



2020 California Survey of Speeding Attitudes and Behaviors



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Executive Summary

Using Qualtrics panel data, survey responses were collected from 3,150 individuals with a valid California driver's license, providing a broad representation of the state's population. Respondents were e-mailed the survey link, and the survey was completed between July 10th and July 30th, 2020. The detailed survey findings are presented in this report.

The survey indicates that 20 percent of the respondents tend to pass other cars more often than other cars pass them. When asked about the speeding laws and if drivers should obey these laws, 76 percent of respondents strongly or somewhat agree that everyone should obey speed limits because it is the law.

In reference to the perceived risks and benefits of speeding, the results showed that only 17 percent of respondents indicated that driving over the speed limit is not dangerous for skilled drivers. Furthermore, only 13 percent of people agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "If something bad will happen, it will happen no matter what, so it doesn't matter whether or not you speed." As a result, most people agree that individual behavior on the road determines whether they will experience misfortune while driving. Further, respondents were asked about the benefits of driving at or near the speed limit and 72 percent of people either strongly or somewhat agreed that driving at or near the speed limit reduces their risk of a crash, and 69 percent either strongly or somewhat agreed that they would be better able to avoid dangerous situations.

The results indicate that people may sometimes go faster than the speed limit for different reasons. The most common reasons included being late (55%), safe road conditions (35%), and impatience (29%). Regarding where and when speeding enforcement should be conducted, respondents felt that it should be targeted primarily on freeways/interstates (46 %) and city streets (41 %). In terms of the time of day that enforcement is most needed, 58 percent of drivers support enforcement occurring equally at all times of day and night. In addition, 86 percent of survey respondents indicated that receiving a speeding ticket or a warning changed their speeding behavior.

When asked about their distracted driving and risky behaviors, 94.8 percent of survey respondents reported wearing their seatbelts all of the time and another 2.6 percent reported wearing seatbelts most of the time. These numbers were consistent with California's recent yearly observational study of seatbelt usage conducted for NHTSA. In terms of risky behavior, drivers also indicated that in the past year they had consumed the following substances to a degree that may have impeded their driving, but still chose to drive: alcohol (8.6%), cannabis (5.8%), prescription drugs (5.3%), and other narcotics (2.8%).

As a specific type of risky behavior, eight percent of people reported having exhibited road rage often or some of the time. Moreover, excessive speeding (going over 25 mph over the limit) was reported as often or some of the time by 7 percent of drivers. In addition, 29 percent of drivers reporting using their cell phones to talk some, most, or all of the time. In terms of how the cell phones were used, five percent of drivers reported not using any hands-free feature while driving. Lastly, 20 percent of people reported reading or sending text/email messages some, most, or all of the time while they were driving, and the vehicle is moving.

Part 1: Introduction

The 2020 California Survey of Speeding Attitudes and Behaviors was developed as part of the collaboration between the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) and California State University, Fresno under the grant agreement OP20006. The goal of the survey was to collect data from California drivers and identify their driving behaviors and attitudes towards speeding. The data collection was completed utilizing Qualtrics panel data. Respondents were e-mailed the survey link, and the survey was collected online between July 10th and July 30th, 2020. It is worth noting that the survey collection took place online during the time when some California counties were experiencing shelter-in-place orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Usable responses were collected from 3,150 individuals who were distributed across the state with a valid California driver's license. The detailed survey findings are presented in this report.

The survey questions were drafted based on various NHTSA (i.e., National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) speeding surveys and input from OTS team members. The survey was pre-tested for the flow and clarity of the questions. Once all the changes were made, the final respondents were informed that the survey asks a series of questions relating to their driving practices and will take approximately 10-12 minutes to complete.

Part 2: Speeding Behaviors

The first set of questions asked respondents a screening question (if they have a California Driver's License), and to then describe their driving behavior. Once respondents without valid California driver's licenses were removed, survey participants were asked a series of questions that described their general driving behaviors, and their driving behaviors on various road types. These results are presented in Figures 1-5.

As shown in Figure 1, 20 percent of respondents indicated that they drive faster than the other cars on the road. In addition, a large majority (98%) of drivers indicated that they drive at the same speed or slower when a passenger is in their vehicle (Figure 2).

Additional questions asked respondents to share how often they drive 15 miles or more over the speed limit on various road types. These results are presented in Figures 3-5. As the road types become "smaller" or more "local", the number of respondents who speed over 15 miles per hour over the limit decreases significantly. Thirty-seven percent of respondents report driving 15 miles or more over the speed limit often or sometimes on multi-lane, divided highways, while 27 percent do so on two lane, undivided highways, while only 14 percent report doing so on local streets.

Figure 1. Which of the following statements best describes your driving?

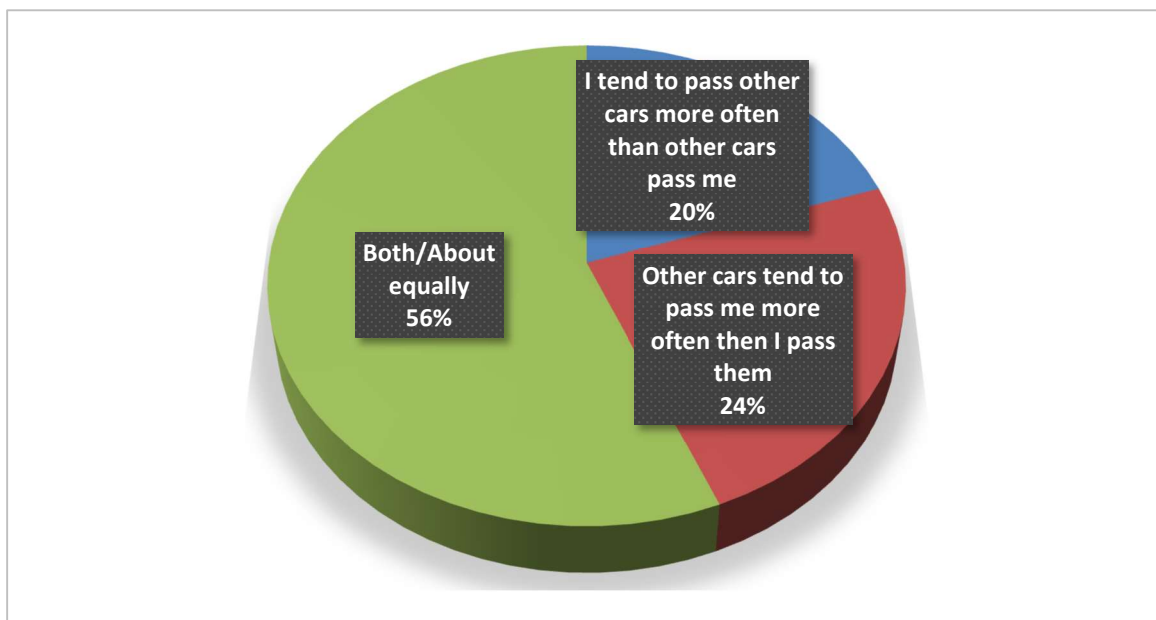


Figure 2. When I drive and I have one or more passengers, I tend to drive:

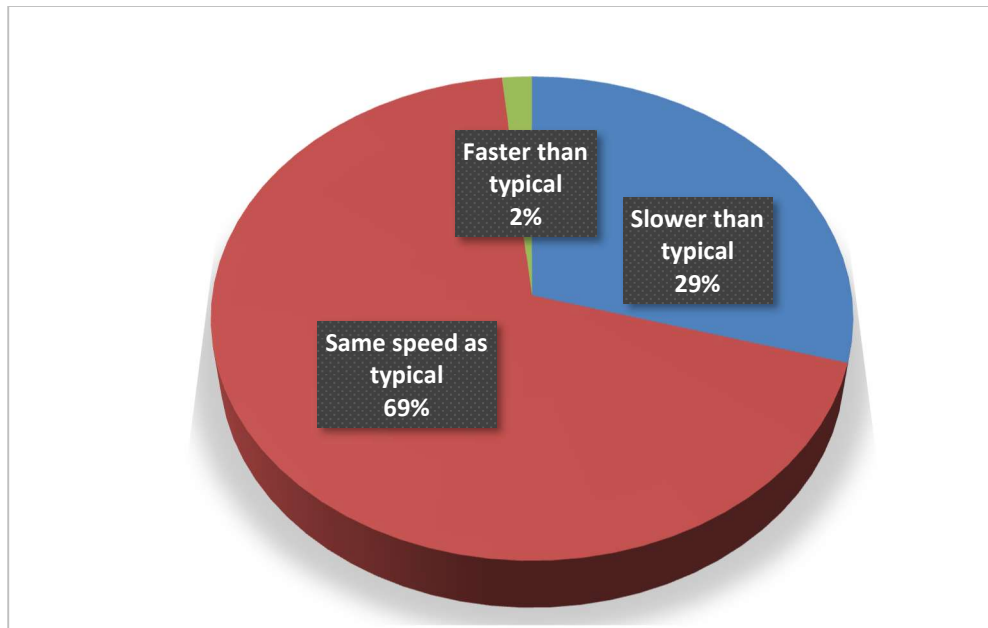


Figure 3. How often do you drive 15 miles an hour over the speed limit on multi-lane, divided highways?

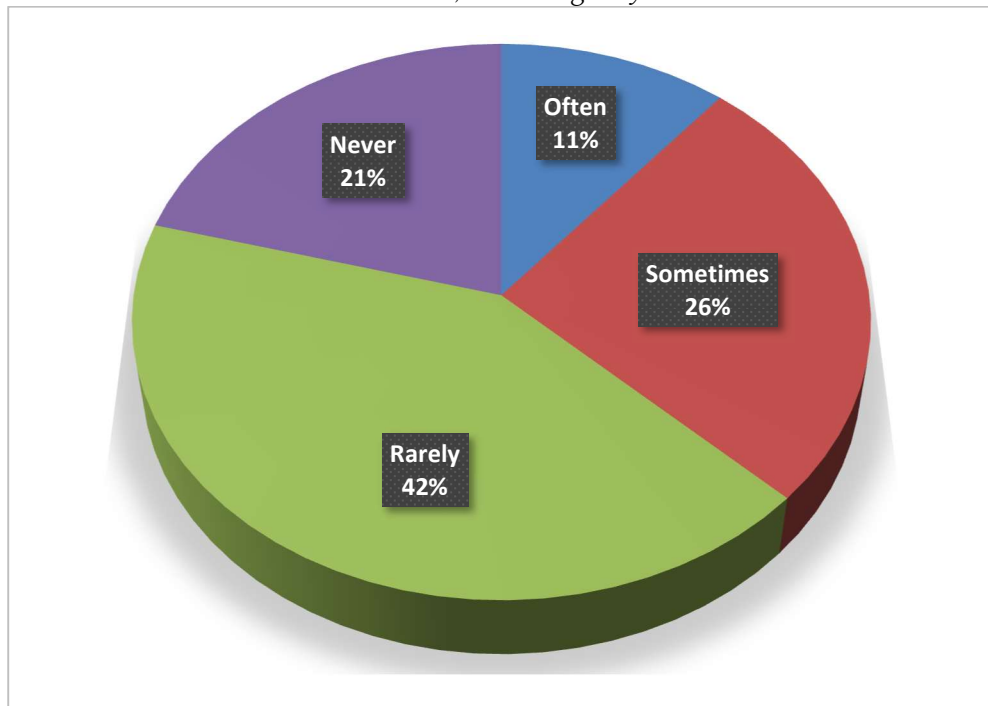


Figure 4. How often do you drive 15 miles an hour over the speed limit on two-lane, undivided highways?

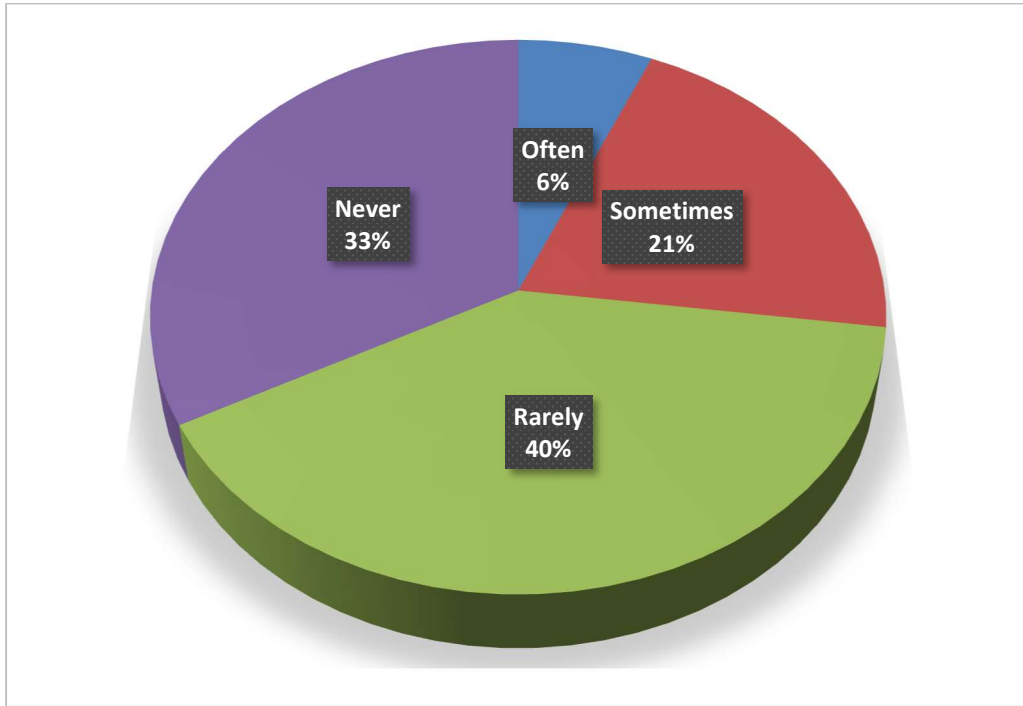
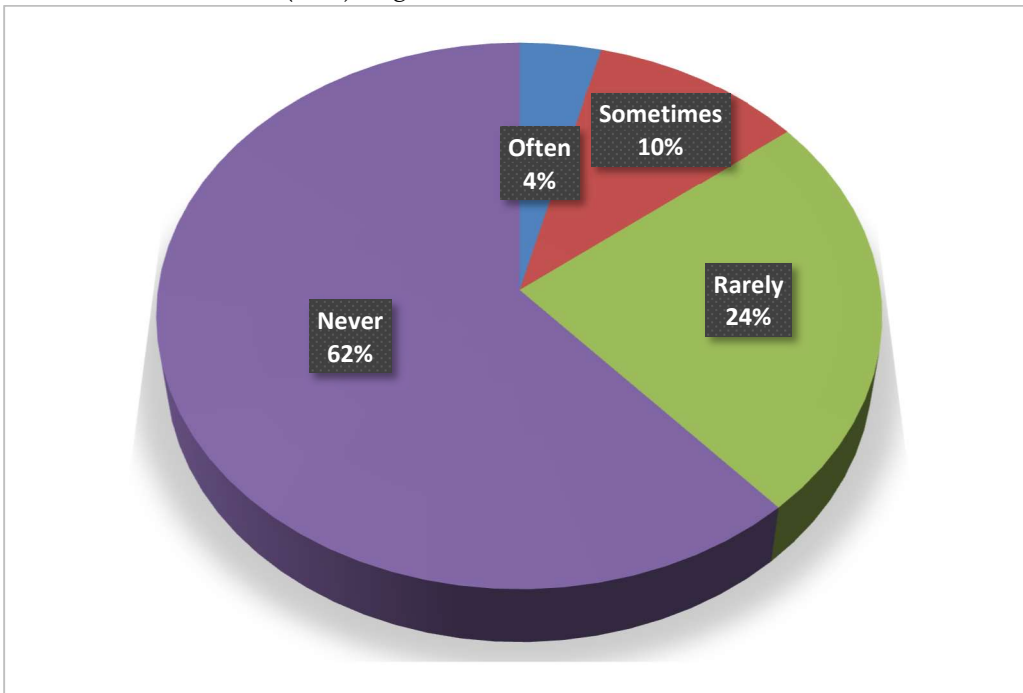


Figure 5. How often do you drive 15 miles an hour over the speed limit on (most) neighborhood or residential streets?



Part 3: Attitudes about Speeding

Respondents were asked about the speeding laws and if drivers should obey these laws. The detailed responses are presented in Figures 6-10. Seventy-six percent (Figure 6) of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that everyone should obey speed limits because it is the law. However, when the question is posed whether there is no excuse to exceed the speed limit (Figure 7), only 37 percent of people either strongly or somewhat agreed with that statement. This seeming contradiction can be somewhat explained by the results shown in Figures 8 and 9. More specifically, 49 percent of respondents in Figure 8 indicated that it is acceptable to speed as long as it is not more than 10 mph over the speed limit. Further, 78 percent of respondents in Figure 9 indicated that exceeding the speed limit by 20 mph or more is unacceptable. Lastly, Figure 10 shows that 85 percent of people responded that drivers should keep up with the flow of traffic. When taken together, these results indicate that respondents' attitudes about speeding are somewhat nuanced and depend upon the rate of speed and the relative speed of other drivers.

Figure 6. Everyone should obey the speed limits because it is the law:

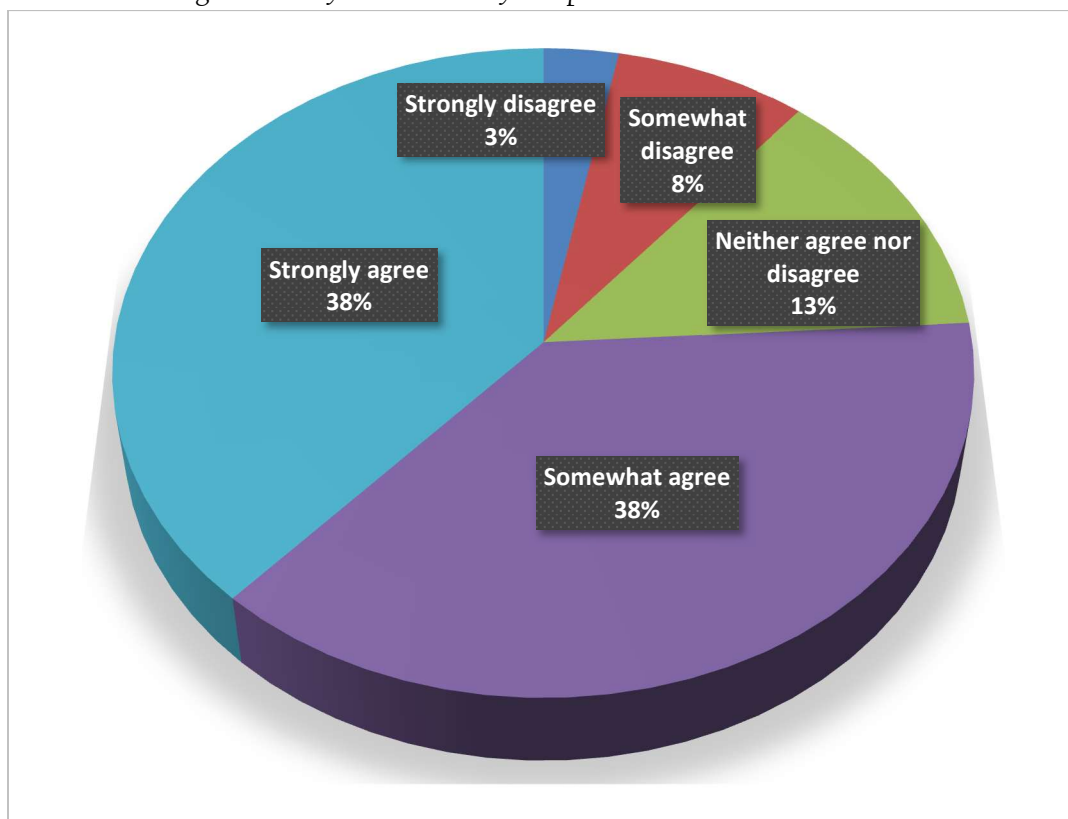


Figure 7 - There is no excuse to exceed the speed limits.

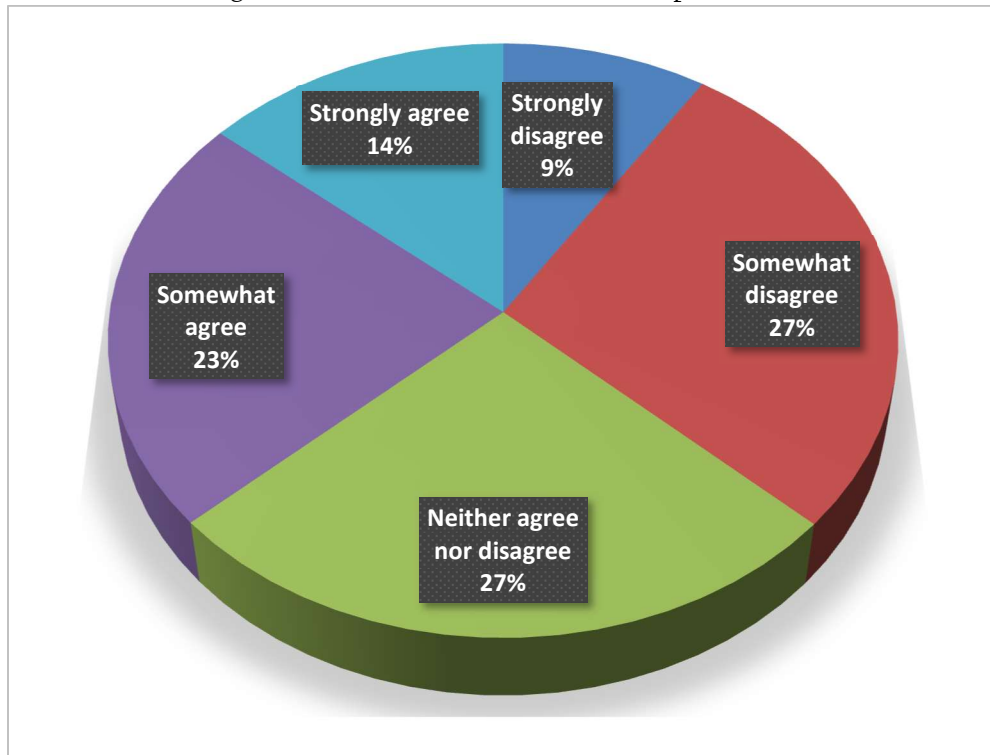


Figure 8. It is okay to drive over the speed limit, as long as it is no more than 10 mph over.

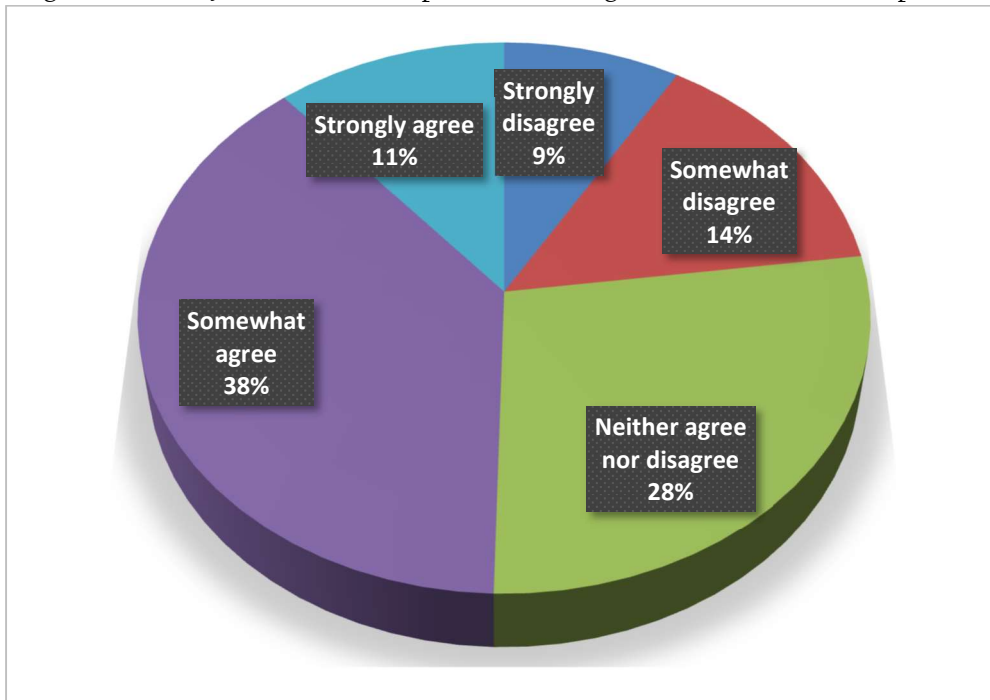


Figure 9. It is unacceptable to exceed speed limits by more than 20 mph.

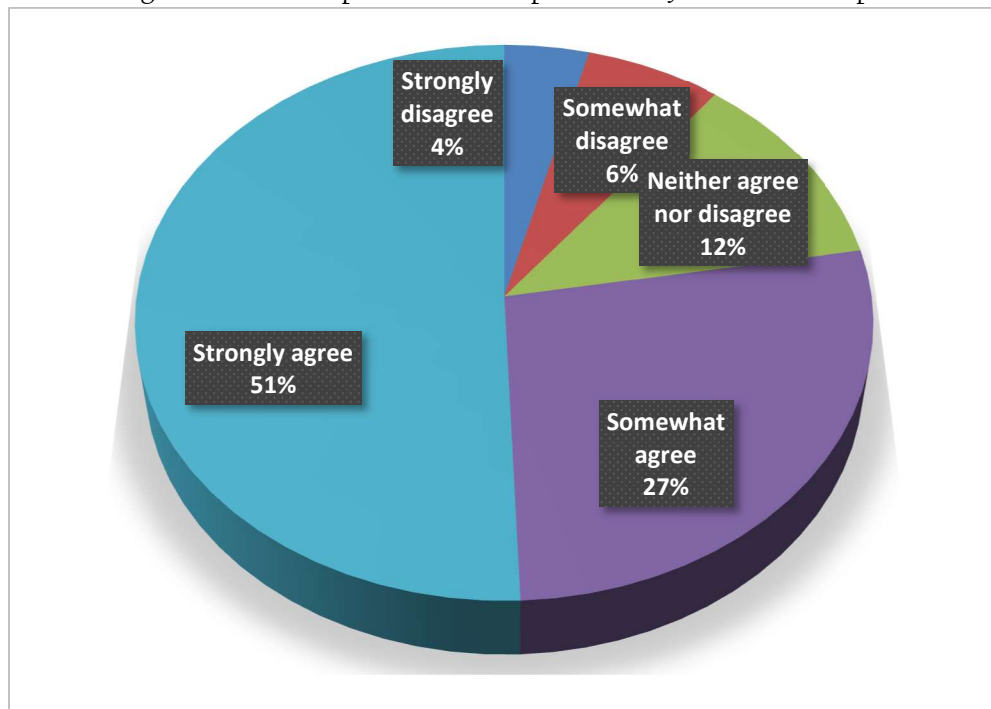
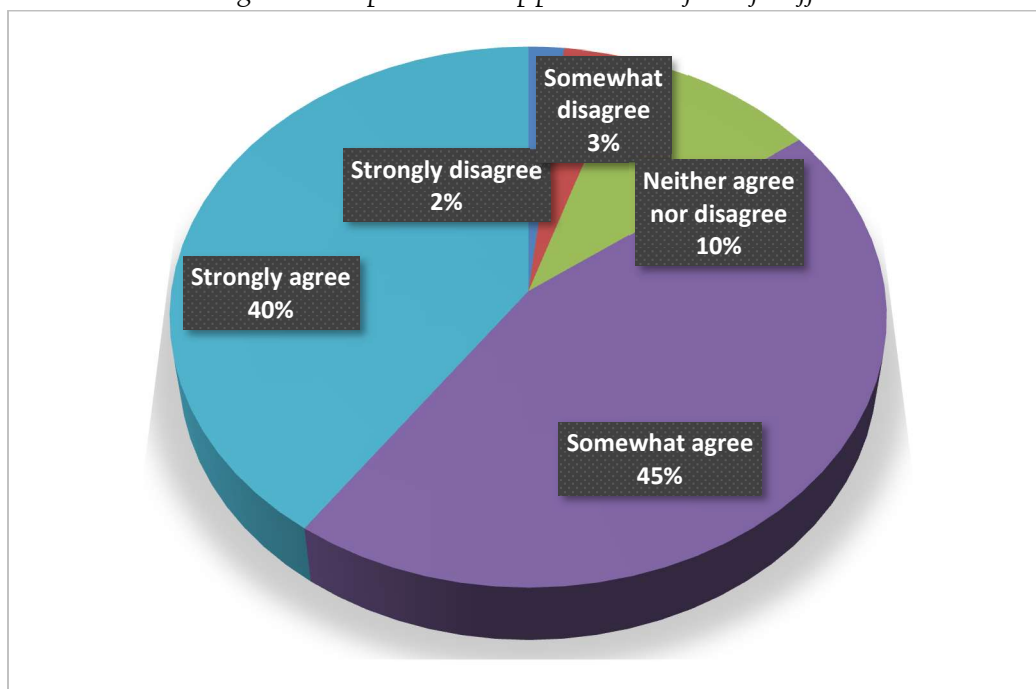


Figure 10. People should keep pace with the flow of traffic:



Part 4: Perceived Speeding Risks and Benefits

When asked about perceived risks and benefits of speeding, the results show that only 17 percent of respondents (Figure 11) indicated that driving over the speed limit is not dangerous for skilled drivers. Furthermore, only 13 percent of people agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “If something bad will happen, it will happen no matter what, so it doesn’t matter whether or not you speed (Figure 12).” As a result, a vast majority of people do agree that individual behavior on the road determines whether they will experience misfortune while driving. The results shown in Figure 13 supported the notion that people are concerned about having accidents while driving as 47 percent indicated either strongly or somewhat agreeing that they “worry a lot about having a crash”.

In terms of perceived benefits, 41 percent of drivers either strongly or somewhat agreed that they liked the feeling they experience while driving fast (Figure 14), and 25 percent of drivers either strongly or somewhat agreed that speeding made them feel more alert (Figure 15).

Lastly, respondents were asked about the benefits of driving at or near the speed limit. As shown in Figure 16, 72 percent of people either strongly or somewhat agreed that driving at or near the speed limit reduces their risk of a crash, and 69 percent either strongly or somewhat agreed that they would be better able to avoid dangerous situations.

Figure 11. Driving over the speed limit is not dangerous for skilled drivers.

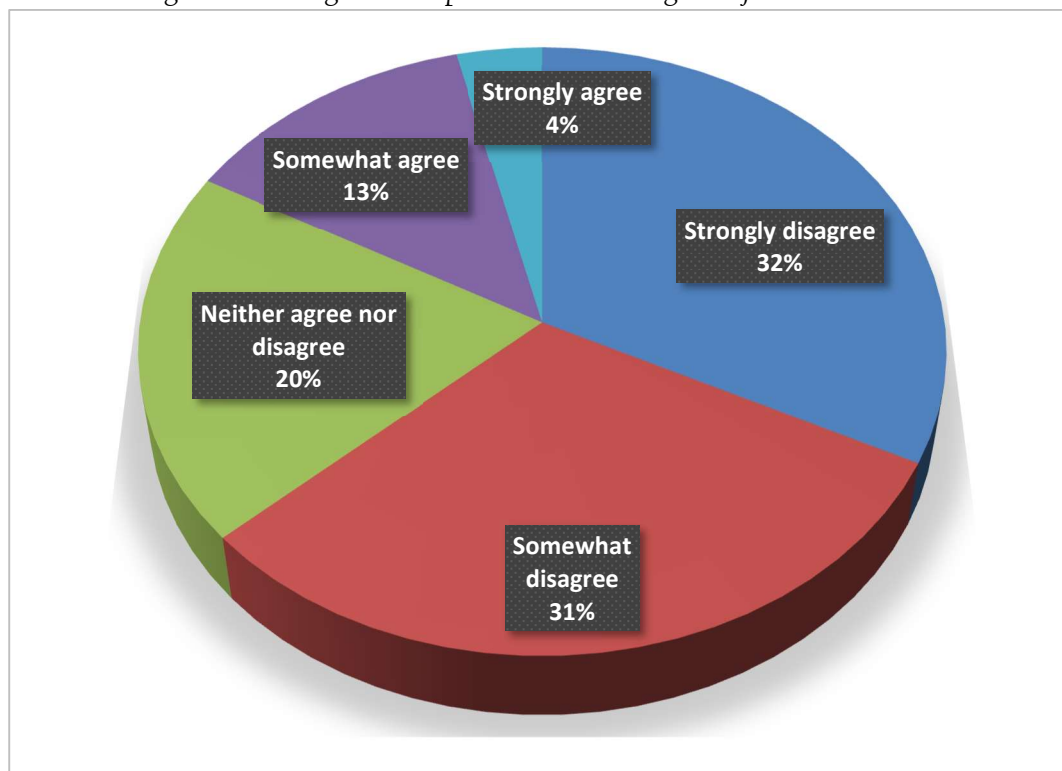


Figure 12. If something bad will happen, it will happen no matter what, so it doesn't matter whether or not you speed.

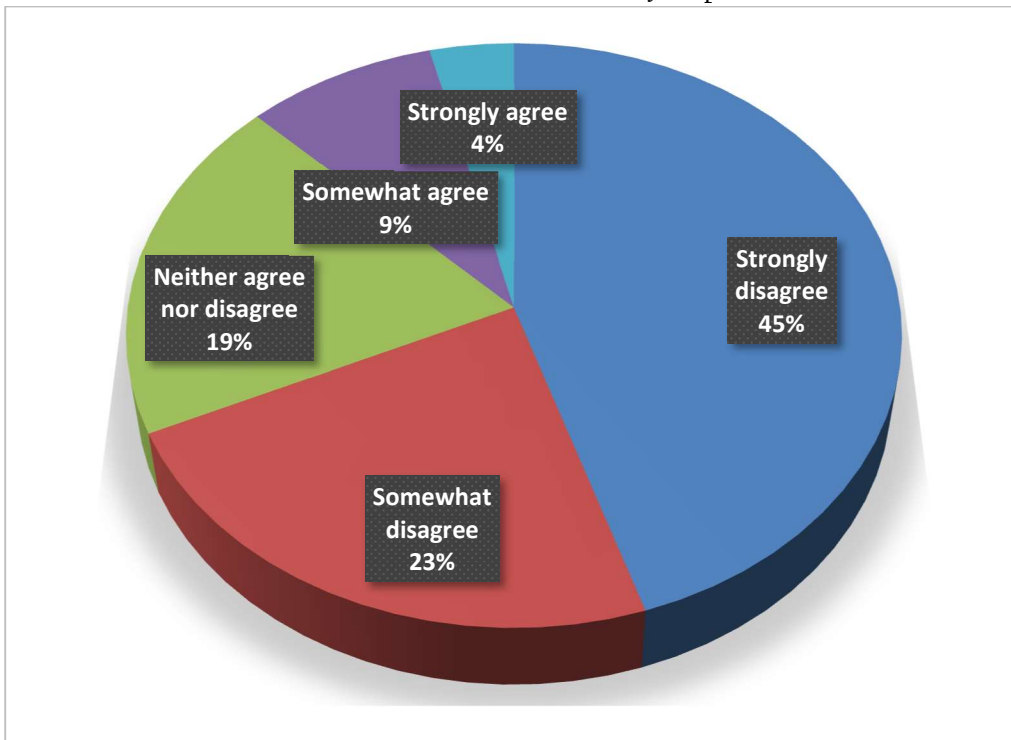


Figure 13. I worry a lot about having a crash.

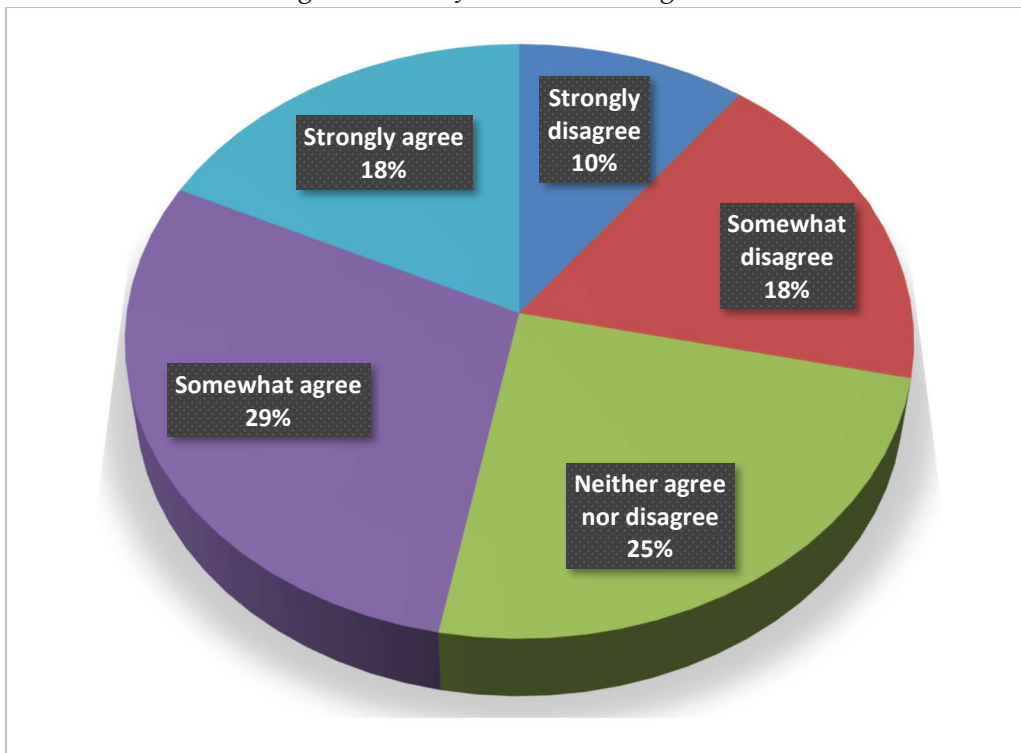


Figure 14. I enjoy the feeling of driving fast.

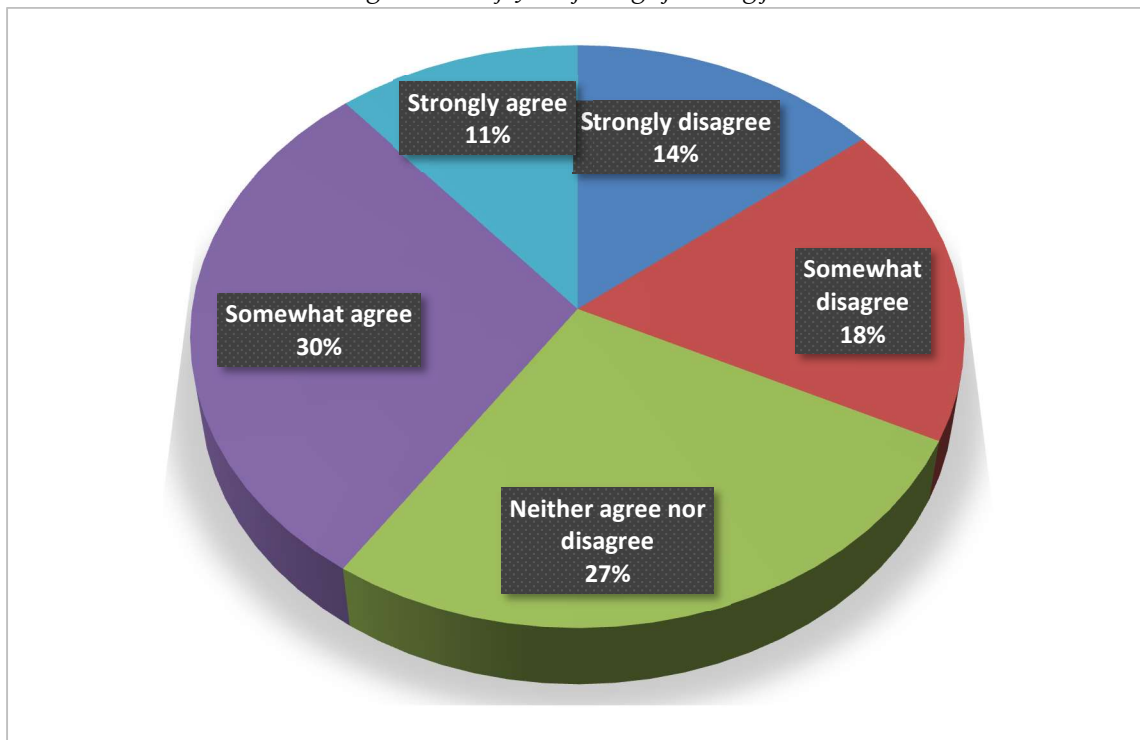


Figure 15. The faster I drive, the more alert I am.

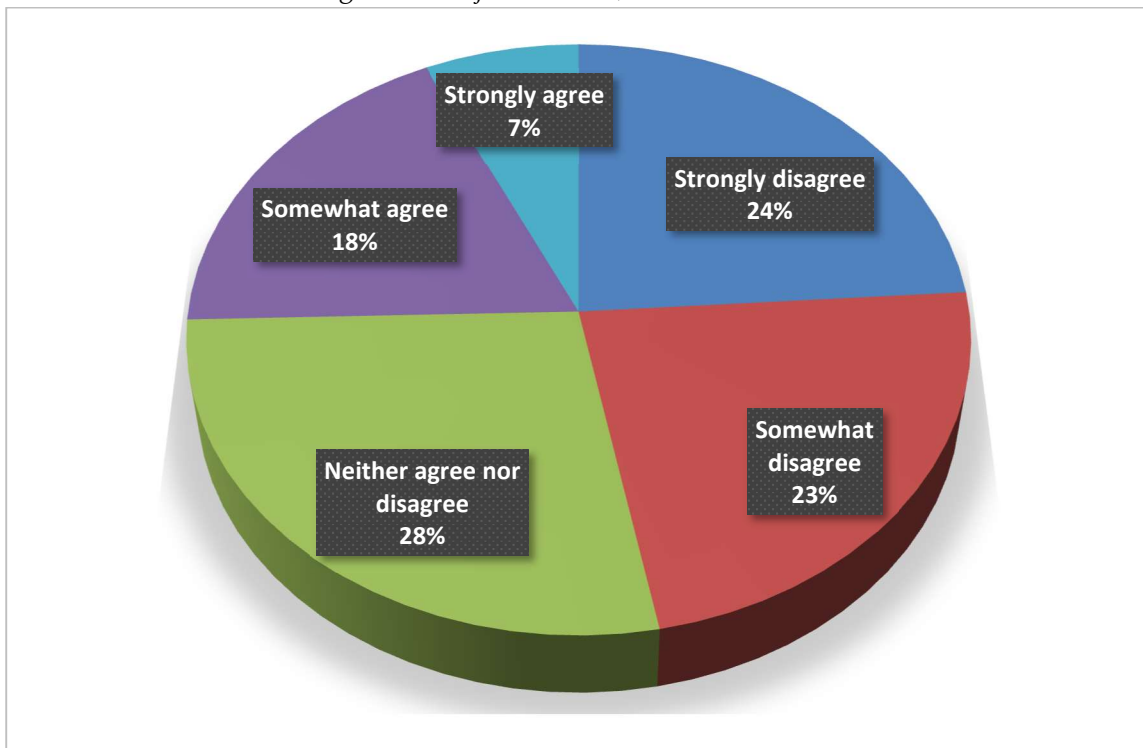
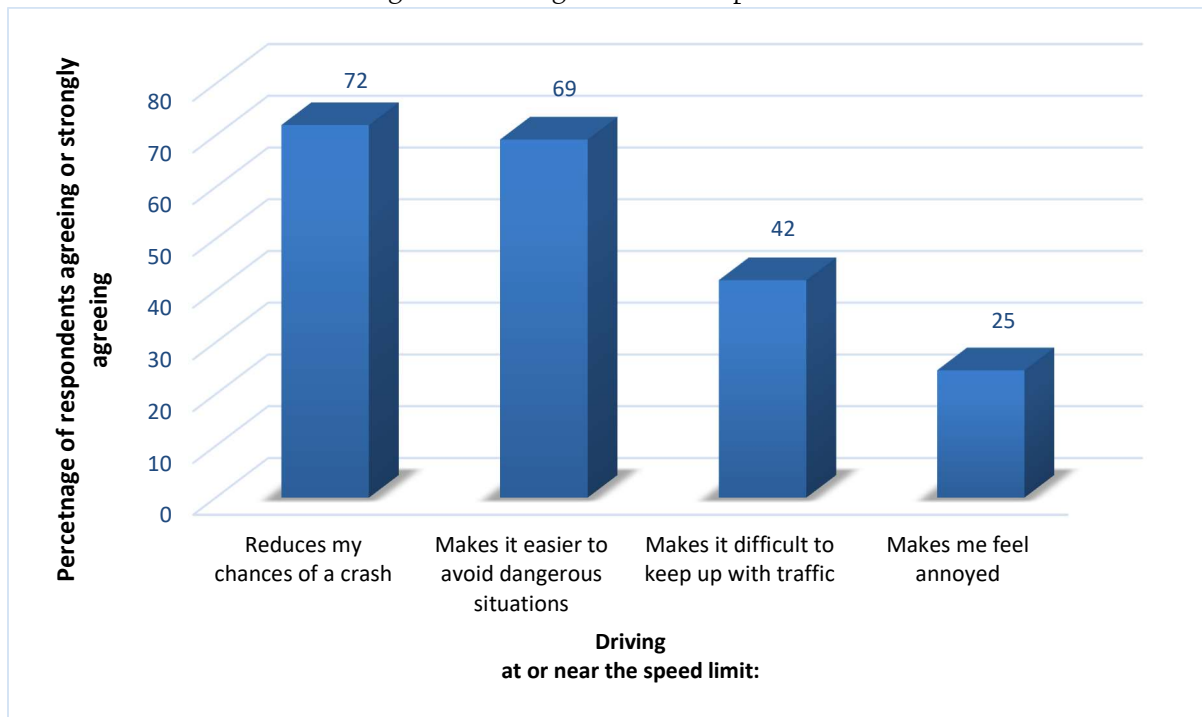


Figure 16. Driving at or near the speed limit:



Part 5: Reasons Provided for Speeding

To better understand why people speed, respondents were asked to select from a list of multiple potential reasons. The detailed responses are presented in Figure 17, with being late (55%), safe road conditions (35%), and impatience (29%) as the three most common reasons.

To further explore the reasons for speeding, three specific issues were presented. More specifically, Figure 18 indicates that 27 percent of drivers either strongly or somewhat agreed that they try to get where they are going as fast as they can. Additionally, Figure 19 shows 31 percent of people either strongly or moderately agreed that speeding is something they did without thinking. Lastly, 60 percent of people either strongly or somewhat agreed that they often get impatient with slow drivers.

Figure 17. People sometimes go faster than the speed limit for different reasons. On those occasions when you do, what do you think are the main reasons you drive faster than the speed limit?

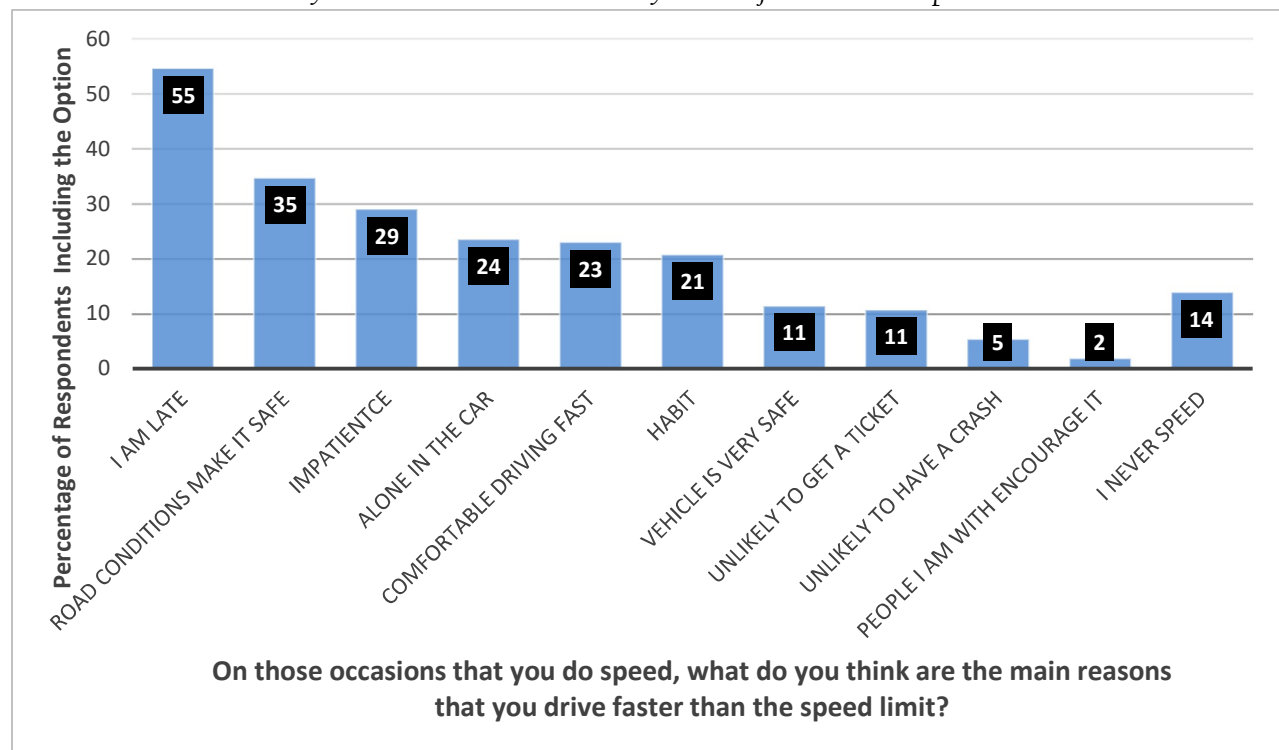


Figure 18. I try to get where I am going as fast as I can.

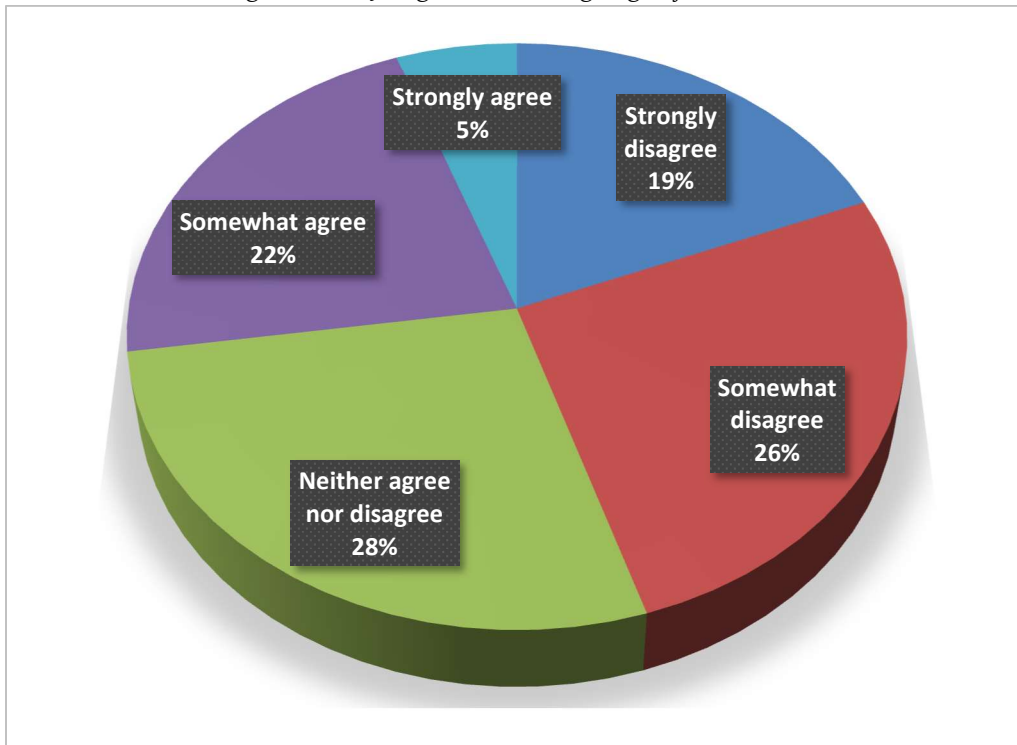


Figure 19. Speeding is something I do without thinking.

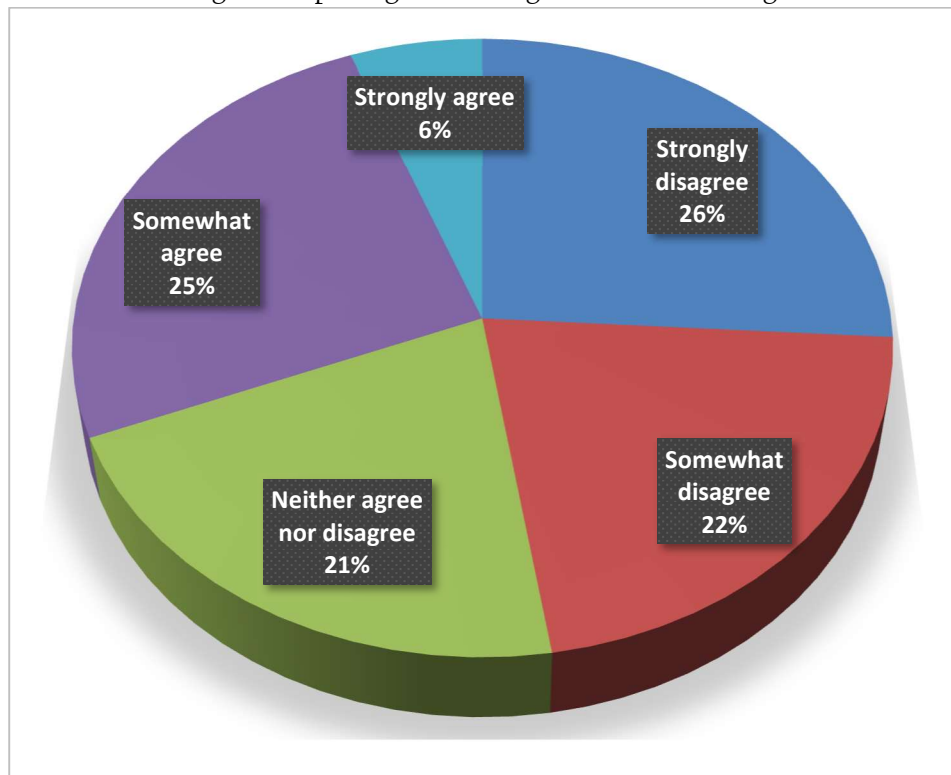
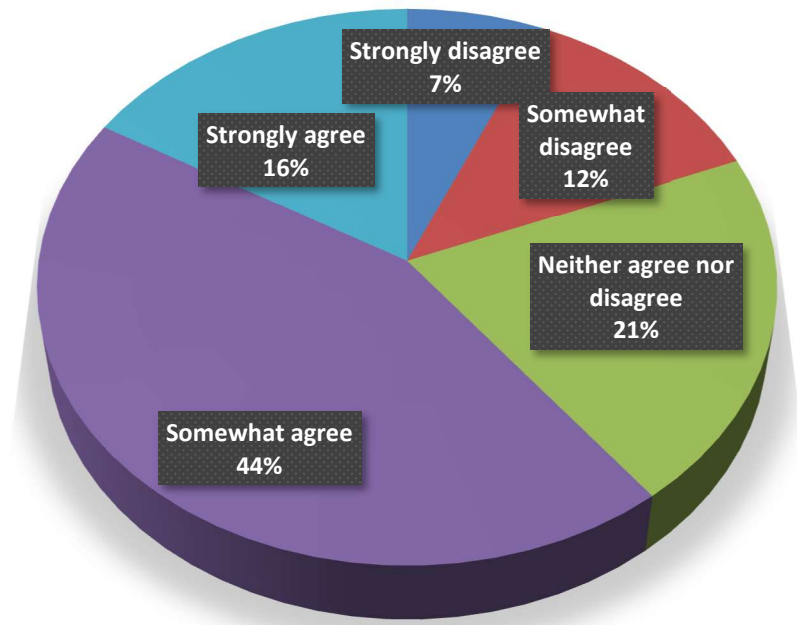


Figure 20. I often get impatient with slower drivers.



Part 6: Attitudes Regarding Enforcement and Prevention Measures

To better understand attitudes toward speeding enforcement, respondents were asked about the importance of speeding enforcement on California roads. As shown in Figure 21, only two percent felt that it was not at all important, while 60 percent believed that it is extremely or very important. On the other hand, when asked whether speeding tickets have more to do with raising money than they do with reducing speeding, Figure 22 reveals that 43 percent of driver's either strongly or moderately agreed that tickets are more about raising money.

When asked about their personal experiences with speeding enforcement, the results show (Figure 23) that only 29% of people never or rarely see a vehicle pulled over by police. Furthermore, when asked about where and when enforcement should be conducted (Figure 24), respondents felt that speeding enforcement should be targeted primarily on freeways/interstates (46 %) and city streets (41 %). In terms of the time of day, Figure 25 indicates that 58 percent of drivers supported enforcement occurring equally at all times of day and night.

The respondents also identified various measures that would be useful in deterring speeders in their communities. In general, the measures presented received wide support. As seen in Figure 26, the top four of these measures included road design changes (74%), increased use of speed cameras (73%), increasing public awareness of the risks of speeding (67%), and having more visible speed patrols (62%). On a related note, respondents were asked about their support of using digital signs to change the speed limit on a section of road based on traffic or weather conditions. As shown in Figure 27, there was broad agreement that the use of such signs was a good idea for school zones (90%), bad weather (86%), and congested roadways (77%).

Figure 21. How important is the enforcement of speeding on California roads?

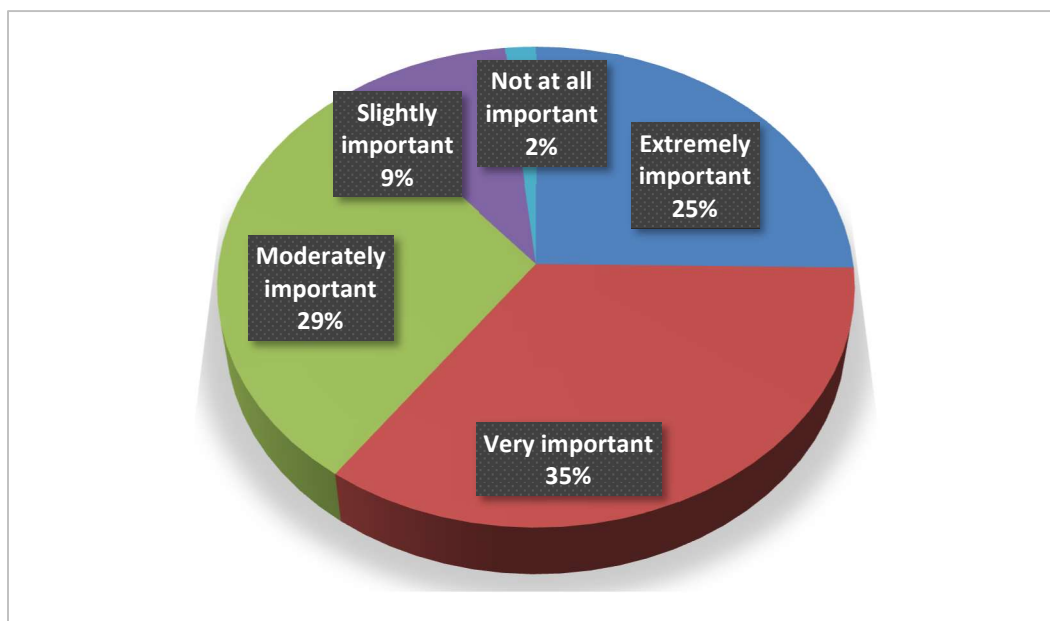


Figure 22. Speeding tickets have more to do with raising money than they do with reducing speeding.

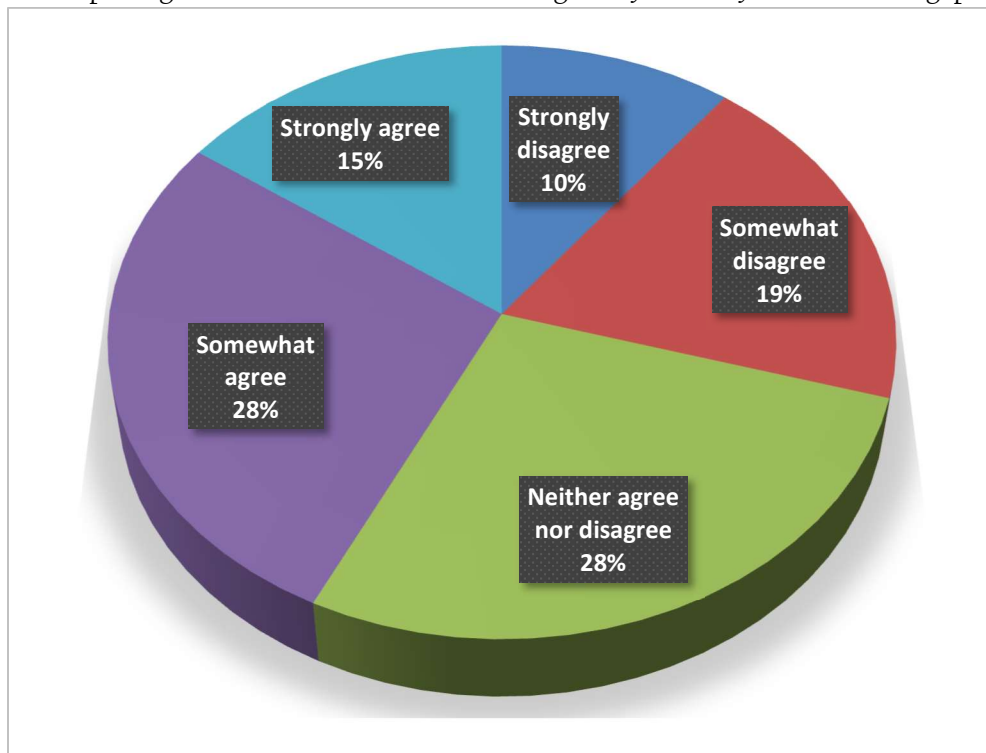


Figure 23. How often do you see motor vehicles that have been pulled over by police on the streets and roads you normally drive?

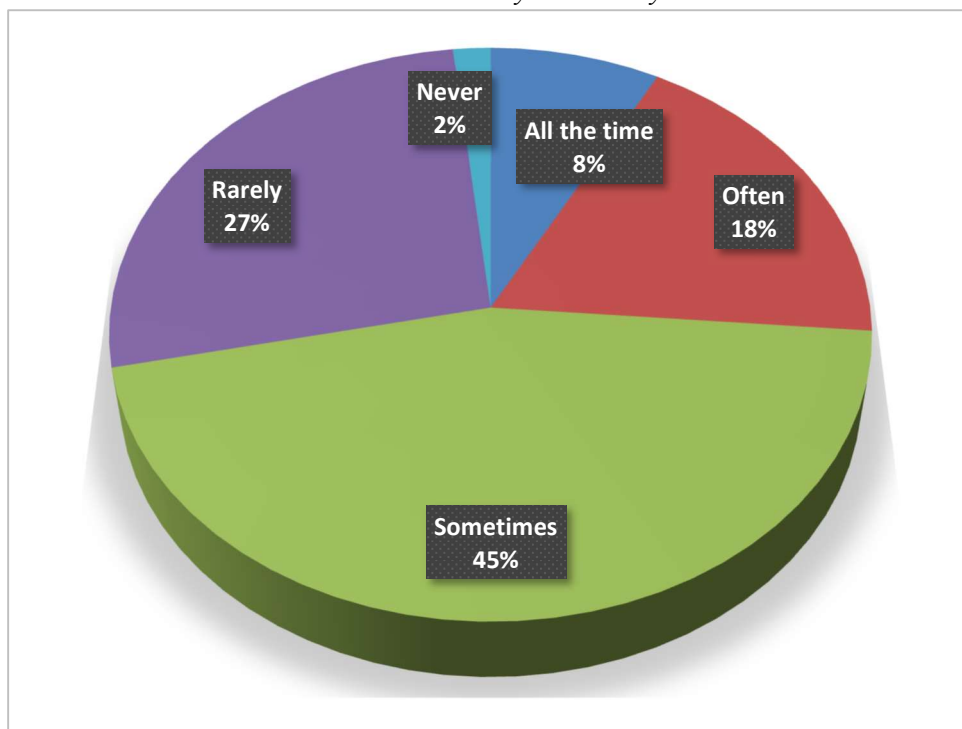


Figure 24. Where is speeding the biggest problem and needs to be enforced the most?

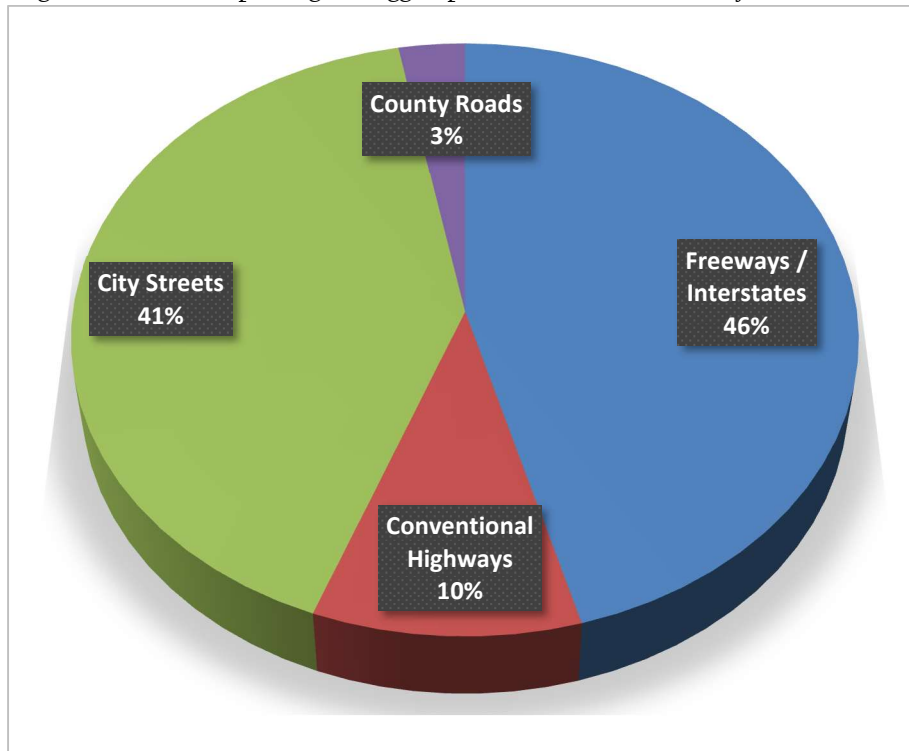


Figure 25. At what time of day should speeding be enforced the most?

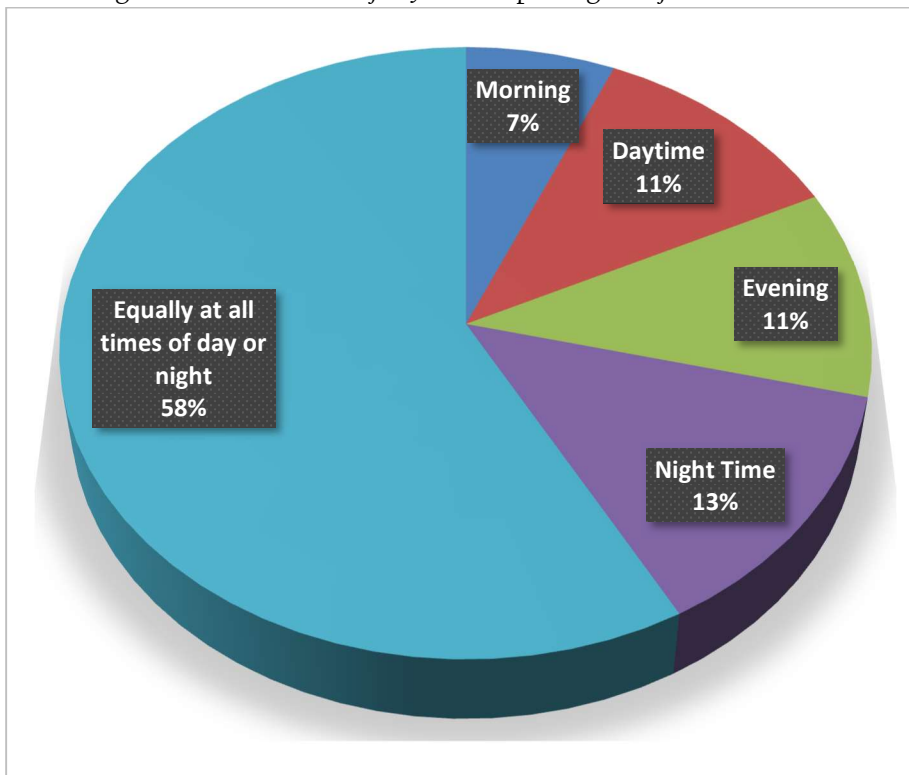


Figure 26. How would you feel about using the following measures in your community to reduce speeding?

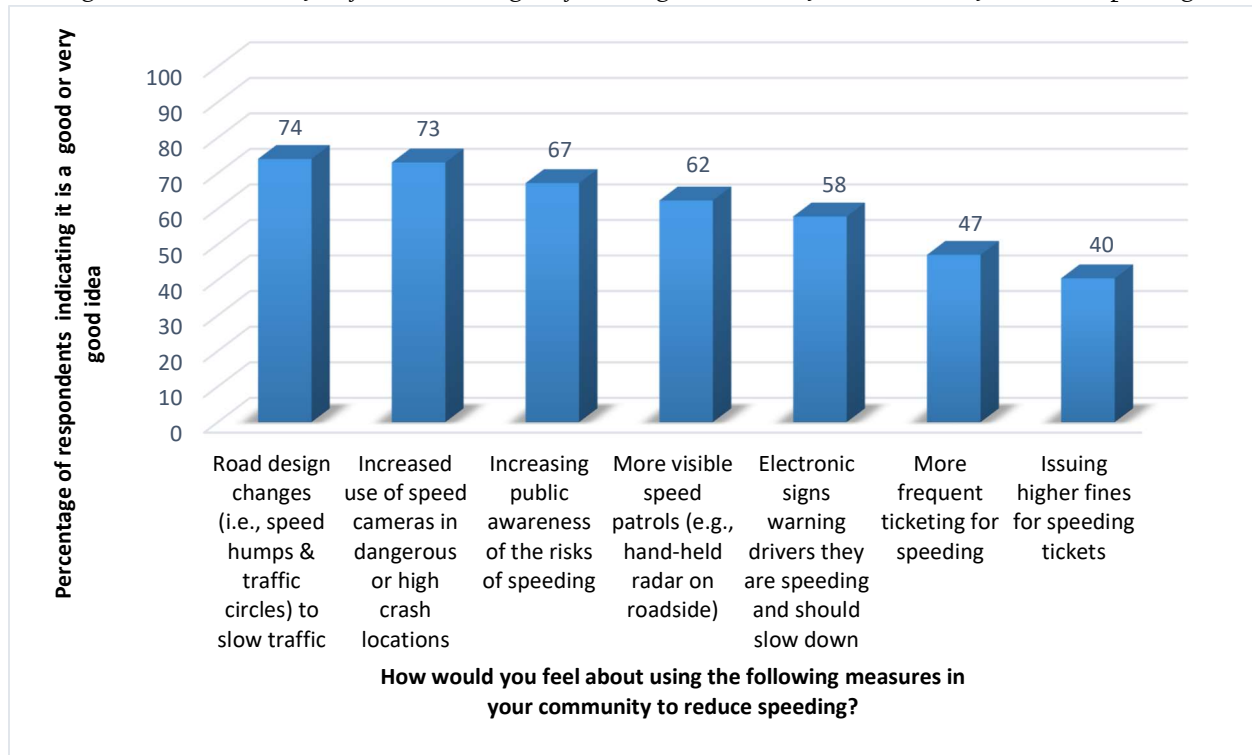
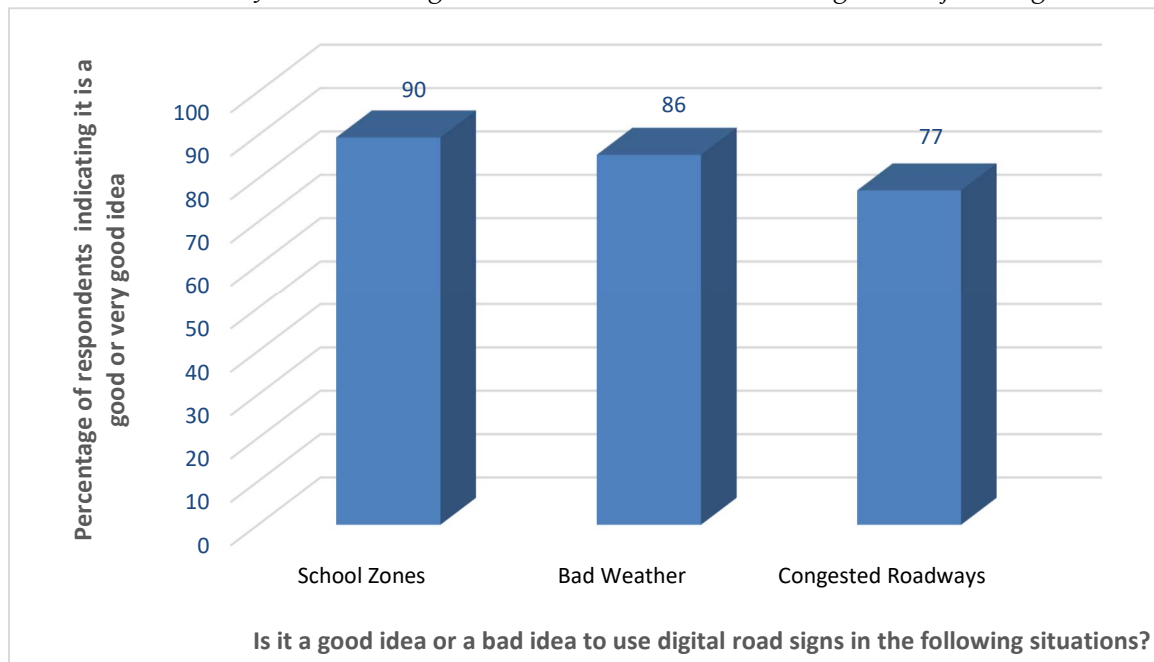


Figure 27. Some roadways use digital signs to change the speed limit on a section of road based on traffic or weather conditions. Do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea to use these signs in the following situations?



Part 7: Experience with Speeding Enforcement

When asked about their experience with speeding enforcement, 90 percent of respondents have not been stopped for speeding during the last three years (Figure 28). For the individuals who were stopped in the past three years, Figure 29 shows that 69 percent of them were given a ticket the last time they were stopped, and Figure 30 shows that 29 percent were given a warning. As seen in Figure 31, 86 percent of drivers reported changing their driving behavior because of receiving the warning or ticket for speeding.

Figure 28. How many times have you been stopped for speeding in the last three years?

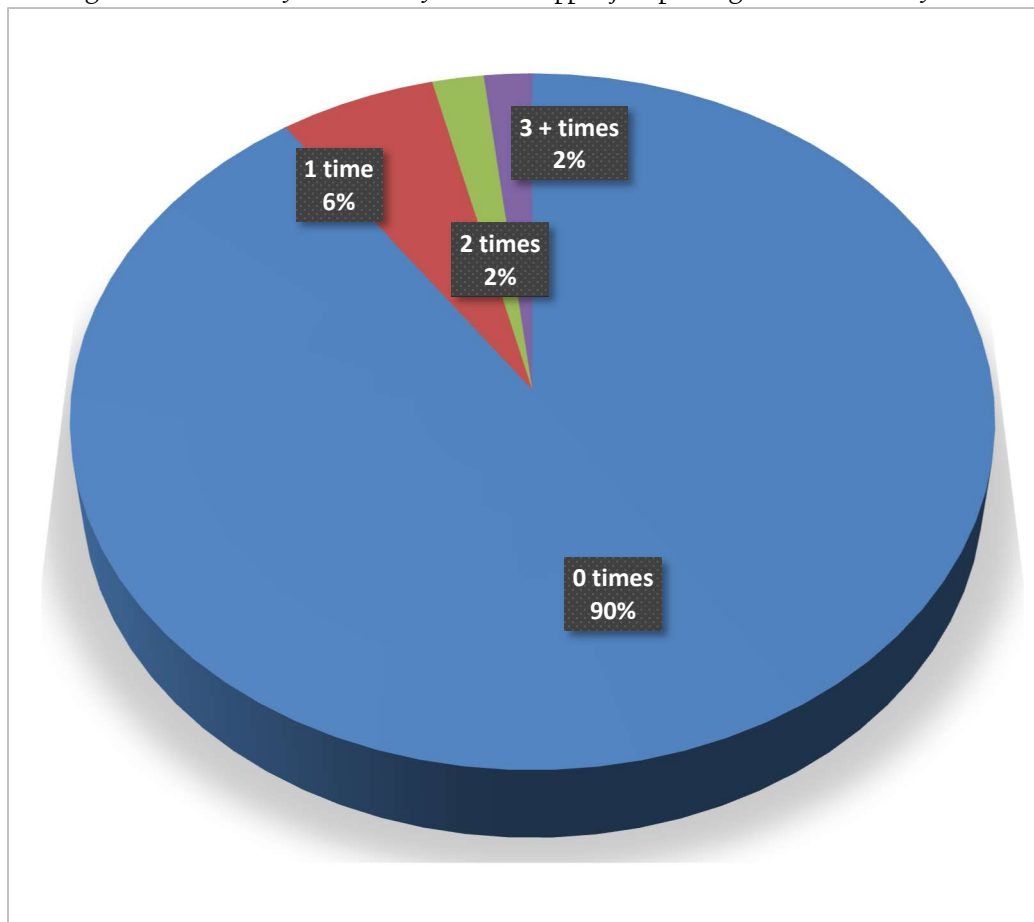


Figure 29. Did you receive a ticket during the last time you were stopped for speeding?

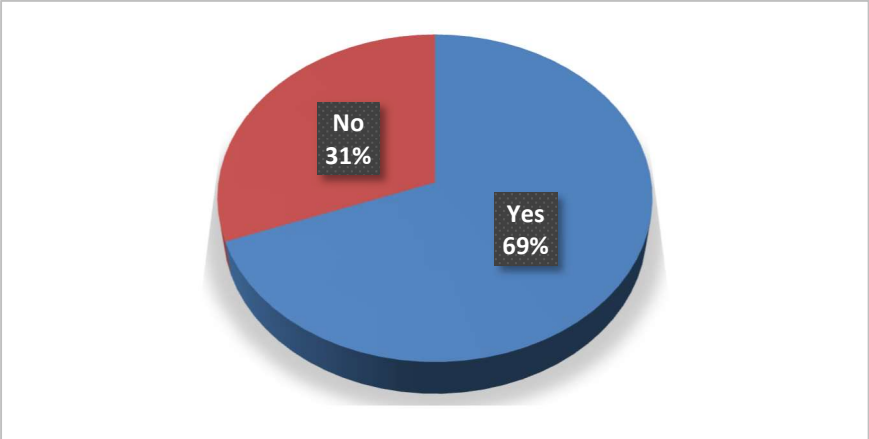


Figure 30. Did you receive a warning the last time you were stopped for speeding?

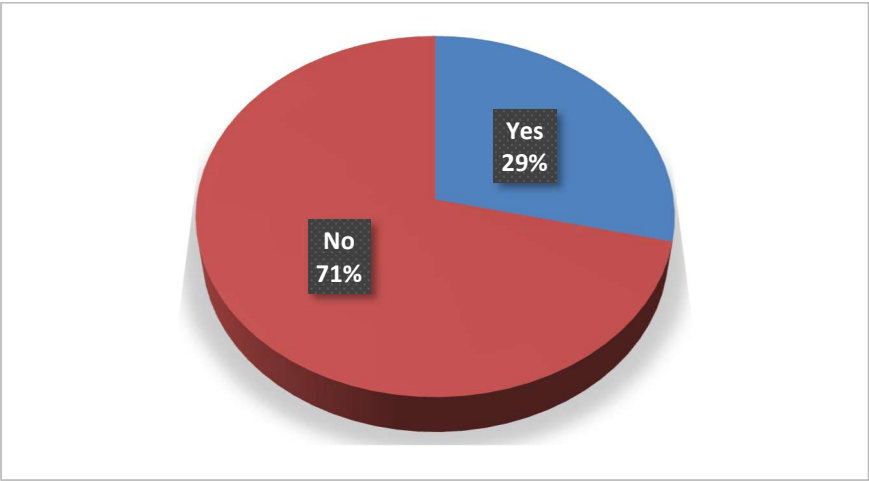
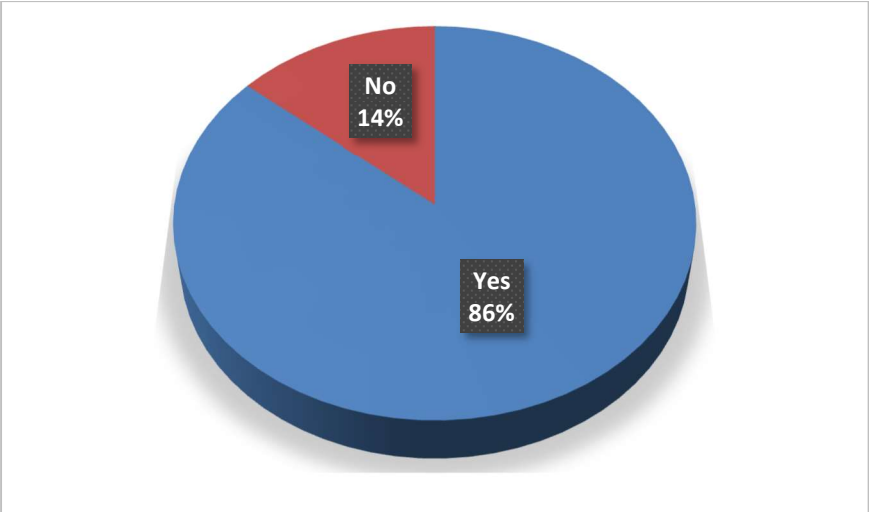


Figure 31. Did you change your driving behavior as a result of receiving the (Ticket/Warning) for speeding?



Part 8: Distracted Driving and Risky Behaviors

The last set of questions asked respondents about distracted driving and other risky behaviors. As seen in Figure 32, only 5.2 percent of respondents reported that they did not wear their seatbelt all the time, while only one percent of people replied that they rarely or never wear a seatbelt. These findings are very much in line with the annual observational California Seat Belt Survey results.

Respondents were also asked a series of questions about consumption of various substances and their decision to drive even though they thought they might have consumed too much of a substance to drive safely. As shown in Figure 33, the identified substances were alcohol (8.6%), cannabis (5.8%), prescription drugs (5.3%), and other narcotics (2.8%). In addition to the question addressing substances, respondents were also asked about how often they engaged in a series of other risky behaviors while driving. As illustrated in Figure 34, eating in the car (31.2%) is by the far the most common behavior impeding drivers.

As a specific type of risky behavior, two questions consistent with road rage were presented. As seen in Figure 35, eight percent of people reported having exhibited road rage often or some of the time. Moreover, excessive speeding (going over 25 mph over the limit) was reported as often or some of the time by seven percent of drivers as seen in Figure 36.

Lastly, we presented respondents with three questions relating to cell phone usage and texting/email behavior while driving. As shown in Figure 37, 29 percent of drivers reported using their phones to talk some, most, or all the time. In terms of how the cell phones were used, five percent of drivers reported not using any hands-free feature (Figure 38). The third question of this section asked how often people read or send text/email messages while they were driving, and the vehicle is moving. As seen in Figure 39, 20 percent of drivers responded that they engaged in this behavior some, most, or all the time.

Figure 32. How often do you wear your seatbelt?

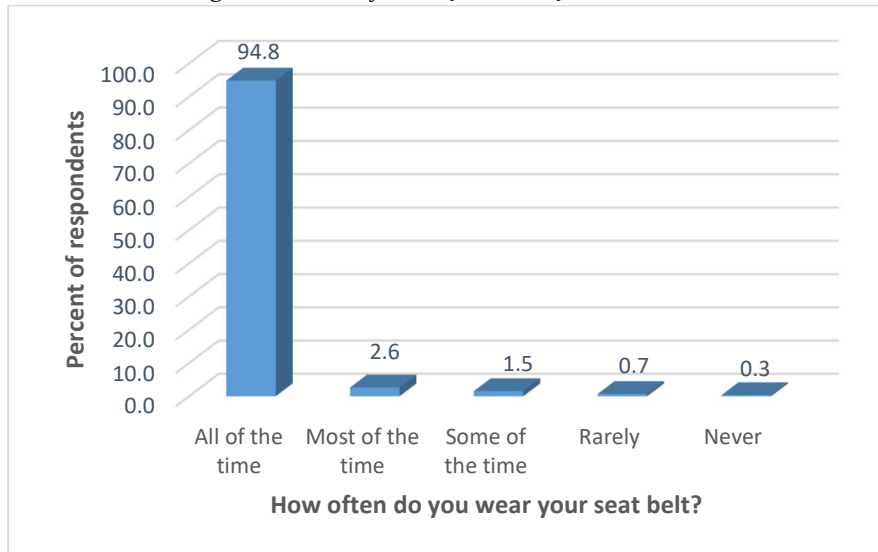


Figure 33. In the past year, have you driven a vehicle when you thought you might have consumed too much of the following to drive safely?

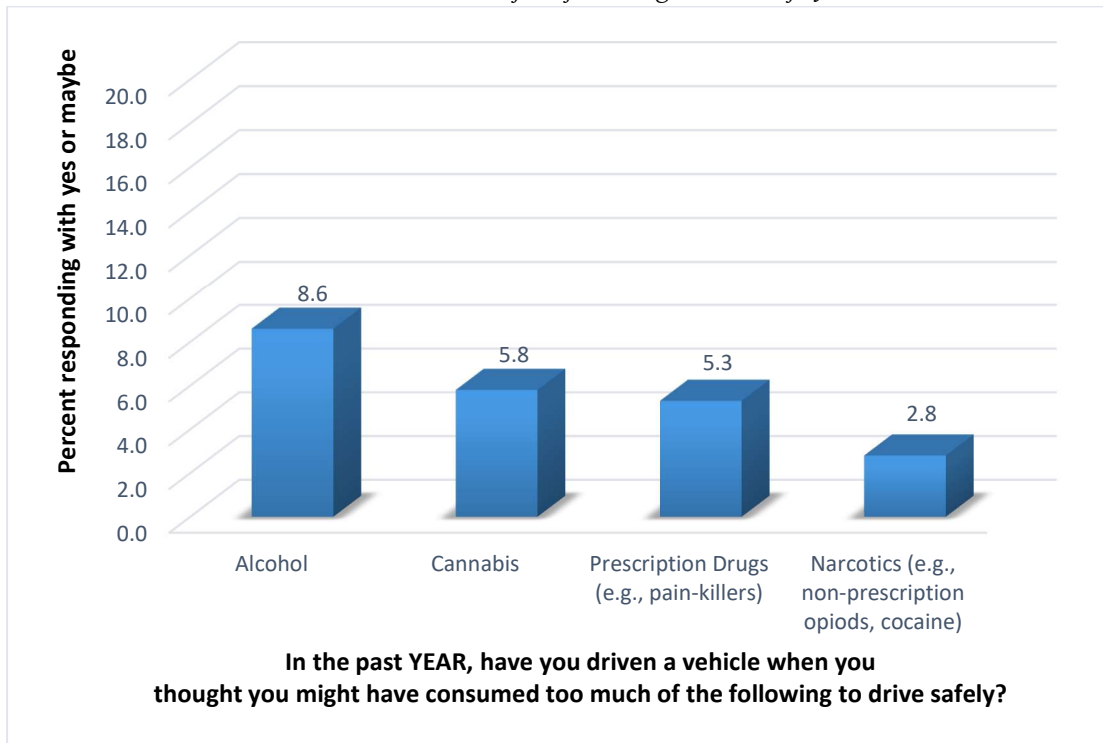


Figure 34. How often do you engage in the following behaviors while driving?

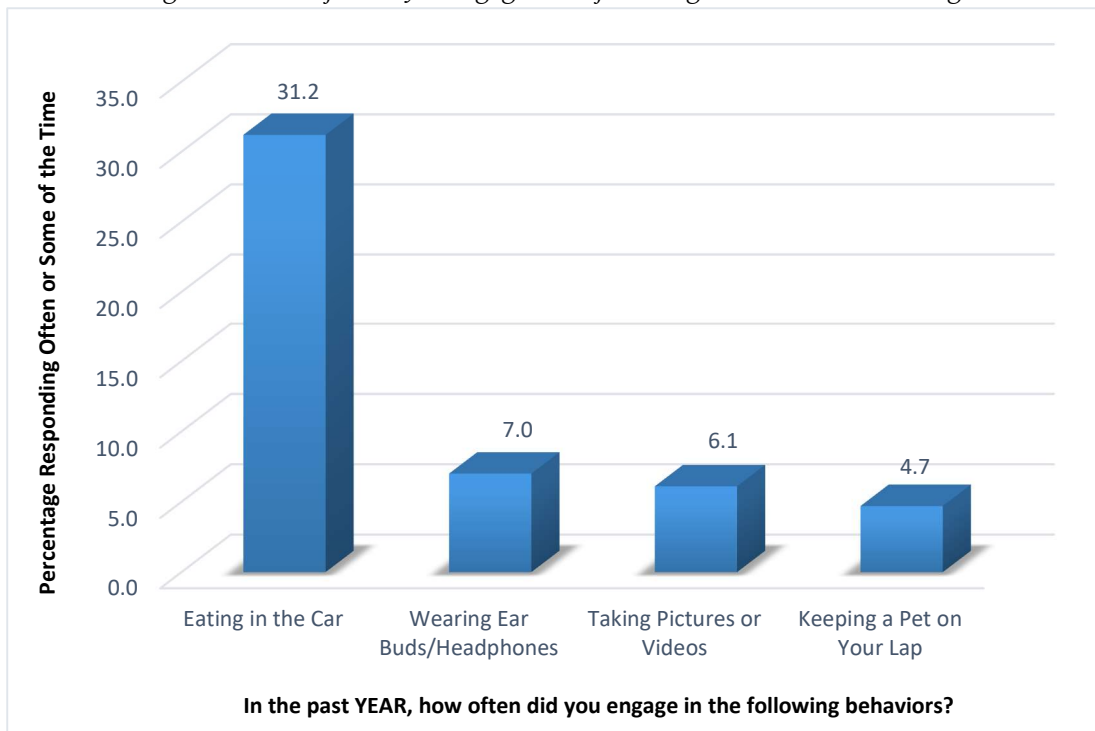


Figure 35. How often do you engage in the road rage behavior
(e.g., tailgating, honking, erratic passing / braking, threatening motions, etc.)?

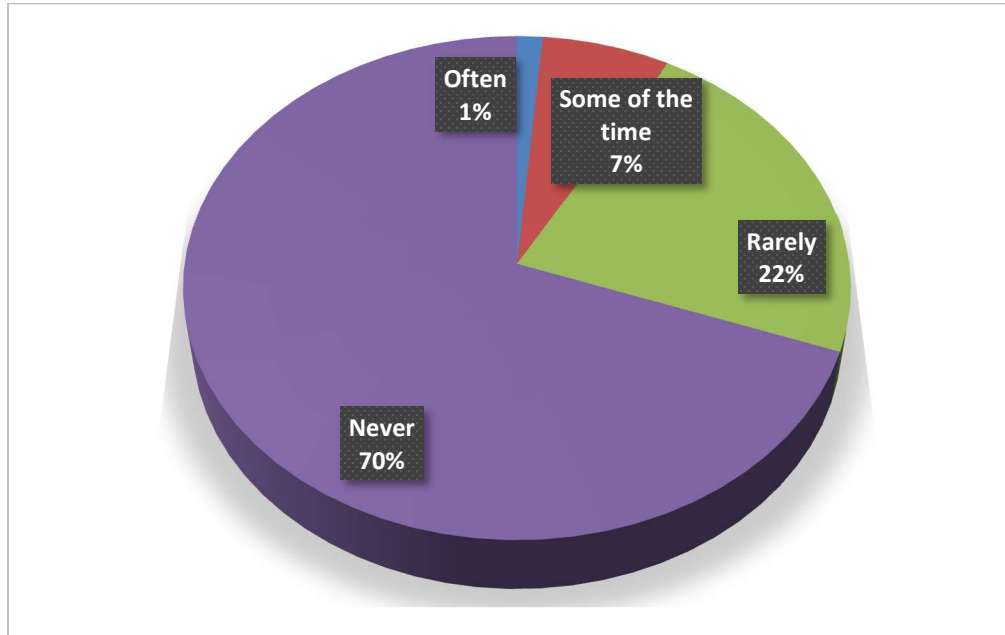


Figure 36. How often do you drive more than 25 miles per hour over the speed limit?

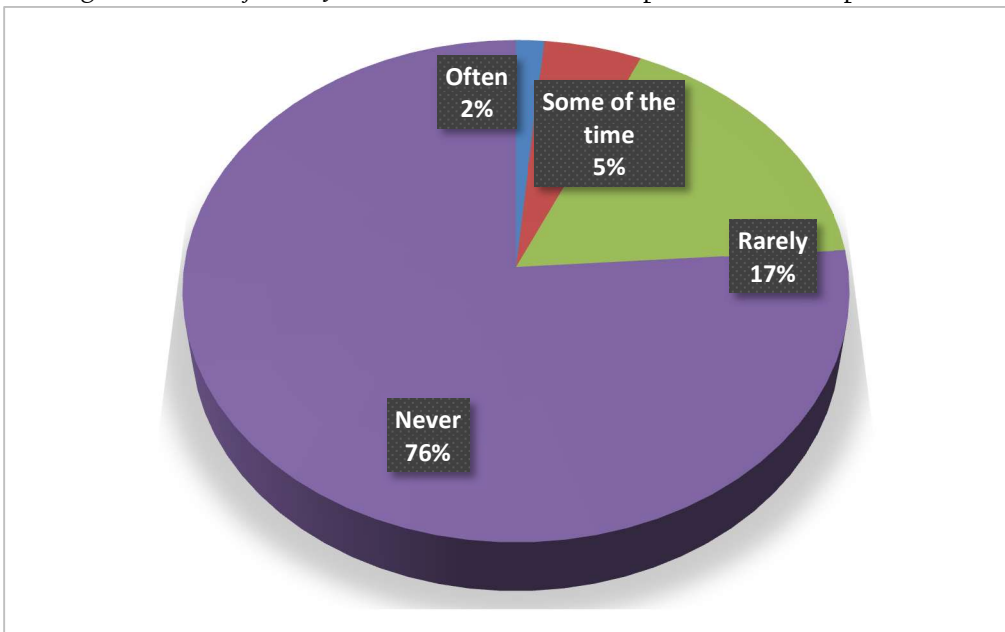


Figure 37. How often do you talk on the phone while you are driving?

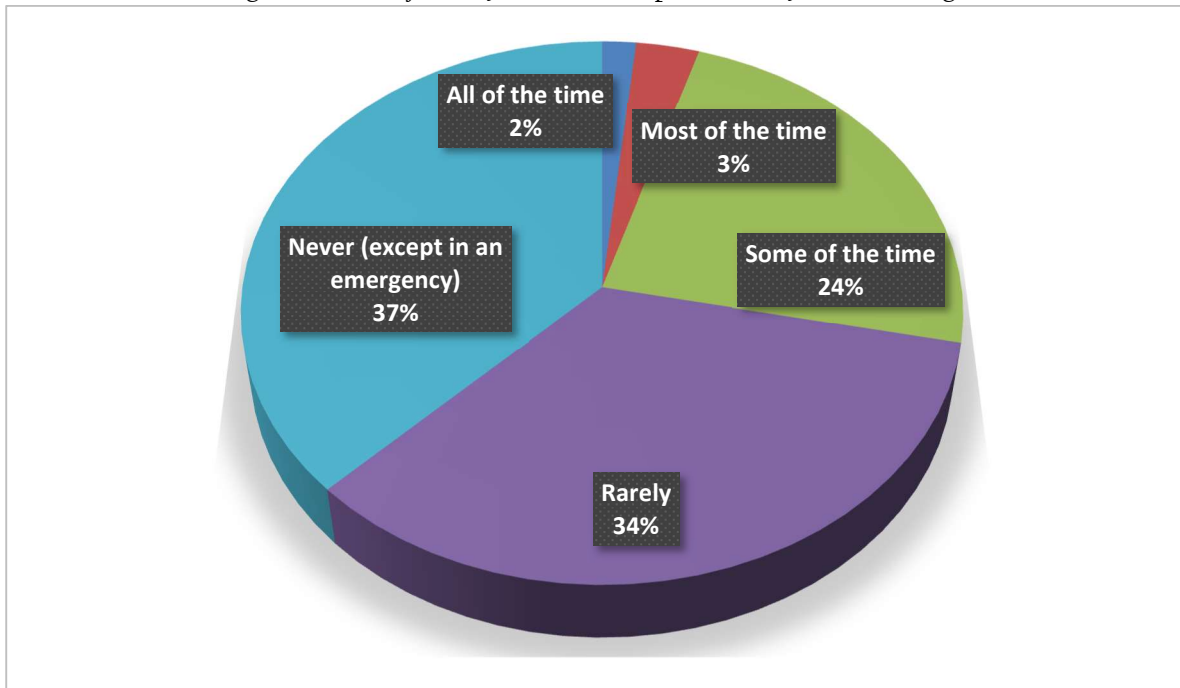


Figure 38. When you are talking on the phone while driving your primary vehicle, what do you tend to?

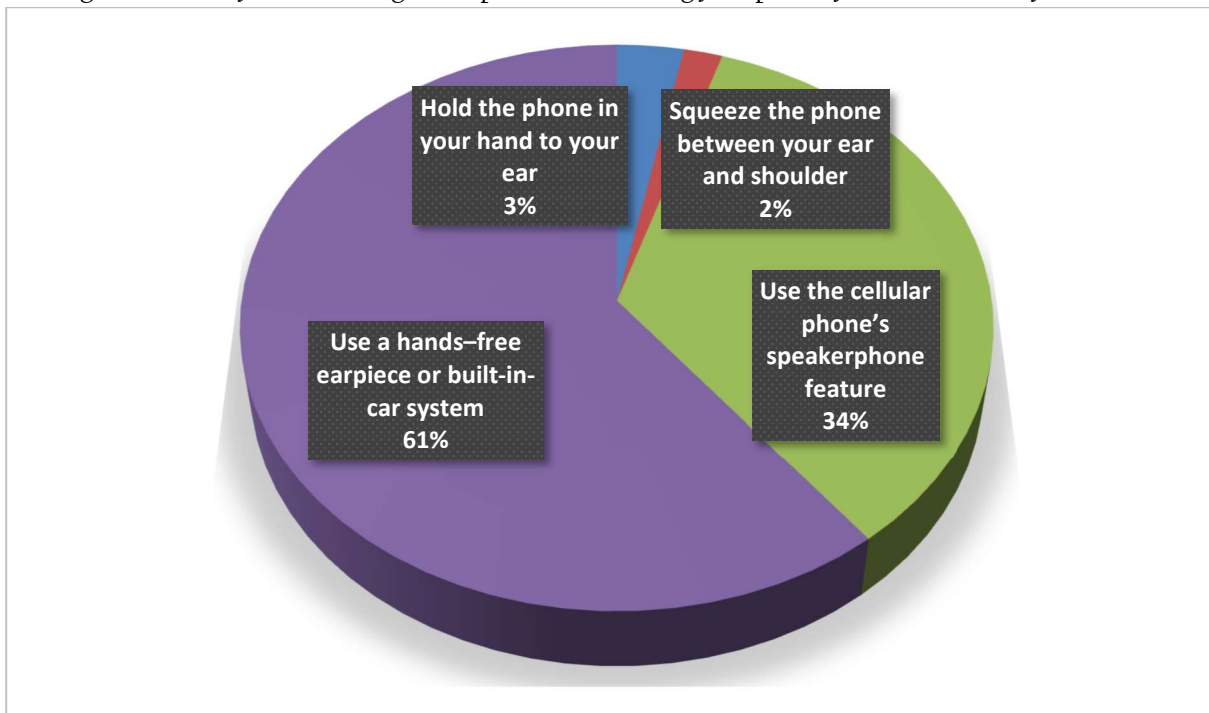
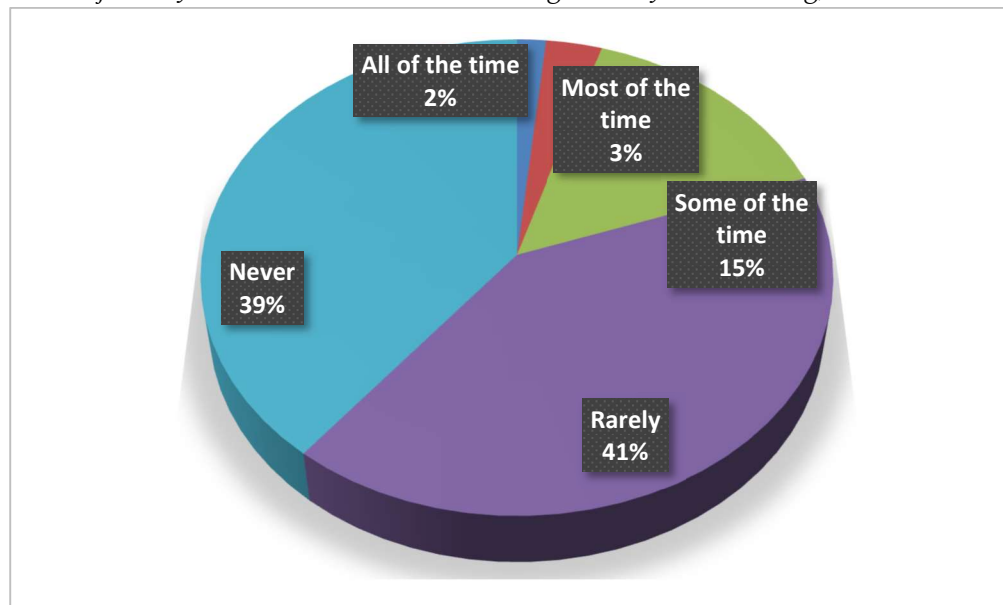


Figure 39. How often do you read or send text/email messages while you are driving, and the vehicle is moving?



Part 9: Conclusion

The goal of the online 2020 California Survey of Speeding Attitudes and Behaviors was to collect data from California drivers and to identify their driving behaviors, attitudes toward speeding and enforcement, as well as distracted driving patterns. Readers are encouraged to explore the report in detail and to utilize the results for enforcement and safety-related purposes. For more information on California's Office of Traffic Safety and additional initiatives and resources, please visit <https://gosafelyca.org>.