivers (54%) said they were somewhat or very likely to be ticketed if they did not wear safety belts at all while driving over the next six months. In contrast, slightly more than one-third of drivers (37%) in secondary enforcement States considered themselves to be somewhat or very likely to be ticketed.

Figure 98
Perceived Risk Of Being Ticketed For Non-Use By Enforcement Provisions Of State Law



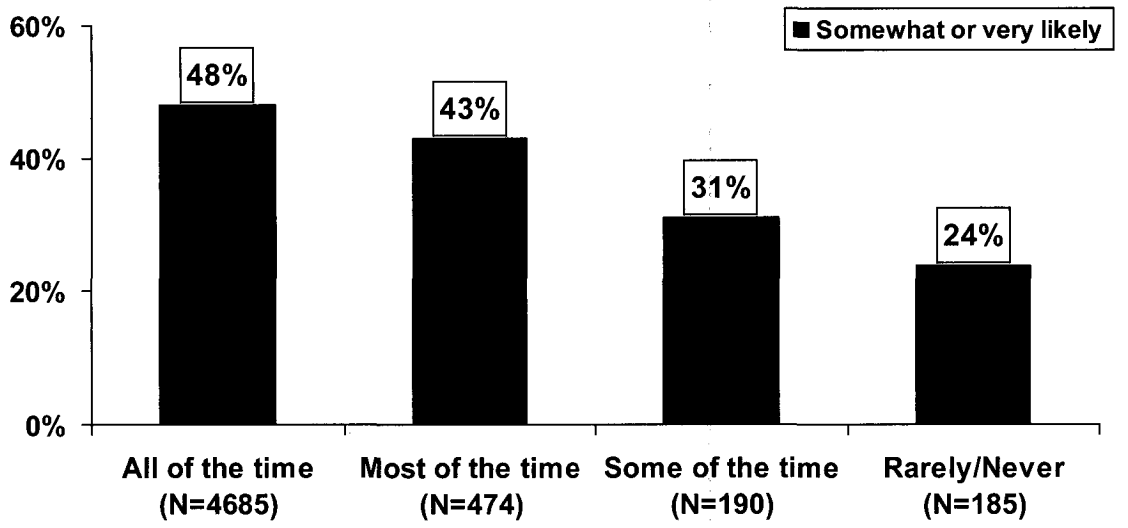
Qx: Assume that you do not wear your seat belt AT ALL while driving over the next six months. How likely do you think you will be to receive a ticket for not wearing a seat belt?

Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Drivers who wore their safety belts more often were more likely than other drivers to perceive themselves at-risk of being ticketed if they did not use their safety belts at all. Among self-reported "all of the time" safety belt users, 48% thought it was either somewhat likely or very likely that they would receive a ticket if they did not wear a safety belt at all while driving over the next six months. The number dropped to 43% among "most of the time" users, and 31% among "some of the time" users. Slightly less than one-fourth (24%) of those who said they rarely or never wore safety belts thought they would likely get a ticket.

Figure 99
Perceived Risk Of Being Ticketed For Non-Use By Drivers' Reported Frequency Of Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

Qx: Assume that you do not wear your seat belt AT ALL while driving over the next six months. How likely do you think you will be to receive a ticket for not wearing a seat belt?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Among the demographic groups listed in Table 45, greatest perceived risk of being ticketed for non-use of safety belts over a period of six months was recorded for Hispanics and Blacks. Almost two-thirds of Hispanics (64%) considered it very or somewhat likely they would be given a ticket, compared to 44%[12] of non-Hispanics. The gap was almost as large between Blacks (57%) and Whites (42%).

Table 45
Perceived Risk Of Being Ticketed For Non-Use By Gender, Age, Race, And Ethnicity

Qx: Assume that you do not wear your seat belt AT ALL while driving over the next six months. How likely do you think you will be to receive a ticket for not wearing a seat belt.

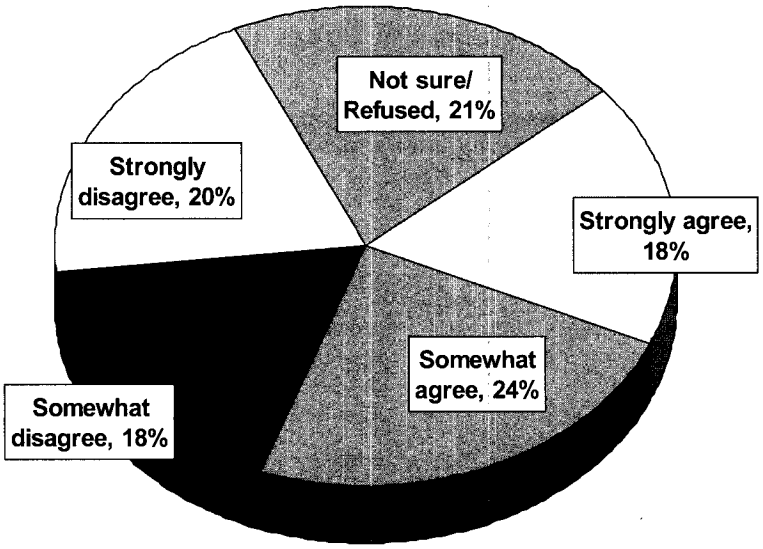
Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

	Unweighted N	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Somewhat unlikely	Very unlikely	Not sure/ Refused
Total	(5561)	21%	25%	21%	29%	4%
Gender						
Female	(2856)	22%	27%	19%	27%	5%
Male	(2705)	19%	24%	22%	31%	4%
Age						
16-20	(421)	15%	30%	23%	30%	1%
21-24	(412)	18%	31%	21%	28%	2%
25-34	(1283)	20%	24%	23%	31%	2%
35-44	(1271)	24%	23%	20%	29%	3%
45-54	(878)	19%	25%	21%	31%	4%
55-64	(581)	19%	26%	20%	29%	6%
65+	(642)	24%	23%	16%	26%	11%
Race						
Black	(439)	31%	25%	16%	21%	6%
White	(4295)	17%	25%	22%	32%	4%
Ethnicity						
Hispanic	(555)	40%	24%	12%	19%	4%
Non-Hispanic	(4976)	18%	25%	22%	30%	4%

[12] The numbers in this paragraph may not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

One of the attitude questions included in the survey asked respondents their level of agreement with the statement "Police in my community generally do not bother to write tickets for seat belt violations." The public was more likely to agree with that statement (42%) than to disagree (37%)[13]. However, many people (21%) said they did not know the answer.

Figure 100
Police In My Community Generally Do Not Bother To Write Tickets For Safety Belt Violations

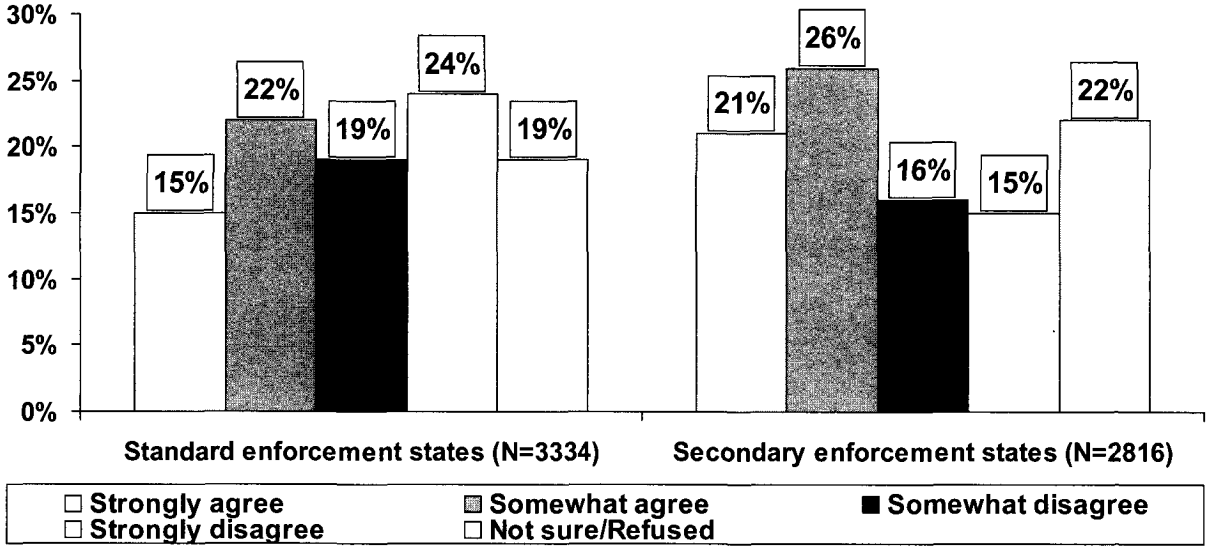


Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. "Police in my community generally do not bother to write tickets for seat belt violations."
Base: Total population 16+.
Unweighted N=6180

[13] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

Respondents were less likely to (strongly or somewhat) agree that police in their community did not bother to write safety belt tickets if they lived in standard enforcement States (38%)[14] than in secondary enforcement States (47%).

Figure 101
Police In Community Do Not Bother To Write Belt Tickets By Enforcement Provisions Of State Law



Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. "Police in my community generally do not bother to write tickets for seat belt violations."

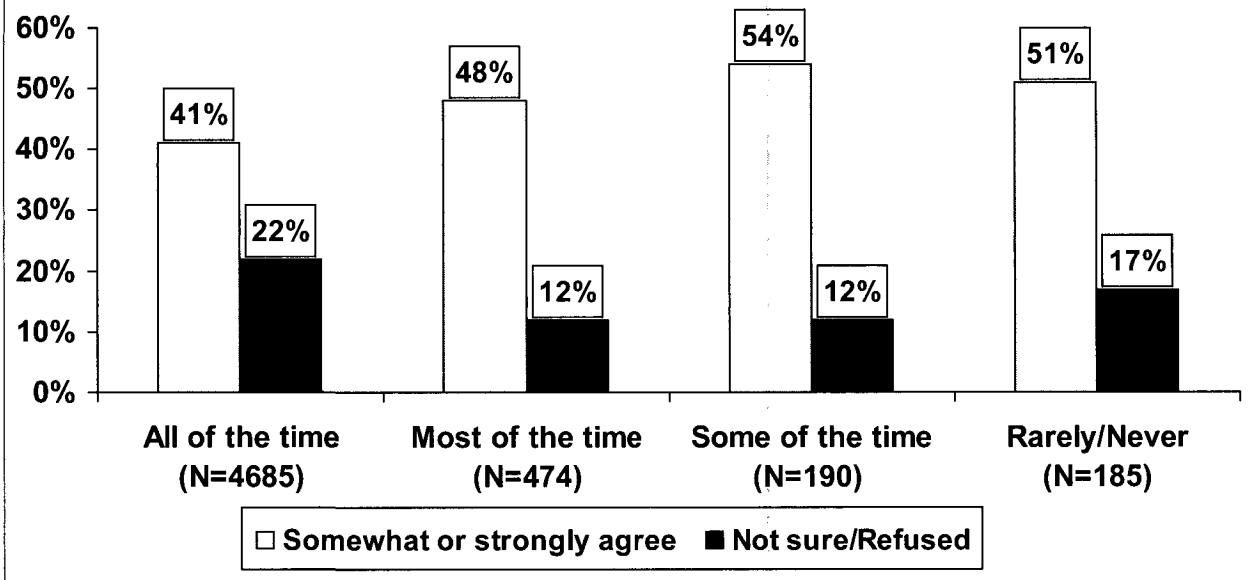
Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

[14] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

Infrequent users of safety belts were less likely than frequent users to believe that local police enforced the safety belt law. However, even among regular safety belt users, about two-in-five agreed with the statement that police in their community do not bother to write safety belt tickets and 22% did not know.

Figure 102
Police In Community Do Not Bother To Write Safety Belt Tickets By Frequency Of Driver Safety Belt Use



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree? "Police in my community generally do not bother to write tickets for seat belt violations."

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Persons ages 16-20 (57%) and 21-24 (48%) were most likely among the groups listed below to agree that ticketing for safety belt violations generally did not occur in their community; those age 65 and older were the most unsure (34%). Blacks and Hispanics differed from Whites and non-Hispanics in that the former two groups were more likely to strongly agree or strongly disagree with the statement and less likely to express uncertainty.

Table 46
"Police In My Community Generally Do Not Bother To Write Tickets For Safety Belt Violations" By Gender, Age, Race, And Ethnicity

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. "Police in my community generally do not bother to write tickets for seat belt violations."

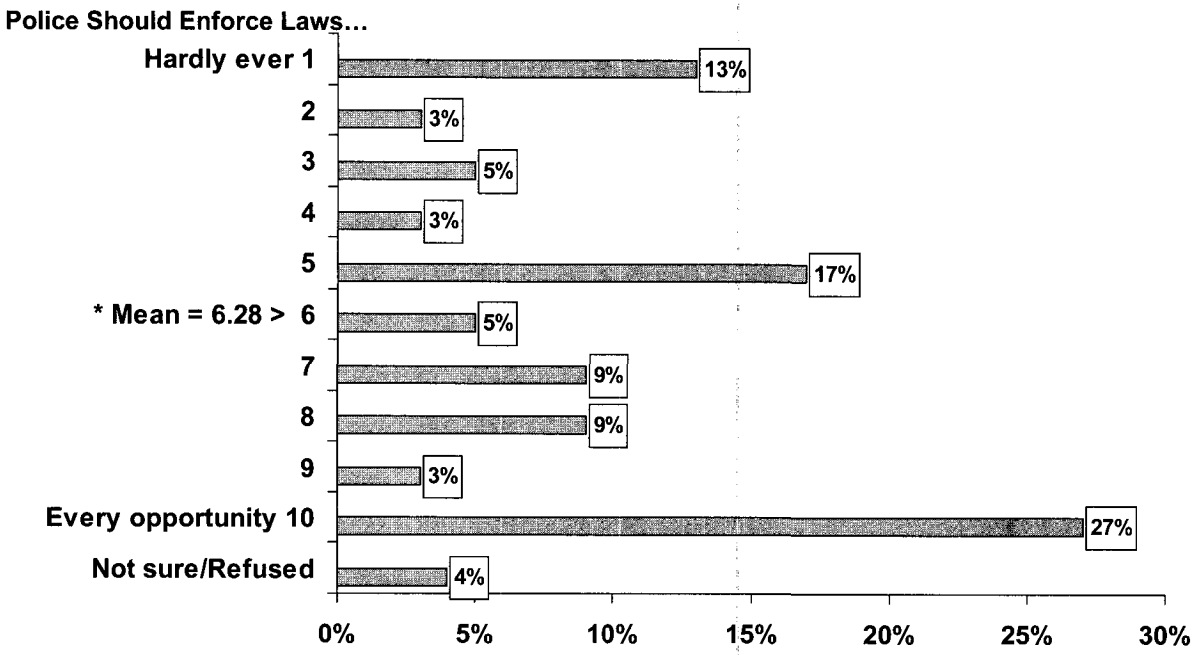
Base: Total population age 16+.

	Unweighted N	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure/ Refused
Total	(6180)	18%	24%	18%	20%	21%
Gender						
Female	(3244)	18%	22%	17%	19%	24%
Male	(2936)	18%	26%	18%	20%	17%
Age						
16-20	(531)	25%	32%	20%	17%	6%
21-24	(468)	19%	29%	22%	20%	10%
25-34	(1393)	17%	25%	20%	21%	17%
35-44	(1360)	17%	24%	20%	20%	19%
45-54	(948)	16%	25%	18%	20%	21%
55-64	(636)	17%	21%	16%	20%	26%
65+	(764)	19%	17%	11%	19%	34%
Race						
Black	(537)	22%	18%	16%	29%	15%
White	(4591)	16%	26%	18%	18%	22%
Ethnicity						
Hispanic	(757)	24%	19%	16%	27%	14%
Non-Hispanic	(5386)	17%	25%	18%	18%	21%

Preferred Level Of Enforcement

Support for safety belt law enforcement was mixed, with some favoring strong enforcement and others wanting little or no enforcement. Interviewers asked respondents how strictly police should enforce safety belt laws, using a 1-to-10 scale, where 1 meant police should hardly ever give tickets for safety belt violations and 10 meant they should give tickets at every opportunity. Most frequently, the respondents said they favored ticketing at every opportunity, although there also was clustering at the middle and low end of the scale. The average score was 6.3.

Figure 103
Level Of Support For Enforcing Safety Belt Laws



Qx: How often do you think police should ticket for seat belt violations? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means police should hardly ever give tickets and 10 means police should give tickets at every opportunity when it comes to enforcing seat belt laws, how strict should police enforcement be?

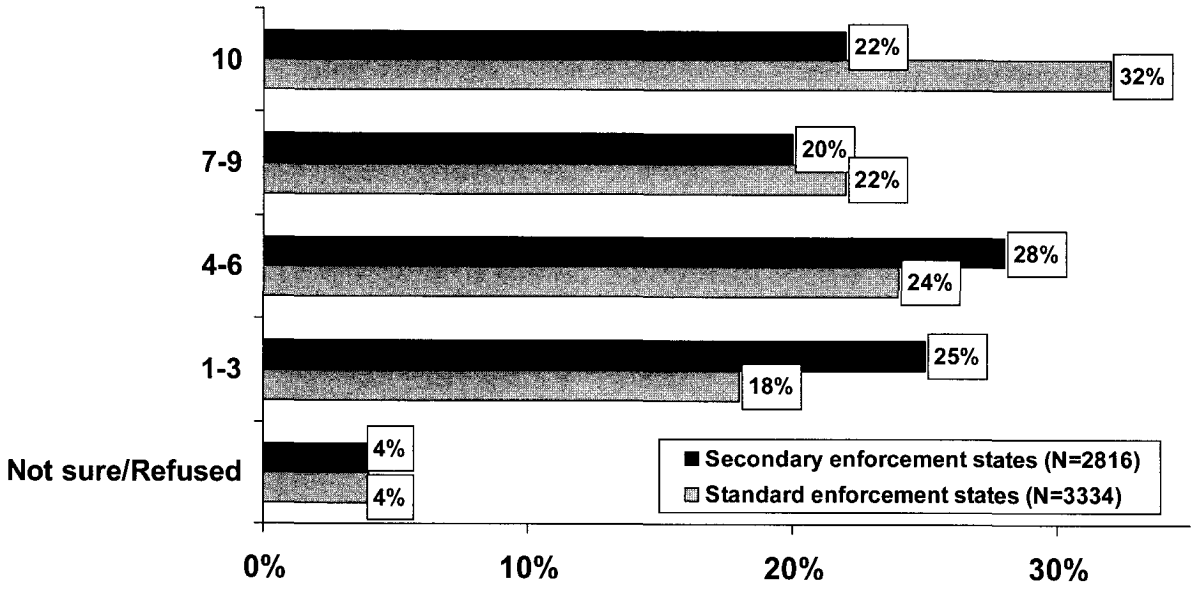
Base: Total population 16+.

Unweighted N=6180

** The mean excludes respondents in the Not sure/Refused category.*

Persons in standard enforcement States tended towards supporting stricter enforcement of safety belt laws than did those in secondary enforcement States. The mean score recorded for the respondents in standard enforcement States was 6.66 on the ten-point scale, versus 5.84 for respondents in secondary enforcement States.

Figure 104
Level Of Support For Enforcing Safety Belt Laws By Enforcement Provisions Of State Law



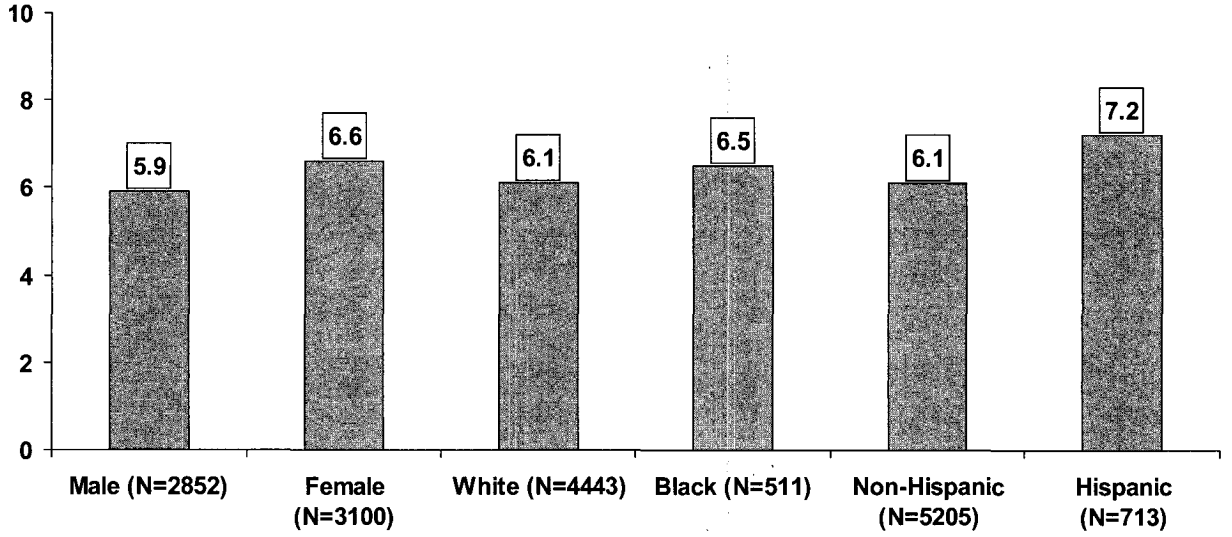
Qx: How often do you think police should ticket for seat belt violations? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means police should hardly ever give tickets and 10 means police should give tickets at every opportunity when it comes to enforcing seat belt laws, how strict should police enforcement be?

Base: Total population age 16+.

Unweighted N's listed above.

Hispanics voiced the strongest support for enforcement of safety belt laws, providing an average score of 7.2 on the ten-point scale. Blacks (6.5) and females (6.6) also were above the mean population average of 6.3.

Figure 105
*Average Level Of Support For Enforcing Safety Belt Laws By Gender, Race And Ethnicity



Qx: How often do you think police should ticket for seat belt violations? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means police should hardly ever give tickets and 10 means police should give tickets at every opportunity when it comes to enforcing seat belt laws, how strict should police enforcement be?

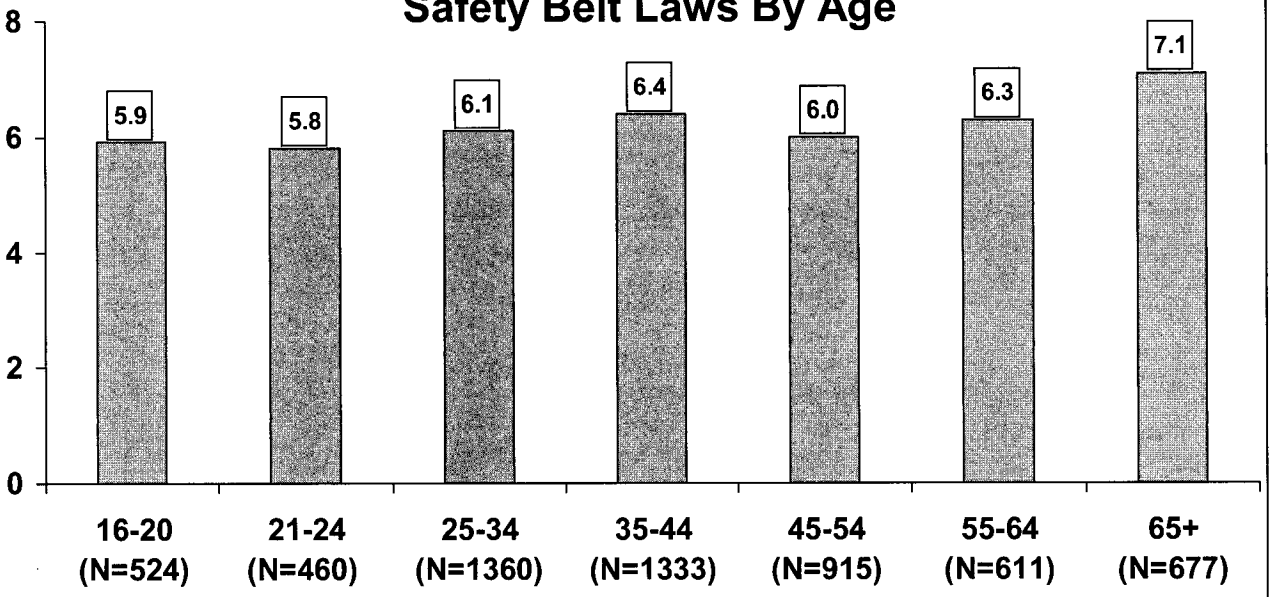
Base: Total population age 16+ who chose a scale value from 1 to 10.

Unweighted N's listed above.

**Excludes persons who said they 'didn't know" or else refused to answer when asked what value they would choose from the ten-point scale.*

Age differences in level of support for enforcement of safety belt laws were generally smaller than the racial/ethnic differences shown on the preceding page. The least support appeared among persons in the 16-24 age range, the greatest support among persons 65 years and older.

Figure 106
***Average Level Of Support For Enforcing Safety Belt Laws By Age**



Qx: How often do you think police should ticket for seat belt violations? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means police should hardly ever give tickets and 10 means police should give tickets at every opportunity when it comes to enforcing seat belt laws, how strict should police enforcement be?

Base: Total population 16+ who chose a scale value from 1 to 10.

Unweighted N's listed above.

** Excludes persons who said they "didn't know" or else refused to answer when asked what value they would choose from the ten-point scale.*

2003 SURVEY RESULTS

CHAPTER 5: 1994-2003 TRENDS

Drivers And Vehicles, 1994-2003

There has been little appreciable change between 1994 and 2003 in the frequency with which the public age 16 and older drives motor vehicles. The most noticeable finding has been a slow increase over time in the percentage of non-drivers.

Table 47
Driving Frequency, 1994-2003

Qx: How often do you drive a motor vehicle?
Base: Total population age 16+.

Driving frequency	1994	1996	1998	2000	2003
Almost every day	79%	80%	78%	78%	76%
A few days a week	10%	10%	10%	9%	10%
A few days a month	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
A few days a year	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Never	8%	8%	9%	10%	11%

Cars continued to decrease as a proportion of the vehicle fleet. Meanwhile, the percentage of persons who answered that their primary vehicle was a sport utility vehicle edged upwards, although part of the increase since 1996 may be from a slight change in the wording of the question. The term "sport utility vehicle" was included in the stem of the survey question beginning in 1998.

Table 48
Type Of Primary Vehicle Driven, 1994-2003

Qx: Is the vehicle you drive most often a car, van, motorcycle, sport utility vehicle, pickup truck, or other type of truck?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

Driving frequency	1994	1996	1998	2000	2003
Car	71%	67%	65%	62%	59%
Van/Minivan	9%	9%	10%	10%	10%
Sport utility vehicle	3%	5%	8%	10%	13%
Pickup truck	15%	17%	16%	16%	16%

Type Of Driver-Side Safety Belts, 1994-2003

The 2003 survey observed a continued increase in one-piece belt systems. The one-piece manual lap and shoulder system now accounts for 80% of driver safety belts in primary vehicles. The once ubiquitous lap only system now appears in only 1% of all primary vehicles at the driver seating position.

Table 49
Safety Belt Configuration In Front Seat Of Primary Vehicle, 1994-2003

Qx: Do the seat belts in the front seat of the (car/truck/van) go across your shoulder only, across your lap only, or across both your shoulder and your lap?

Qx: Are the shoulder and lap belt one piece or are they two separate belts?

Qx: Are both the shoulder and lap belt automatic, is only the shoulder belt automatic or is neither the shoulder or lap belt automatic?

Qx: Is the shoulder belt automatic or do you have to fasten it?

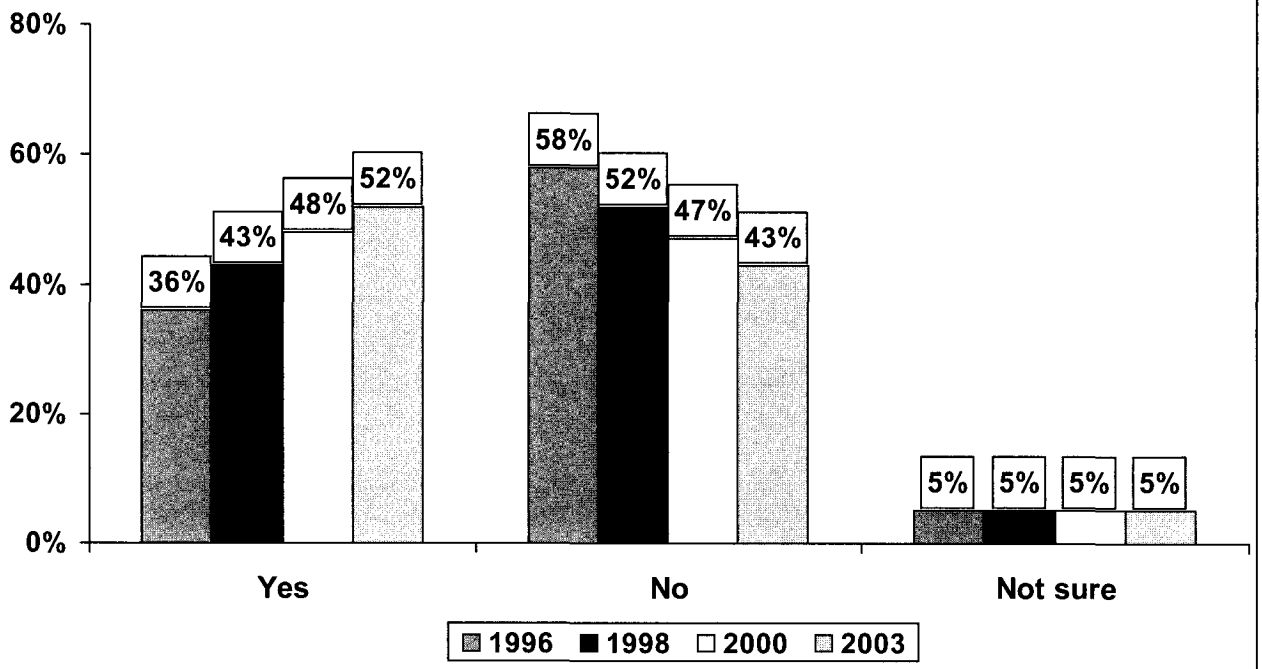
Base: Vehicle driven most often has safety belts.

Seat belt type	1994	1996	1998	2000	2003
Basic configuration					
Shoulder only	8%	7%	7%	7%	6%
Lap only	4%	3%	2%	1%	1%
Shoulder and lap	88%	90%	90%	91%	92%
Type of driver safety belt					
One-piece systems	[85%]	[86%]	[88%]	[89%]	[91%]
Lap belt only	4%	3%	2%	1%	1%
Lap/shoulder manual	70%	72%	75%	76%	80%
Lap/shoulder automatic	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Shoulder only manual	7%	6%	6%	6%	5%
Shoulder only automatic	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
One-piece-NS if automatic	*	*	*	*	*
Two-piece systems	[14%]	[13%]	[12%]	[10%]	[8%]
Lap manual/shoulder manual	6%	5%	4%	4%	4%
Lap manual/shoulder automatic	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%
Lap automatic/shoulder automatic	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Two-piece-NS if automatic	*	*	*	*	*
Not sure if one-piece or two-piece	**1%**	**1%**	*	**1%**	**1%**

*Less than 0.5%.

The 2003 survey continued to show rapid penetration of the vehicle fleet by adjustable shoulder belts. Fifty-two percent of drivers in 2003 had adjustable shoulder belts in their primary vehicle compared to 36% in 1996. (This question was not asked in 1994.)

Figure 107
Have Adjustable Shoulder Belt In Primary Vehicle, 1996-2003



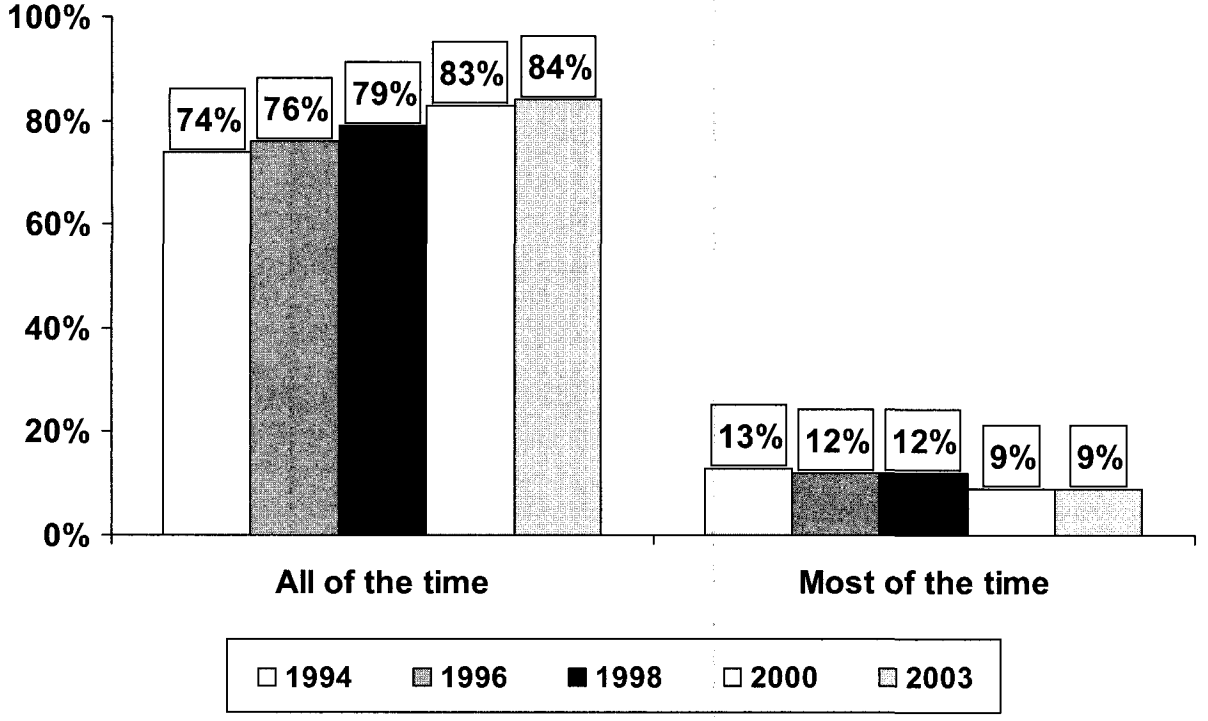
Qx: Shoulder belts are usually attached to the door or frame behind the driver's left shoulder. In some vehicles, this attachment can be moved up or down to adjust the shoulder belt. Is this attachment adjustable in your vehicle?

Base: Vehicle has safety belts across both lap and shoulder or across shoulder only.

Driver's Use Of Safety Belts, 1994-2003

The public is increasingly reporting that they use safety belts on a regular basis. The percentage of drivers age 16 and older who said that they always used their safety belt while driving has increased 10 percentage points since 1994, from 74% to 84%. This increase has largely come from most of the time and some of the time users, as the percentages of rare and never users has remained fairly stable over time (3% rarely used safety belts in 1994 versus 2% in 2003, 3% never used safety belts in 1994 versus 2% in 2003).

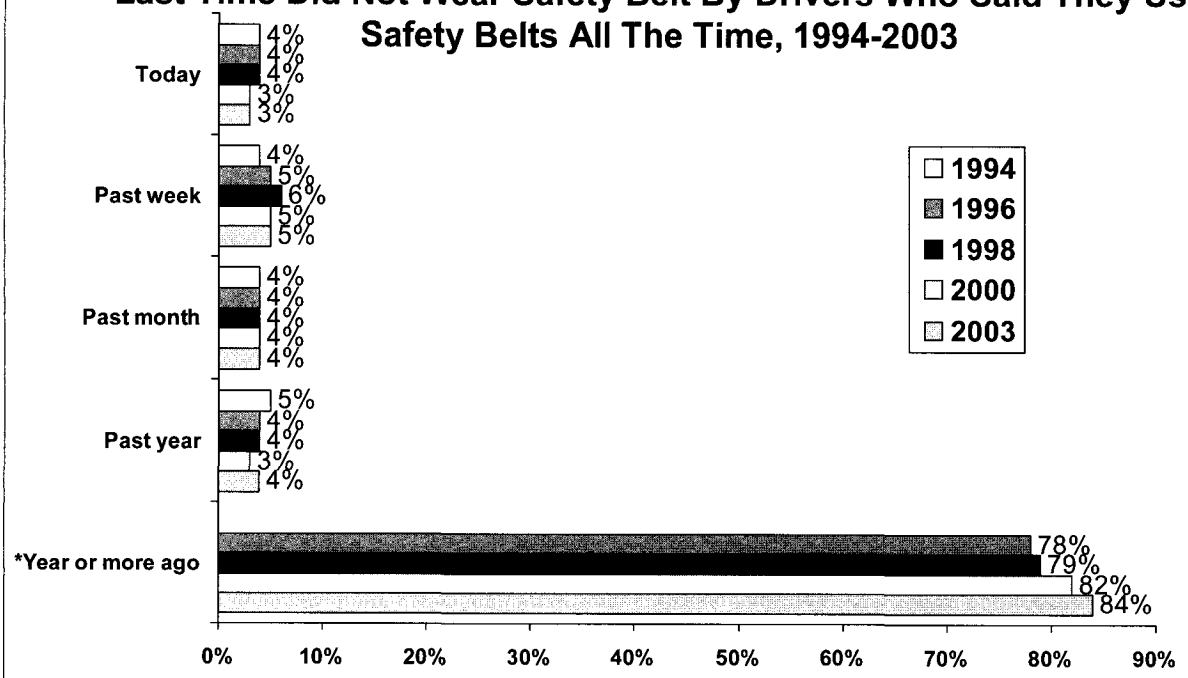
Figure 108
Frequency Of Reported Driver Safety Belt Use, 1994-2003



Qx: When driving this (car/truck/van) how often do you wear your (shoulder/lap) belt?
Base: Drives whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Although more people reported using safety belts "all of the time" in 2003, a portion of these full-time users still indicated that they had not worn their safety belts recently while driving. On a follow-up question, 7%[15] of drivers in 2003 indicated they had not used their safety belt at least once in the past day or week. This is consistent with previous years, as the percentage has ranged from 8% to 10%.

Figure 109
Last Time Did Not Wear Safety Belt By Drivers Who Said They Use Safety Belts All The Time, 1994-2003



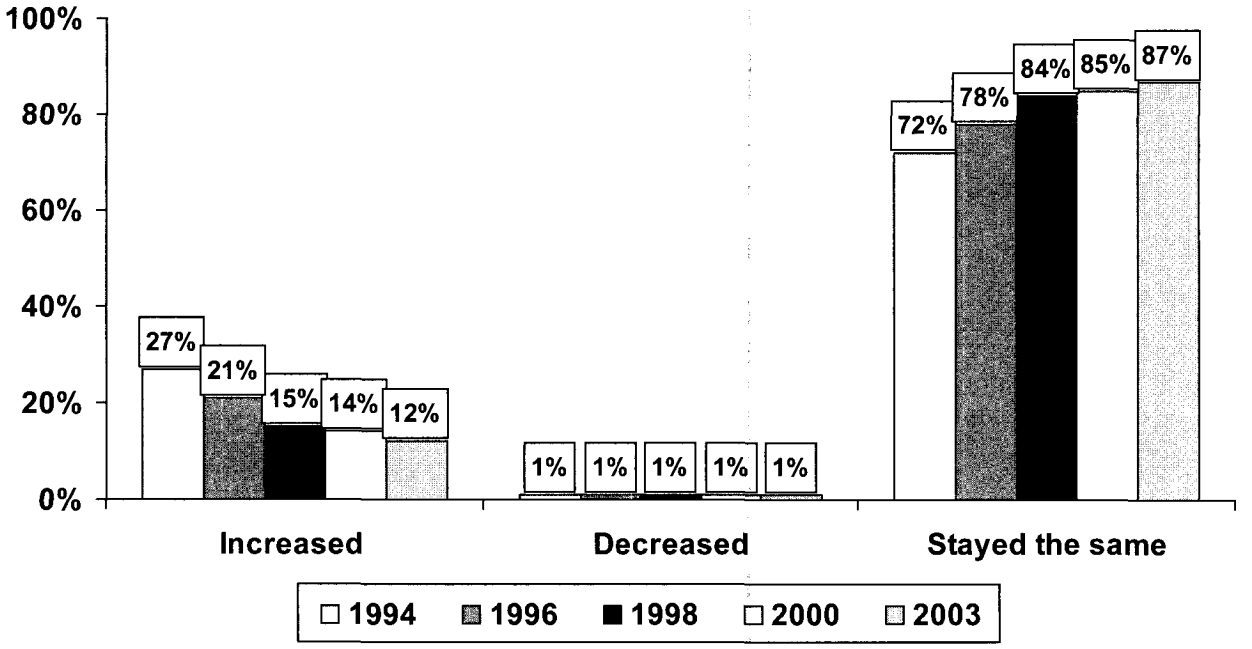
Qx: When was the last time you did not wear your seat belt when driving?
Qx: Has there been any occasion in the past 12 months when you did not wear your seat belt (neither lap nor shoulder) when driving?
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has seat belts, and said they wore the belts "all of the time."
**A follow-up question was added in 1996 asking persons who did not know the last time they failed to wear their safety belt whether or not it occurred in the past year. These persons were then apportioned into the "Year or more" and "Not sure/within past year" categories in subsequent years (thus 1994 was not comparable for these categories).*

[15] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

Reported Changes In Driver Safety Belt Use, 1994-2003

The percentage of drivers who said they increased their safety belt use over the past year has declined since 1994. In 1994, 27% of drivers reported that their use of safety belts while driving in the past twelve months had increased. Only 12% agreed with that statement in 2003.

Figure 110
Reported Change In The Use Of Safety Belts Among Drivers, 1994-2003



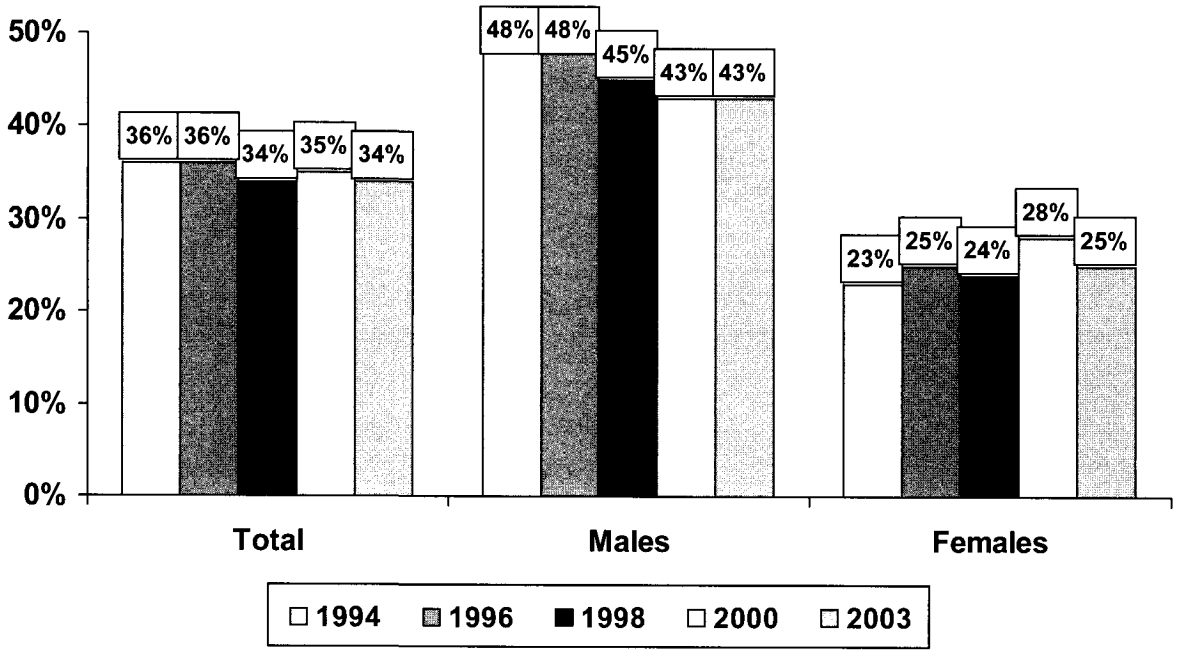
Qx: In the past 12 months, has your use of seat belts when driving (car driven most often) increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts.

Driving On The Job, 1994-2003

The overall percentage of drivers who drive on the job has remained fairly stable since 1994.

Figure 111
At Least Sometimes Drive A Vehicle As Part Of A Job Or Business, 1994-2003



Qx: Not including driving to and from work, do you at least sometimes drive a motor vehicle as part of a job or business?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

Company Safety Belt Policy, 1994-2003

Drivers who said they drove on the job were asked if their company had a safety belt policy. If they answered "yes," the interviewers then asked them if it was a written policy.

The percentage of drivers who reported a safety belt policy was about the same in 2003 as in the 2000 survey. However, more of these policies were thought to be written in 2003 than was the case in 2000.

Table 50
Company Safety Belt Policy – Written Or Unwritten, 1994-2003

Qx: Does your company have a policy requiring seat belt use when driving on the job?
Qx: Is that a written policy?
Base: Drivers who drive on the job.

	1994	1996	1998	2000	2003
Company has policy	**52%**	**53%**	**48%**	**55%**	**53%**
Yes, written policy	66%	67%	67%	62%	68%
No, not a written policy	25%	24%	25%	28%	25%
Not sure	9%	9%	8%	11%	7%
Company doesn't have policy	**43%**	**42%**	**45%**	**39%**	**41%**
Not sure if company has policy	**5%**	**5%**	**6%**	**6%**	**6%**

Frequency Of Front Seat Passenger Safety Belt Use, 1996-2003

In 1994, only respondents who said they usually sat in the front seat when riding as passengers were asked their frequency of safety belt use in that passenger seating position (the same approach was used for the back seat). The later surveys restructured this section so that everyone was asked their safety belt use for each seating position. In accordance with the restructuring, Table 51 compares reported safety belt use across years in the front passenger seat for all persons who ever ride as passengers, while omitting 1994 because the data are not comparable.

The data showed a three percentage point jump in reported safety belt use for the front passenger seat from 2000 to 2003. There has been a 10 percentage point increase since 1996 in reported safety belt use for the front passenger seating position.

Table 51
Frequency Wear Safety Belt As Front Seat Passenger, 1996-2003

Qx: How often do you ride as a passenger in any kind of car, van, or truck? Would you say almost every day, a few days a week, a few days a month, a few days a year, or never?

Qx: When riding as a passenger in the front seat how often do you wear your seat belt?

Base: At least sometimes rides as a passenger.

Frequency of front seat passenger safety belt use	1996	1998	2000	2003
All of the time	73%	74%	80%	83%
Most of the time	14%	13%	10%	10%
Some of the time	7%	6%	5%	4%
Rarely	3%	3%	2%	2%
Never	3%	4%	2%	2%

Frequency Of Back Seat Passenger Safety Belt Use, 1996-2003

Reported belt use in the back seat continued to increase in 2003. Over half of passengers (53%) now report wearing safety belts all of the time while riding in the back seat, compared to 37% in 1996. Readers are reminded, however, that across all years, the vast majority of respondents usually sat in the front seat when riding as passengers.

Table 52
Frequency Wear Safety Belt As Back Seat Passenger, 1996-2003

Qx: How often do you ride as a passenger in any kind of car, van, or truck? Would you say almost every day, a few days a week, a few days a month, a few days a year, or never?
Qx: When riding as a passenger in the back seat how often do you wear your seat belt?
Base: At least sometimes rides as a passenger.

Frequency of back seat passenger safety belt use	1996	1998	2000	2003
All of the time	37%	43%	49%	53%
Most of the time	14%	12%	13%	12%
Some of the time	15%	11%	11%	8%
Rarely	11%	9%	7%	8%
Never	18%	17%	14%	13%
Never ride in back	5%	7%	5%	6%

Most Important Reason For Safety Belt Use By Drivers, 1994-2003

In 1994 and 1996 the interviewers read six potential reasons for safety belt use to the respondents. They asked the respondents which of the reasons applied to them (they could choose more than one, and could volunteer "other" reasons as well), and then asked which single reason did the respondent consider the most important. In 1998, two additional reasons were included on the list. This did not appreciably change the results as safety remained the predominant reason for wearing safety belts in 1998, 2000 and 2003, although the percentage who cited injury avoidance as the most important reason did decrease slightly compared to the first two years of the survey. In 2003, a ninth item was added to the reasons for safety belt use, "A bell, buzzer or light reminds me."

Table 53
Most Important Reason For Safety Belt Use: Drivers, 1994-2003

Qx: When I wear my seat belt, I do so because...

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion wear their safety belt.

Reason	1994	1996	1998	2000	2003
I want to avoid serious injury.	68%	68%	66%	64%	66%
It's the law.	8%	8%	7%	9%	7%
It's a habit.	7%	6%	6%	7%	6%
I want to set a good example for others.	NA	NA	5%	5%	5%
I don't want to get a ticket.	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%
I'm uncomfortable without it.	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Others want me to wear it.	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
The people I'm with are wearing seat belts.	NA	NA	*	*	*
Vehicle has a bell, buzzer or light that reminds me	NA	NA	NA	NA	*
Other	6%	7%	4%	6%	4%
All important, can't select just one.	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%

*Less than 0.5%.

Most Important Reason For Non-Use Of Safety Belts By Drivers, 1994-2003

The interviewers approached the reasons for non-use in the same manner they did the reasons for use (described on the previous page). In past years, respondents were read eight reasons for non-use. In 2003, a ninth item was added to the reasons, "Don't like being told what to do." Another change over time was a revision in 1998 in wording for one item: "because of the people I am with" became "the people I am with are not wearing seat belts." Table 54 shows little difference in the overall response in recent years.

Table 54
Most Important Reason For Not Wearing A Safety Belt: Drivers, 1994-2003

Qx: Sometimes I do not wear my seat belt because...

Qx: Of the following reasons you just gave me for not wearing your seat belt, which is the most important?

Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

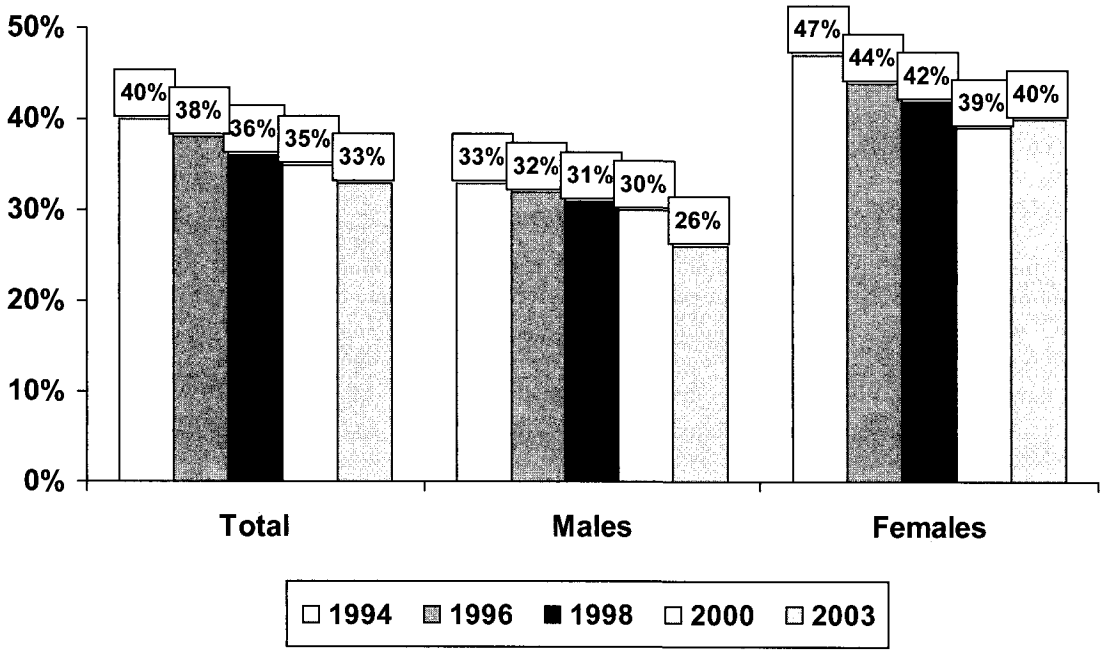
Reason	1994	1996	1998	2000	2003
I forget to put it on.	24%	23%	24%	24%	25%
I'm only driving a short distance.	17%	24%	22%	24%	23%
The seat belt is uncomfortable.	10%	10%	12%	12%	13%
I'm in a rush.	7%	7%	8%	9%	8%
The probability of being in a crash is too low.	3%	4%	4%	4%	2%
I'm driving in light traffic.	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
I don't want my clothes to get wrinkled.	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
The people I'm with are not wearing seat belts.	1%	1%	1%	1%	*
Don't like being told what to do	NA	NA	NA	NA	5%
Other	7%	9%	7%	8%	4%
None of these reasons.	22%	16%	17%	12%	13%
All are important, can't select just one.	3%	3%	2%	2%	1%

*Less than 0.5%.

Drivers Who Dislike Or Find Something Annoying About Safety Belts, 1994-2003

All drivers regardless of whether or not they wore their safety belts regularly were asked if there was anything that they particularly disliked or found annoying about wearing their safety belt. Figure 112 shows a continued slow, steady decline in drivers' irritation with safety belts.

Figure 112
Dislike Or Find Something Annoying About Safety Belts, 1994-2003



Qx: Is there anything that you particularly dislike or find annoying about wearing your seat belts?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle that has safety belts.

Attitudes Concerning Fatalism And The Utility of Safety Belts, 1998-2003

The 1998 survey added a new section on attitudes related to the utility of safety belts, thus there currently are three points in time for comparisons. Table 55 shows little difference between the 1998 and 2003 numbers. At the bottom of the Table, there is an item that appeared in a separate section of the questionnaire and was included in earlier administrations of the survey.

Table 55
Attitudes Concerning Risk Perception, Fatalism, And The Usefulness Of Safety Belts, 1998-2003

Qx: Now I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

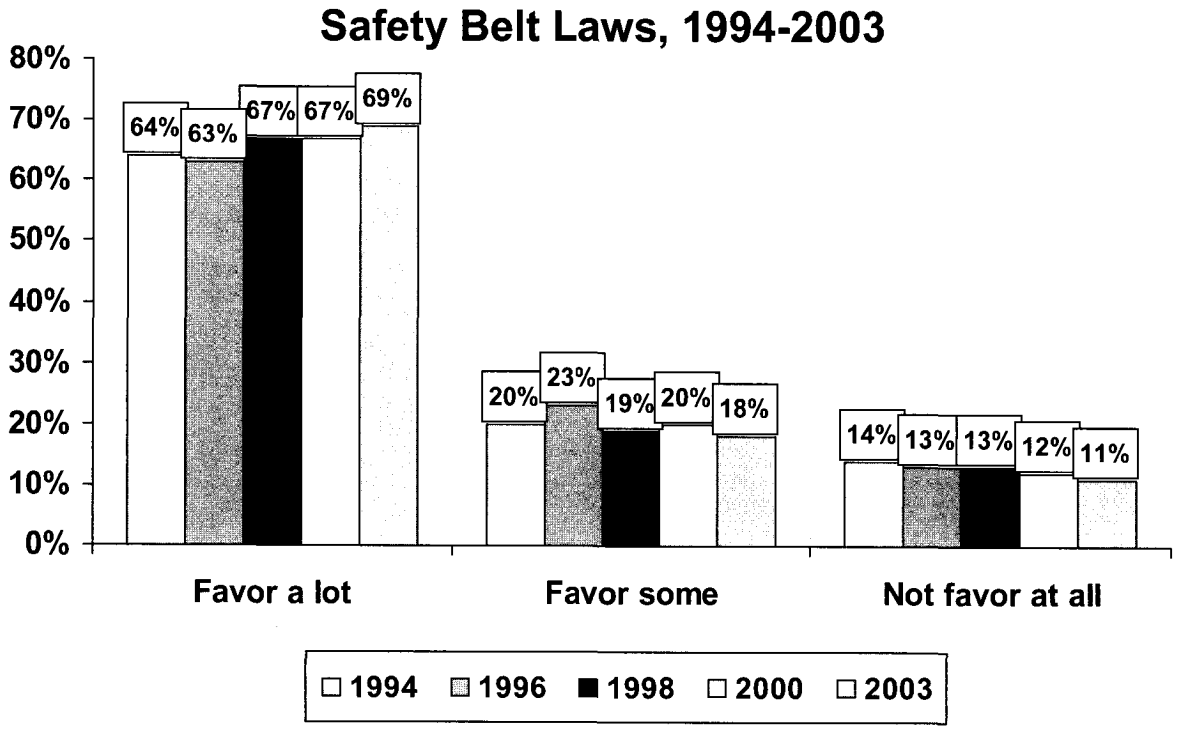
Qx: Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.

Base: Total population age 16+.

	1998	2000	2003
Strongly or somewhat agree with statement:			
Seat belts are just as likely to harm you as help you.	38%	36%	35%
An accident close to home is usually not as serious as an accident farther away.	12%	14%	16%
If I were in an accident, I would want to have my seat belt on.	93%	94%	95%
Most motor vehicle accidents happen within five miles of home.	NA	NA	80%
I would feel self-conscious around my friends if I wore a seat belt and they did not.	18%	19%	19%
Medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts.	68%	68%	65%
Putting on a seat belt makes me worry more about being in an accident.	15%	15%	15%
Agree with statement:			
If it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.	28%	25%	26%

Support For Safety Belt Laws That Apply To The Front Seat, 1994-2003

Safety belt laws have been enacted throughout the country to increase safety belt use. The 2003 survey found continued strong support for laws that applied to drivers and front seat passengers, as 88%[16] favored such laws "a lot" or "some". The 2000 figure was 87%.



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

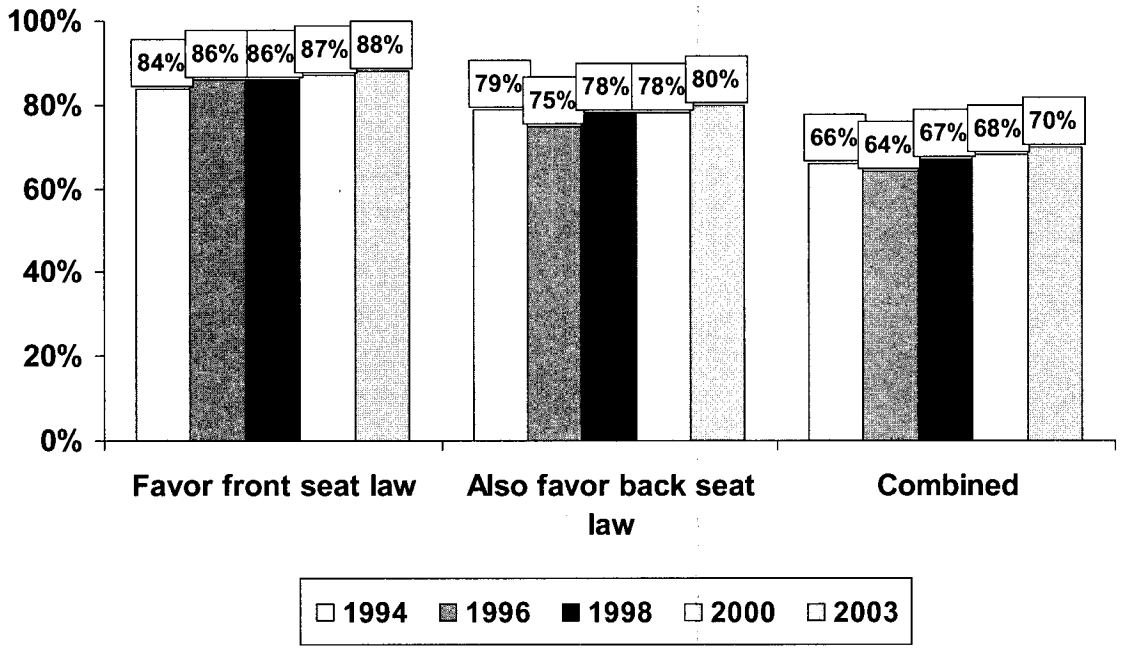
Base: Total population age 16+.

[16] The number does not equal the sum of the components in the Figure due to rounding.

Support For Safety Belt Laws That Apply To Both The Front And Back Seats, 1994-2003

Of the 88% who favored front seat laws in 2003, 80% also favored having safety belt laws apply to the back seat, which translated into 70% who favored laws applicable to both the front and back seats. This compared to 68% in 2000, 67% in 1998, 64% in 1996, and 66% in 1994.

Figure 114
Support For Safety Belt Laws That Apply To Both The Front And Back Seats, 1994-2003



Qx: How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts? Do you favor these laws a lot, do you favor them some, or do you not favor these laws at all?

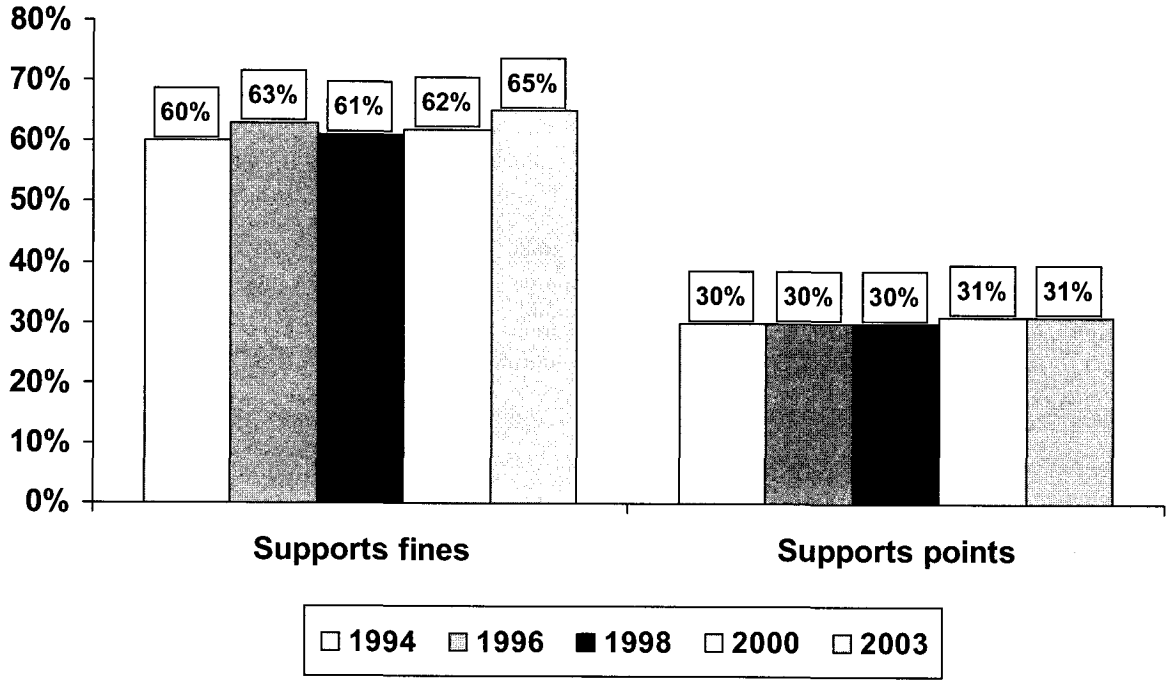
Qx: Do you think that seat belt laws should also apply to back seat adult passengers?

Base: Total population age 16+.

Support For Fines And Points, 1994-2003

The level of public support for fines reached 65% in 2003 while the support for points as sanctions for violating safety belt laws has largely stayed the same since 1994. About twice as many persons support fines as support points.

Figure 115
Support For Fines And Points, 1994-2003

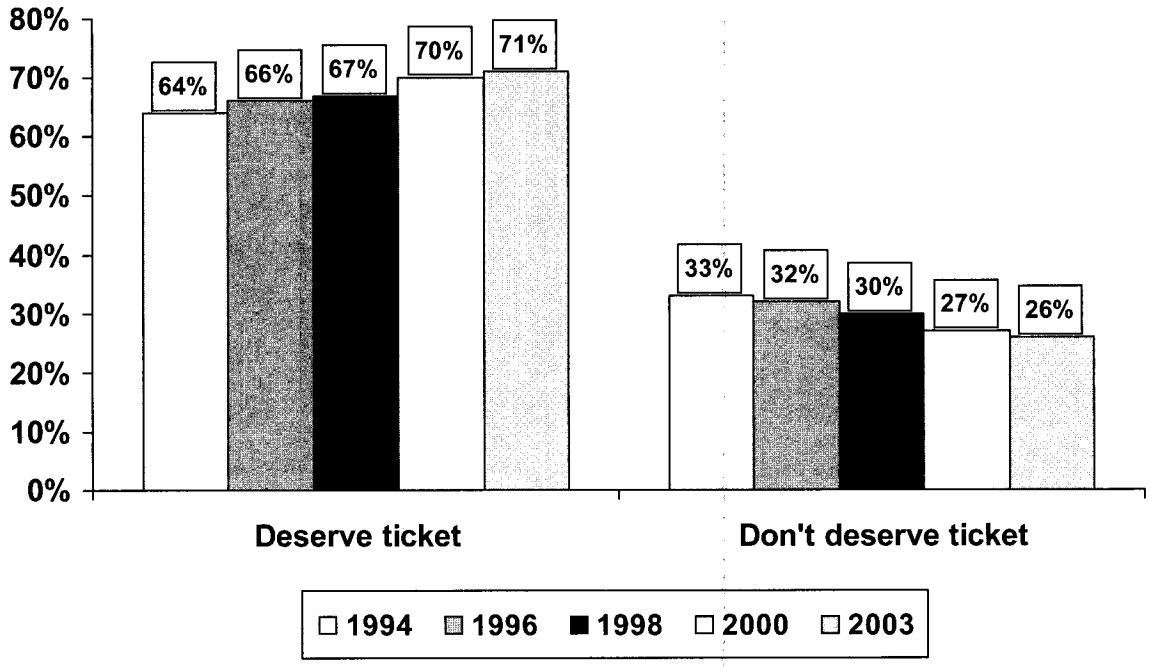


Qx: Do you favor or oppose fines for drivers who do not wear seat belts?
Qx: Do you favor or oppose receiving points against a license as a penalty for seat belt violations?
Base: Total population age 16+.

Likely Reaction To Receiving Safety Belt Ticket, 1994-2003

The interviewers asked the respondents which of the following would be their more likely reaction to receiving a safety belt ticket: that they deserved the ticket because they broke the law, or that they did not deserve the ticket because wearing a safety belt should be a personal choice. The 2003 survey found continued movement toward acceptance of the notion that the ticket would be deserved, as 71% agreed with that position.

Figure 116
Likely Reaction To Receiving Safety Belt Ticket, 1994-2003



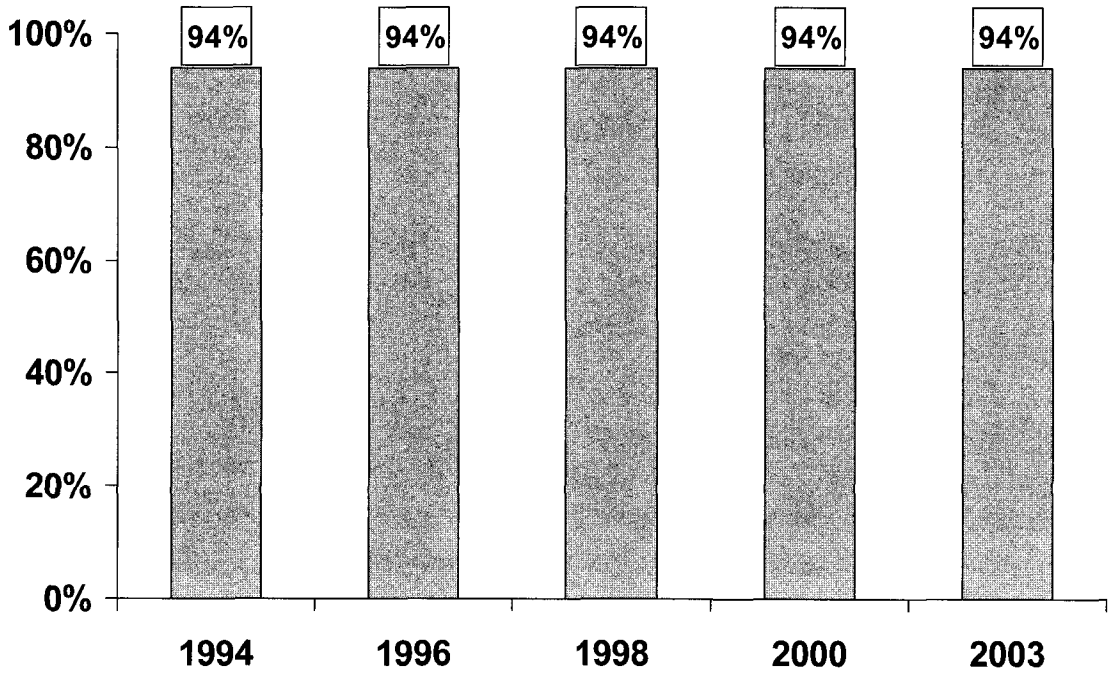
Qx: Suppose you get a ticket for not wearing your seat belt. Which of the following statements better describes your likely reaction? I deserve the ticket because I broke the law, or I do NOT deserve the ticket because wearing a seat belt should be a personal choice.

Base: Total population age 16+.

Believe Their State Has A Safety Belt Law, 1994-2003

The interviewers asked all respondents if their State had a law requiring safety belt use. The response did not change across the five administrations of the survey; 94% believed there was a safety belt law. During the 1994 survey, 47 States had safety belt laws that applied to adults. In all subsequent survey years, 49 States had such laws.

Figure 117
Believe Their State Has A Safety Belt Law, 1994-2003

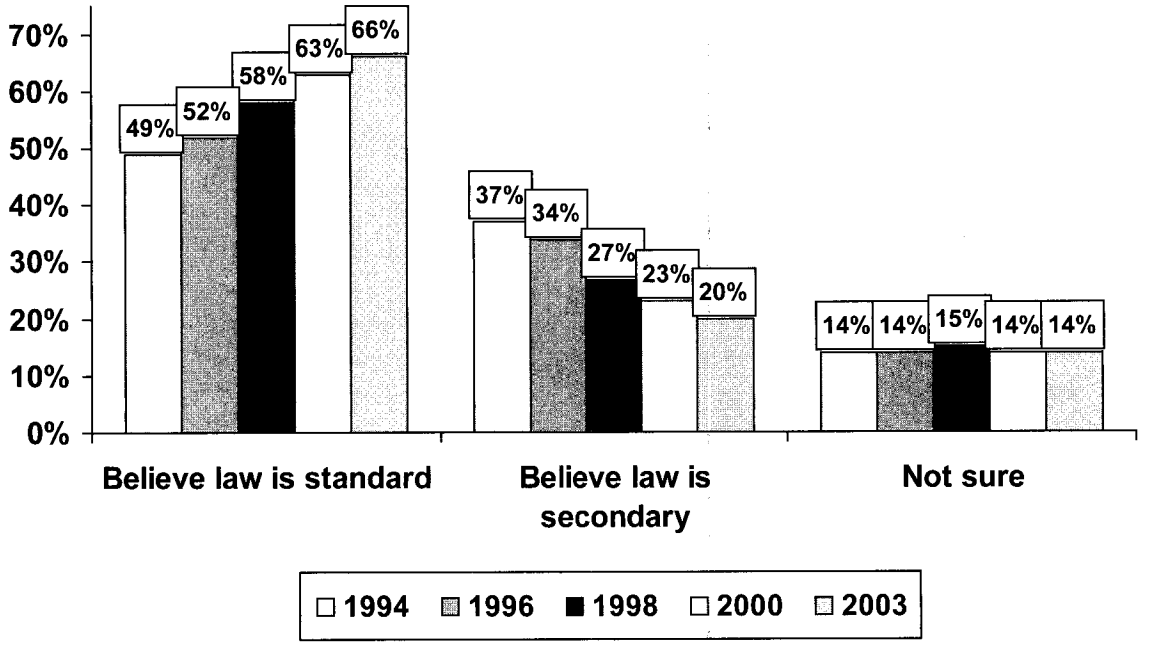


Qx: Does (STATE) have a law requiring seat belt use?
Base: Total population 16+.

Knowledge Of Standard Versus Secondary Enforcement, 1994-2003

At the time of the 1994 survey, 9 States had safety belt laws that permitted standard enforcement, where law enforcement officers could stop a vehicle on the basis of observing a safety belt violation. The number increased to 11 in 1996, 14 in 1998, 17 in 2000 and 18 in 2003. Over that period of time, there was an increase in the percentage of persons who believed their State law included standard enforcement provisions. Among persons who believed their State had a safety belt law, 66% thought the law provided for standard enforcement in 2003 compared to 49% in 1994.

Figure 118
Believe State Law Is Standard Or Secondary, 1994-2003



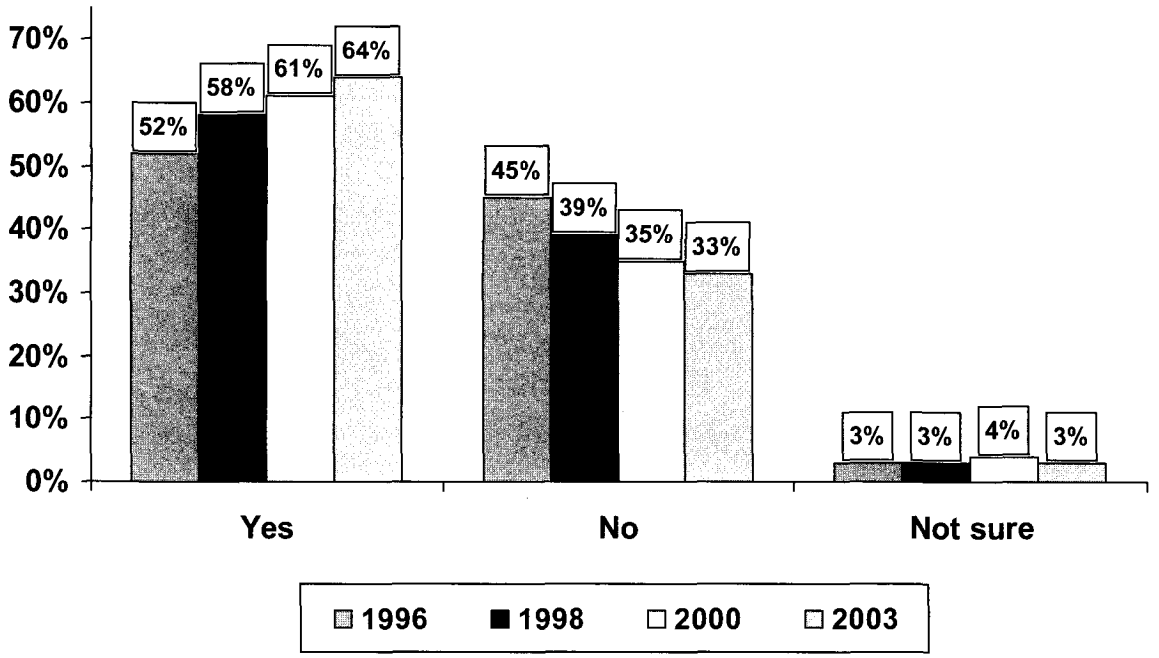
Qx: According to your state law, can police stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation, or do they have to observe some other offense first in order to stop the vehicle?

Base: Believe their State has a safety belt law.

Support For Standard Enforcement, 1996-2003

The 1996 survey introduced a question that asked if law enforcement officers should be allowed to stop a motor vehicle if they observed a safety belt violation but no other law was being broken. Barely half of the public, (52%) agreed at that time that police should have that authority. Support for the standard enforcement provision has increased by 12 percentage points since that time, reaching 64% in 2003.

Figure 119
Support Standard Enforcement, 1996-2003



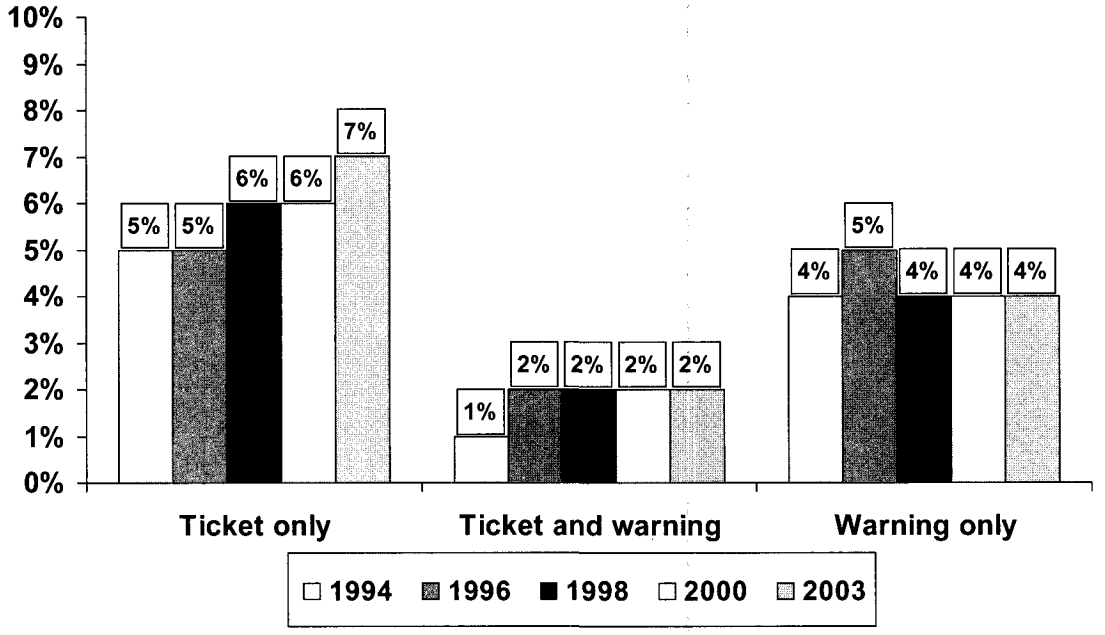
Qx: In your opinion, should police be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being broken?

Base: Total population age 16+.

Ever Received A Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning, 1994-2003

The percentage of the population in 2003 who reported receiving a safety belt ticket and/or warning increased slightly from 10% in 1994 to 13% in 2003.

Figure 120
Ever Received A Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning, 1994-2003

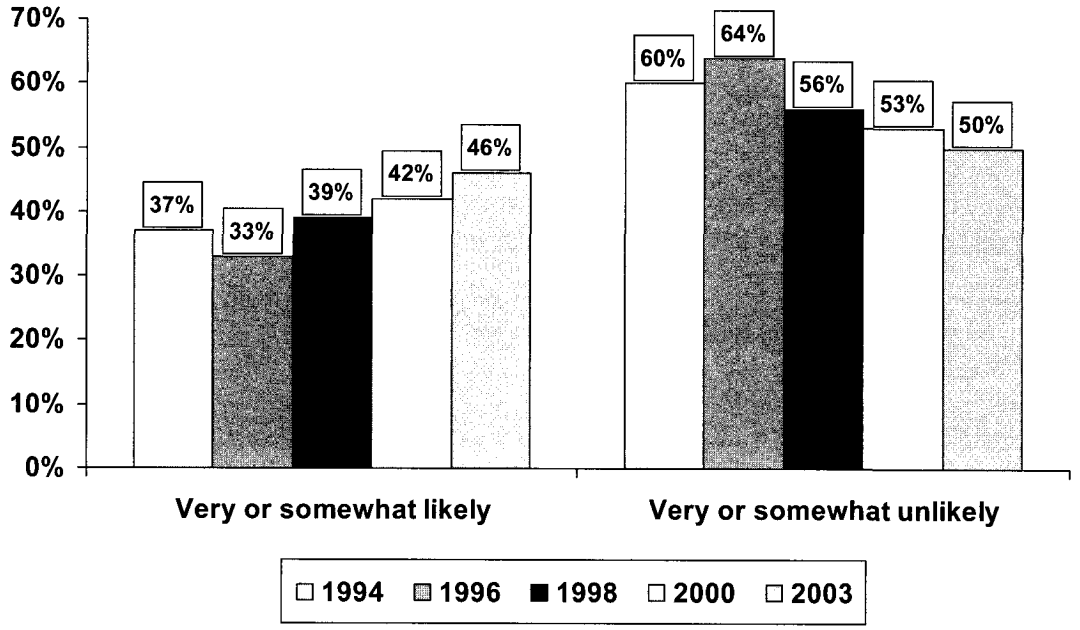


Qx: Did you receive a ticket for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Did you receive a warning for violating seat belt laws?
Qx: Have you ever received a ticket for not wearing seat belts?
Qx: Have you ever received a warning for not wearing seat belts?
Base: Total population age 16+.

Perceived Likelihood Of Being Ticketed, 1994-2003

In 2003, more drivers than in the previous surveys (46%) believed that they were likely to receive a safety belt ticket if they did not wear a safety belt at all while driving over the next six months. However, one-half of the public still believed that they would probably not receive a ticket for violating the safety belt law.

Figure 121
Likelihood Of Being Ticketed If Don't Wear Safety Belt While Driving Over Next 6 Months, 1994-2003

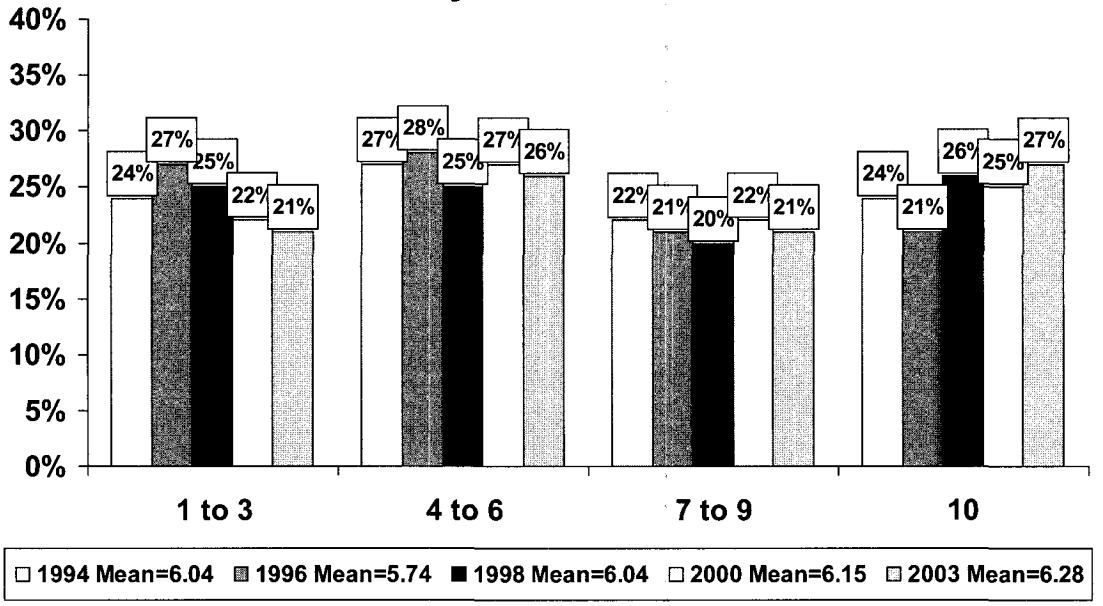


Qx: Assume that you do not wear your seat belt AT ALL while driving over the next six months. How likely do you think you will be to receive a ticket for not wearing a seat belt?
Base: Drives a motor vehicle.

Level Of Support For Enforcing Safety Belt Laws, 1994-2003

The 2003 survey findings continued to show the public split on how strictly police should enforce safety belt laws.

Figure 122
On A 10-Point Scale, How Strictly Police Should Enforce Safety Belt Laws, 1994-2003



Qx: How often do you think police should ticket for seat belt violations? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means police should hardly ever give tickets and 10 means police should give tickets at every opportunity when it comes to enforcing seat belt laws, how strict should police enforcement be?

Base: Total population age 16+.

**The means exclude respondents in the Not sure/Refused category.*

2003 SURVEY RESULTS

APPENDIX A: *PRECISION OF SAMPLE ESTIMATES

*Reprinted from:

Boyle, J. and P. Vanderwolf. 2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey. Volume I. Methodology Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Precision of Sample Estimates

The objective of the sampling procedures used on this study was to produce a random sample of the target population. A random sample shares the same properties and characteristics of the total population from which it is drawn, subject to a certain level of sampling error. This means that with a properly drawn sample we can make statements about the properties and characteristics of the total population within certain specified limits of certainty and sampling variability.

The confidence interval for sample estimates of population proportions, using simple random sampling without replacement, is calculated by the following formula:

$$z * \left[se(x) = \sqrt{\frac{(p * q)}{(n-1)}} \right]$$

Where:

se (x)	=	the standard error of the sample estimate for a proportion;
p	=	some proportion of the sample displaying a certain characteristic or attribute;
q	=	(1 - p);
n	=	the size of the sample;
z	=	the standardized normal variable, given a specified confidence level (1.96 for samples of this size).

The sample sizes for the surveys are large enough to permit estimates for sub-samples of particular interest. Table 56, on the next page, presents the expected size of the sampling error for specified sample sizes of 12,000 and less, at different response distributions on a categorical variable. As the table shows, larger samples produce smaller expected sampling variances, but there is a constantly declining marginal utility of variance reduction per sample size increase.

TABLE 56
Expected Sampling Error (Plus Or Minus)
At The 95% Confidence Level
(Simple Random Sample)

Size of Sample or Subsample	Percentage of the Sample or Subsample Giving A Certain Response or Displaying a Certain Characteristic for Percentages Near:				
	10 or 90	**20 or 80**	**30 or 70**	**40 or 60**	**50**
12,000	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.9
8,000	0.7	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.1
6,000	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.3
4,500	0.9	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5
4,000	0.9	1.2	1.4	1.5	1.5
3,000	1.1	1.4	1.6	1.8	1.8
2,000	1.3	1.8	2.0	2.1	2.2
1,500	1.5	2.0	2.3	2.5	2.5
1,300	1.6	2.2	2.5	2.7	2.7
1,200	1.7	2.3	2.6	2.8	2.8
1,100	1.8	2.4	2.7	2.9	3.0
1,000	1.9	2.5	2.8	3.0	3.1
900	2.0	2.6	3.0	3.2	3.3
800	2.1	2.8	3.2	3.4	3.5
700	2.2	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.7
600	2.4	3.2	3.7	3.9	4.0
500	2.6	3.5	4.0	4.3	4.4
400	2.9	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9
300	3.4	4.5	5.2	5.6	5.7
200	4.2	5.6	6.4	6.8	6.9
150	4.8	6.4	7.4	7.9	8.0
100	5.9	7.9	9.0	9.7	9.8
75	6.8	9.1	10.4	11.2	11.4
50	8.4	11.2	12.8	13.7	14.0

NOTE: Entries are expressed as percentage points (+ or -)

However, the sampling design for this study included a separate, concurrently administered over-sample of youth and young adults (age 16-39). Both the cross-sectional sample and the over-sample of the youth/younger adult population were drawn as simple random samples; however, the disproportionate sampling of the age 16-39 population introduces a design effect that makes it inappropriate to assume that the sampling error for total sample estimates will be identical to those of a simple random sample.

In order to calculate a specific interval for estimates from a sample, the appropriate statistical formula for calculating the allowance for sampling error (at a 95% confidence interval) in a stratified sample with a disproportionate design is:

$$\mathrm{ASE} = 1.96\sqrt{\sum_{h=1}^{g}\left[\mathrm{W}_h^2\left\{\left(1-f_h\right)\left(\frac{s_h^2}{n_h-1}\right)\right\}\right]}$$

where:

ASE	=	allowance for sampling error at the 95% confidence level;
h	=	a sample stratum;
g	=	number of sample strata;
W_h	=	stratum h as a proportion of total population;
f_h	=	the sampling fraction for group h - the number in the sample divided by the number in the universe;
s^2_h	=	the variance in the stratum h - for proportions this is equal to p_h (1.0 - p_h);
n_h	=	the sample size for the stratum h.

Although Table 56 provides a useful approximation of the magnitude of expected sampling error, precise calculation of allowances for sampling error requires the use of this formula. To assess the design effect for sample estimates, we calculated sampling errors for the disproportionate sample for a number of key variables using the above formula. These estimates were then compared to the sampling errors for the same variables, assuming a simple random sample of the same size. The two strata (h^1 and h^2) in the disproportionate sample were all respondents age 16-39 and all respondents age 40 and over, respectively. The proportion for the 16-39 year old stratum (w^1) was 53.0 percent while the proportion for the 40 and over stratum (w^2) was 47.0 percent.

As shown in Table 57, the disproportionate sampling increases the confidence interval by an average of 0.7 percent, compared to a simple random sample of the same size. This means the sample design slightly decreases the sampling precision for total population estimates, while increasing the precision of sampling estimates for the sub-sample aged 16-39 years old. Since the average difference in the confidence interval between the stratified disproportionate sample and a simple random sample is less than one percentage point, the sampling error table for a simple random sample will provide a reasonable approximation of the precision of sampling estimates in the survey.

TABLE 57
Design Effect On Confidence Intervals For Sample Estimates Between Disproportionate Sample Used In Occupant Protection Survey And A Proportionate Sample Of Same Size

		---------- CONFIDENCE INTERVALS ---------- PERCENTAGE POINTS ± AT 95% CONFIDENCE LEVEL		
VARIABLE (Version 1 only)	p=	HYPOTHETICAL PROPORTIONATE SAMPLING*	CURRENT DIS-PROPORTIONATE SAMPLING	DIFFERENCE IN CONFIDENCE INTERVALS ABOUT ESTIMATES
Driven in the past year	*89.2%*	*0.77*	*0.78*	*1.3%*
Drunk alcohol in past year	*63.4%*	*1.21*	*1.23*	*1.7%*
Always use safety belt (N=5502)	*85.1%*	*0.94*	*0.94*	----
Dislike safety belts (N=5505)	*33.1%*	*1.24*	*1.26*	*1.6%*
Always use passenger belt (N=5655)	*82.7%*	*0.98*	*0.98*	----
Favor (a lot) safety belt laws	*69.3%*	*1.15*	*1.16*	*.9%*
Should be primary enforcement	*63.9%*	*1.20*	*1.22*	*.9%*
Ever ticketed by police for seatbelt	*9.3%*	*0.73*	*0.72*	*-1.4%*
Ever injured in vehicle accident	*23.6%*	*1.06*	*1.08*	*1.9%*
Drives a car for work almost every day	*17.2%*	*0.94*	*0.96*	*2.1%*
Set a good example for others (N=5413) (reason for using safety belts)	*74.1%*	*1.17*	*1.19*	*1.7%*
Driver-side air bag in vehicle (N=5551)	*76.5%*	*1.12*	*1.14*	*1.8%*
Race: Black/African American	*8.6%*	*0.70*	*0.70*	----
Ethnicity: Hispanic	*13.2%*	*0.84*	*0.81*	*-3.6%*
Gender: Male	*48.0%*	*1.24*	*1.27*	*2.4%*
AVERAGE DIFFERENCE IN CONFIDENCE INTERVALS				*0.7%*

* Total sample proportions using SRS formula
Unless specified otherwise N=6180

Estimating Statistical Significance

The estimates of sampling precision presented in the previous section yield confidence bands around the sample estimates, within which the true population value should lie. This type of sampling estimate is appropriate when the goal of the research is to estimate a population distribution parameter. However, the purpose of some surveys is to provide a comparison of population parameters estimated from independent samples (e.g. annual tracking surveys) or between subsets of the same sample. In such instances, the question is not simply whether or not there is any difference in the sample statistics that estimate the population parameter, but rather is the difference between the sample estimates statistically significant (i.e., beyond the expected limits of sampling error for both sample estimates).

To test whether or not a difference between two sample proportions is statistically significant, a rather simple calculation can be made. The maximum expected sampling error (i.e., confidence interval in the previous formula) of the first sample is designated ***s1*** and the maximum expected sampling error of the second sample is ***s2***. The sampling error of the difference between these estimates is ***sd*** and is calculated as:

$$\mathrm{sd} = \sqrt{(s1^2 + s2^2)}$$

Any difference between observed proportions that exceeds ***sd*** is a statistically significant difference at the specified confidence interval. Note that this technique is mathematically equivalent to generating standardized tests of the difference between proportions.

An illustration of the pooled sampling error between sub-samples for various sizes is presented in Table 58. This table can be used to determine the size of the difference in proportions between drivers and non-drivers or other sub-samples that would be statistically significant.

TABLE 58. Pooled Sampling Error Expressed As Percentages For Given Sample Sizes (Assuming P=Q)

Sample Size																	
4000	14.1	10.0	7.1	5.9	5.1	4.7	4.3	4.0	3.8	3.6	3.5	3.0	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.2
3500	14.1	10.0	7.1	5.9	5.2	4.7	4.3	4.1	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.0	2.7	2.6	2.4	2.3	
3000	14.1	10.0	7.2	5.9	5.2	4.7	4.4	4.1	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.1	2,8	2.7	2.5		
2500	14.1	10.0	7.2	6.0	5.3	4.8	4.5	4.2	4.0	3.8	3.7	3.2	2.9	2.8			
2003	14.2	10.1	7.3	6.1	5.4	4.9	4.6	4.3	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.3	3.1				
1500	14.2	10.2	7.4	6.2	5.5	5.1	4.7	4.5	4.3	4.1	4.0	3.6					
1000	14.3	10.3	7.6	6.5	5.8	5.4	5.1	4.8	4.7	4.5	4.4						
900	14.4	10.4	7.7	6.5	5.9	5.5	5.2	4.9	4.8	4.6							
800	14.4	10.4	7.8	6.6	6.0	5.6	5.3	5.1	4.9								
700	14.5	10.5	7.9	6.8	6.1	5.7	5.5	5.2									
600	14.6	10.6	8.0	6.9	6.3	5.9	5.7										
500	14.7	10.8	8.2	7.2	6.6	6.2											
400	14.8	11.0	8.5	7.5	6.9												
300	15.1	11.4	9.0	8.0													
200	15.6	12.1	9.8														
100	17.1	13.9															
50	19.8																
	50	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000	1500	2003	2500	3000	3500	4000
								Sample Size									

2003 SURVEY RESULTS

APPENDIX B: STATE HIGHWAY SAFETY LAWS AT TIME OF SURVEY

TABLE 59
Key Provisions Of State Highway Safety Laws At Time Of Survey

STATE	Enforcement	FINE	Seating Positions Covered
ALABAMA	Primary	$25	Front
ALASKA	Secondary	$15	All
ARIZONA	Secondary	$10	All
ARKANSAS	Secondary	$25	Front
CALIFORNIA	Primary	$20	All
COLORADO	Secondary	$15	Front
CONNECTICUT	Primary	$37	Front
DELAWARE	Secondary	$20	Front
DIST. OF COLUMBIA	Primary	$50	All
FLORIDA	Secondary	$30	Front
GEORGIA	Primary	$15	Front
HAWAII	Primary	$45	Front
IDAHO	Secondary	$5	Front
ILLINOIS	Secondary	$25	Front
INDIANA	Primary	$25	Front
IOWA	Primary	$25	Front
KANSAS	Secondary	$10	Front
KENTUCKY	Secondary	$25	All
LOUISIANA	Primary	$25	Front
MAINE	Secondary	$25-$50	All
MARYLAND	Primary	$25	Front
MASSACHUSETTS	Secondary	$25	All
MICHIGAN	Primary	$25	Front
MINNESOTA	Secondary	$25	Front
MISSISSIPPI	Secondary	$25	Front
MISSOURI	Secondary	$10	Front
MONTANA	Secondary	$20	All
NEBRASKA	Secondary	$25	Front
NEVADA	Secondary	$25	All
NEW HAMPSHIRE	No law		
NEW JERSEY	Primary	$20	Front
NEW MEXICO	Primary	$25	All
NEW YORK	Primary	$50-$100	Front
NORTH CAROLINA	Primary	$25	Front
NORTH DAKOTA	Secondary	$20	Front
OHIO	Secondary	$25	Front
OKLAHOMA	Primary	$20	Front
OREGON	Primary	$75	All
PENNSYLVANIA	Secondary	$10	Front
RHODE ISLAND	Secondary	$50	All
SOUTH CAROLINA	Secondary	$10	All
SOUTH DAKOTA	Secondary	$20	Front
TENNESSEE	Secondary	$10	Front
TEXAS	Primary	$25-$50	Front
UTAH	Secondary	$45	All
VERMONT	Secondary	$10	All
VIRGINIA	Secondary	$25	Front
WASHINGTON	Primary	$86	All
WEST VIRGINIA	Secondary	$25	Front
WISCONSIN	Secondary	$10	All
WYOMING	Secondary	$25	All

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