

Findings from the 2018 California Statewide Public Opinion Traffic Study

Tracy McMillan, Katrin Ewald, Lisa Wasserman and Jill Cooper

December 2018

The California Statewide Public Opinion Traffic Study is an annual cross-sectional survey of California drivers ages 18 and over regarding their opinions on traffic safety issues such as speeding, distracted driving, impaired driving, and pedestrian and bicycle safety, as well as their perceptions on other critical safety topics. The survey has been conducted since 2010. This research brief summarizes key findings in the 2018 survey.

Methods

Intercept survey data was collected at over 70 fueling stations across fifteen counties between August-September 2018. Survey sites within counties were selected based on population density within those counties using Census reports. For Los Angeles, San Diego and Orange Counties, the geographic areas were divided into two separate clusters. Data was collected on both weekdays and weekends during daylight hours.

A total of 1,395 surveys were completed. Males participated at a higher rate than females in the geographically representative sample of drivers, which is comparable to previous years' surveys. Those 71 and over were also less likely to participate in the survey. We received a corrected response rate of 74.9%.

Findings

Survey respondents were asked to identify the biggest safety problems on California roadways. The table below summarizes the top five answers (drivers could give more than one answer).

In your opinion, what are the biggest safety concerns on California roadways?	Count of drivers	% of drivers
Speeding/aggressive driving	403	30.2
Distracted driving because of texting	351	26.3
Bad road surfaces	318	23.9
Distracted driving because of talking	295	22.1
Drunk driving	135	10.1

Speeding/Aggressive Driving

Speeding is a significant factor in traffic fatalities and serious injuries in California. Over twenty nine percent of motor vehicle fatalities in California in 2016 were speeding-related, and California had the second-highest number of speeding-related fatalities in the nation. Speeding/aggressive driving was the top safety concern identified by drivers in 2018. It was also the top concern in 2017 and 2016, and in the top 3 concerns since the survey began in 2010.

Two questions addressed the safety of speeding in specific road settings:

- How safe is it to drive 10 miles over the speed limit on freeways?
- How safe is it to drive 5 miles over the speed limit on residential streets?

When asked about driving 10 miles over the speed limit on freeways, approximately fifty-seven percent of respondents reported that it is safe to exceed the speed limit by 10 miles per hour on freeways. Drivers between 18 and 54 were also more likely to believe that it is safe, compared to those over 55. In contrast, when asked the safety of driving 5 miles over the speed limit on residential streets, only about thirty-three percent of all respondents believe it is safe, with a higher percent of drivers age 18-24 believing it is safe compared to drivers over 24 years of age.



Distracted Driving

Distracted driving, which the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration describes as any activity that takes drivers' attention away from driving, is a serious issue on roadways today. Nationally, 3,450 people were killed and 391,000 were injured in crashes involving distracted drivers in 2015.

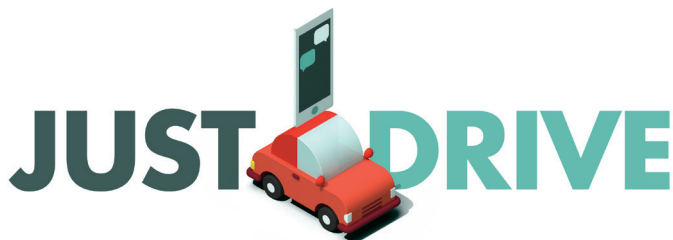
Distracted driving because of texting has been one of the top safety concerns identified by drivers since 2011. In a list of potential distractions while driving, texting has also been the most serious distraction on California roadways for the past six years. Distractions due to the use of cell phones (e.g., texting, calls, use in general) accounted for over eighty-one percent of the serious distractions reported by drivers overall, as compared to all other potential in-vehicle and out-of-vehicle distractions (e.g., roadside distractions, eating while driving, other passengers).

Using a device while driving

When asked about their own electronic wireless device use in the past 30 days while driving, over fifty-three percent of drivers reported using a device "Regularly" (32.0%) or "Sometimes" (21.3%). Drivers forty-five and over were more likely to report "Never" using an electronic wireless device over the past 30 days, compared to those under forty-five.

Driving mistakes

Forty-six percent of drivers reported they had made a driving mistake while talking or texting on a cell phone at some point in the past. Drivers fifty-five and over were more likely to report never making a driving mistake while talking or texting on a cell phone, compared to drivers 18 to 44. Over sixty-two percent of drivers reported being hit or nearly hit by a driver who was talking or texting on a cell phone while driving.



<http://gosafelyca.org/distracted-driving/>

Likelihood of being ticketed

California passed AB1785 in 2016, in order to strengthen the law related to electronic wireless device use while driving. Under this new law, drivers 18 and over can only use their devices hands-free. Drivers can only touch their device if it is mounted on the dashboard, windshield, or center console, and only to activate or deactivate the device with a single swipe or tap. However, in this survey less than fifty percent of drivers believe it is "Very Likely" or "Somewhat Likely" that they will be ticketed for hand-held cell phone use or texting. Drivers fifty-five and over believe they are less likely to be ticketed than younger drivers.

Driving Under the Influence

Alcohol impairment remains a significant traffic safety concern. In 2016, 1,059 people were killed on California roadways in alcohol-impaired collisions. Additionally, 352 fatalities resulted from drug-involved collisions.

Drivers were asked if, in the past six months, they had ever driven after having too much alcohol to drive safely. Approximately six percent of respondents reporting that they drove after drinking too much alcohol to drive safely, with younger drivers reporting this more frequently than older drivers.

Letting others do the driving

In the past 6 months, how often have you...	Always %	Sometimes %	Rarely %	Never %
...used a taxi or other ride service when drinking with others or alone?	31.2	22.7	10.9	35.2
...had a designated sober driver, including yourself?	33.6	23.5	12.8	30.0

A higher percent of drivers reported "Always" or "Sometimes" using a taxi or ride service when drinking in 2018, as compared to 2017 (53.9% vs. 44.2%). Drivers thirty-five and older are more likely to report "Never" using these services, compared to drivers ages 18-34. A higher percent of drivers in 2018 also reported "Always" having a designated sober driver, compared to 2017. A lower percent of drivers aged 18-24 reported "Never" having a designated sober driver compared to drivers twenty-five and over.



<http://gosafelyca.org/duid/>

Driving under the influence of drugs

Over ninety-three percent of drivers were aware that they could get a DUI for driving under the influence of legal or illegal drugs, with little variation by age. Relatedly, more drivers in 2018 reported they would “Very Likely” be arrested for driving impaired, compared to 2017 (42.5% vs. 38.7%). There were no differences by age.

Drivers were asked whether they thought marijuana impaired driving functions, such as reaction time, distance perception, lane tracking, coordination and balance. Over seventy-seven percent of respondents felt marijuana impaired driving functions.

Approximately forty-nine percent of drivers felt that driving under the influence of drugs, (including marijuana, prescription and illegal) was “A Very Big Problem,” a decrease of over four percent from 2017. More drivers age 45 and over reported this than drivers 18-24.

Driverless Vehicles

Driverless vehicles (i.e., automated vehicles) are predicted to become an increasing presence on California roadways. Many companies are already testing automated vehicles in California. Survey respondents were asked two questions about driverless vehicles and road safety.

Approximately twenty-four percent of respondents believe that driverless vehicles will make roadways safer, which is significantly less than in 2017 (27.7%). There was no significant variability by age.

Fewer drivers in 2018 reported feeling “Very Comfortable” about sharing the road with driverless vehicles than in 2017 (17.7% vs. 21%). Drivers ages 25-34 were less uncomfortable sharing the road with driverless vehicles than drivers age 45 and over.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety

Walking and bicycling promotion is an important component in the state’s goals for safe, sustainable transport. Drivers were asked a series of questions regarding pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Sharing the road

The percentage of drivers who think it is legal for bicyclists to ride on roadways when there is no bike lane has increased slightly since the question was first asked in 2014. Approximately sixty-nine percent of drivers believed it was legal in 2014; in 2018, seventy-four percent of drivers responded that it was legal. There were no significant differences by age.

Drivers were asked two questions about their comfort of sharing the road with cyclists under two conditions: when there is a designated bicycle lane, and when there is not a designated bicycle lane.

How comfortable are you with sharing the road with bicyclists when there is...	A designated bicycle lane?	Not a designated bicycle lane?
Very comfortable	46.3%	17.4%
Somewhat comfortable	27.0%	24.2%
Somewhat uncomfortable	15.0%	25.6%
Very uncomfortable	11.7%	32.8%

Drivers are markedly more comfortable sharing the road with bicyclists when there is a designated bicycle lane than when there is no designated bicycle lane. There were no significant differences by age for either question about sharing the road.



<http://gosafelyca.org/bicycle-pedestrian-safety/>

Pedestrian and bicyclist safety concerns

Drivers were asked to reflect on their own experiences as a pedestrian and bicyclist over the past six months, and note any safety problems that they experienced (drivers could name more than one safety problem). The top concerns reported by survey respondents were:

- Distracted drivers (cell phones) (31.1% of drivers)
- Cars not stopping (24.5%)
- Cars going too fast (17.5%)
- Almost getting hit by a car (13.5%)

Almost twenty-six percent reported no problems.

Drivers were also asked to think about the times they were a driver around pedestrians and bicyclists over the past six months and note any safety problems experienced (drivers could name more than one safety problem). The top concerns reported by survey respondents were:

- Pedestrians not using crosswalks (21.4%)
- Pedestrian/bicyclists distracted behavior (phones/ear pods/headsets) (19.2%)
- Bicyclists not stopping at stop signs or traffic lights (15.2%)
- Bicyclists being in the road or blocking traffic (13/6%)

Again, almost twenty-six percent reported no problems.

Conclusion

Speeding and aggressive driving, impaired driving and distracted driving have remained key concerns among drivers in California for several years. These concerns also surface when drivers were asked to think of their experiences as pedestrians or bicyclists. The California Office of Traffic Safety's new campaign, "Go Safely, California," addresses these survey findings in its safety messaging and is targeted to promoting not only the safe behavior of all road users, but also a safety culture.



CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF TRAFFIC SAFETY



Works cited

- Ewald and Wasserman Research Consultants, LLC (2018). *California Traffic Safety Survey 2018: Data Analysis and Comparison with 2010-2017 Survey Data Results*. Elk Grove, CA: California Office of Traffic Safety.
- Chen, K., Tsai, B-W., Fortin, G., and Cooper, J. (2018). *Traffic Safety Facts: Speeding-Related Collisions*. University of California, Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC). Berkeley, CA.
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2018). *Distracted Driving*. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>. Accessed December 4, 2018.
- Chen, K., Tsai, B-W., Fortin, G., and Cooper, J. (2018). *Traffic Safety Facts: Alcohol-Impaired Driving*. University of California, Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC). Berkeley, CA.
- Chen, K., Tsai, B-W., Fortin, G., and Cooper, J. (2018). *Traffic Safety Facts: Drug-Involved Driving*. University of California, Berkeley Safe Transportation Research and Education Center (SafeTREC). Berkeley, CA.
- California Office of Traffic Safety. (2018). *OTS new statewide 'Go Safely' Campaign*. <http://gosafelyca.org>. Accessed December 19, 2018.