

ISSUE BRIEF • FALL 2026

NORTH DAKOTA STATEWIDE TRAFFIC SAFETY SURVEY, 2026

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DRIVE SAFELY

The United States trails other developed countries in several transportation safety metrics. Progress has been made in reducing the number of traffic-related fatalities, but preventable crashes resulting in death, injury, and property damage continue to occur. The statewide driver survey provides baseline metrics for the North Dakota Department of Transportation Highway Safety Division and others to use in understanding perceptions and self-reported behaviors related to traffic safety.

A mail survey was selected as the method for the driver traffic safety survey. A questionnaire was created by blending a core set of questions addressing nationally agreed-upon priorities including seat belt use, impaired driving, and speeding, along with questions designed to better understand views on specific programs and attitudes pertinent to ND drivers. Surveys were mailed to 11,520 ND drivers in 2026. Analysis is based on 1,131 responses.

SEAT BELTS



ALCOHOL IMPAIRED DRIVING



DISTRACTED DRIVING



SPEEDING



DRIVING BEHAVIORS



PERCEIVED LIKLIHOOD OF GETTING A TICKET



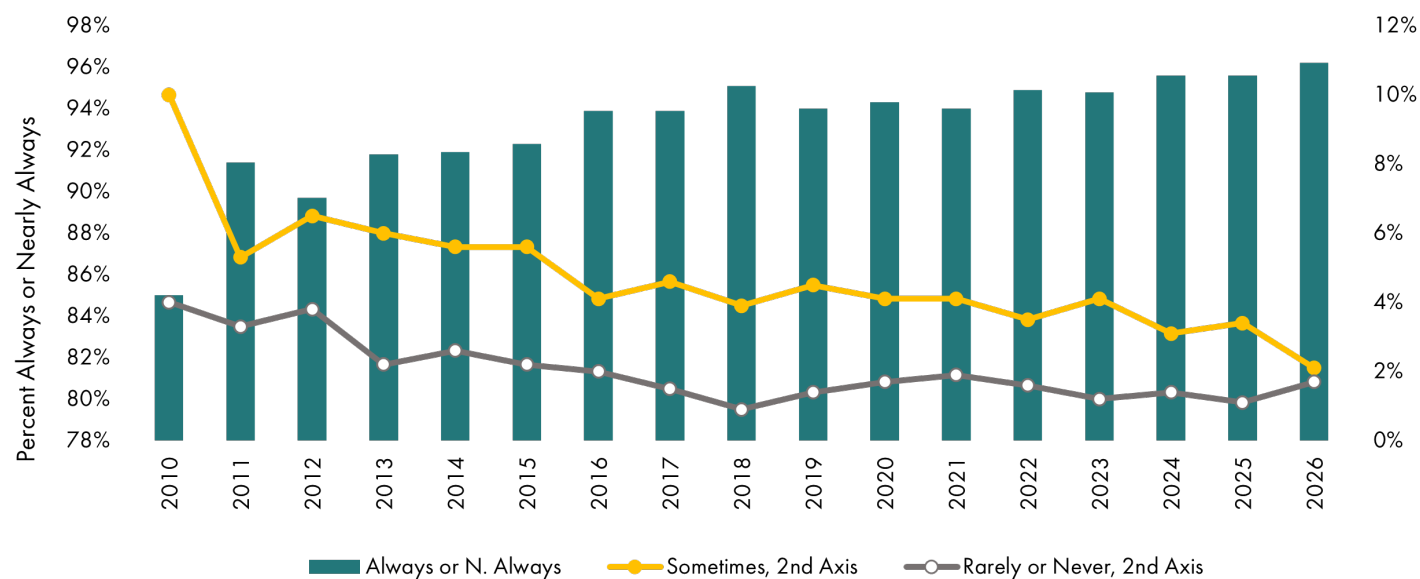
RESULTS HIGHLIGHTS

Seat Belts

Self-reported use showed that 85.5% of respondents "always" wear seat belts with another 11.0% reporting usage as "nearly always." Only 1.7% of drivers reported that they "rarely" or "never" use a seat belt.



Self-Reported Seat Belt Use



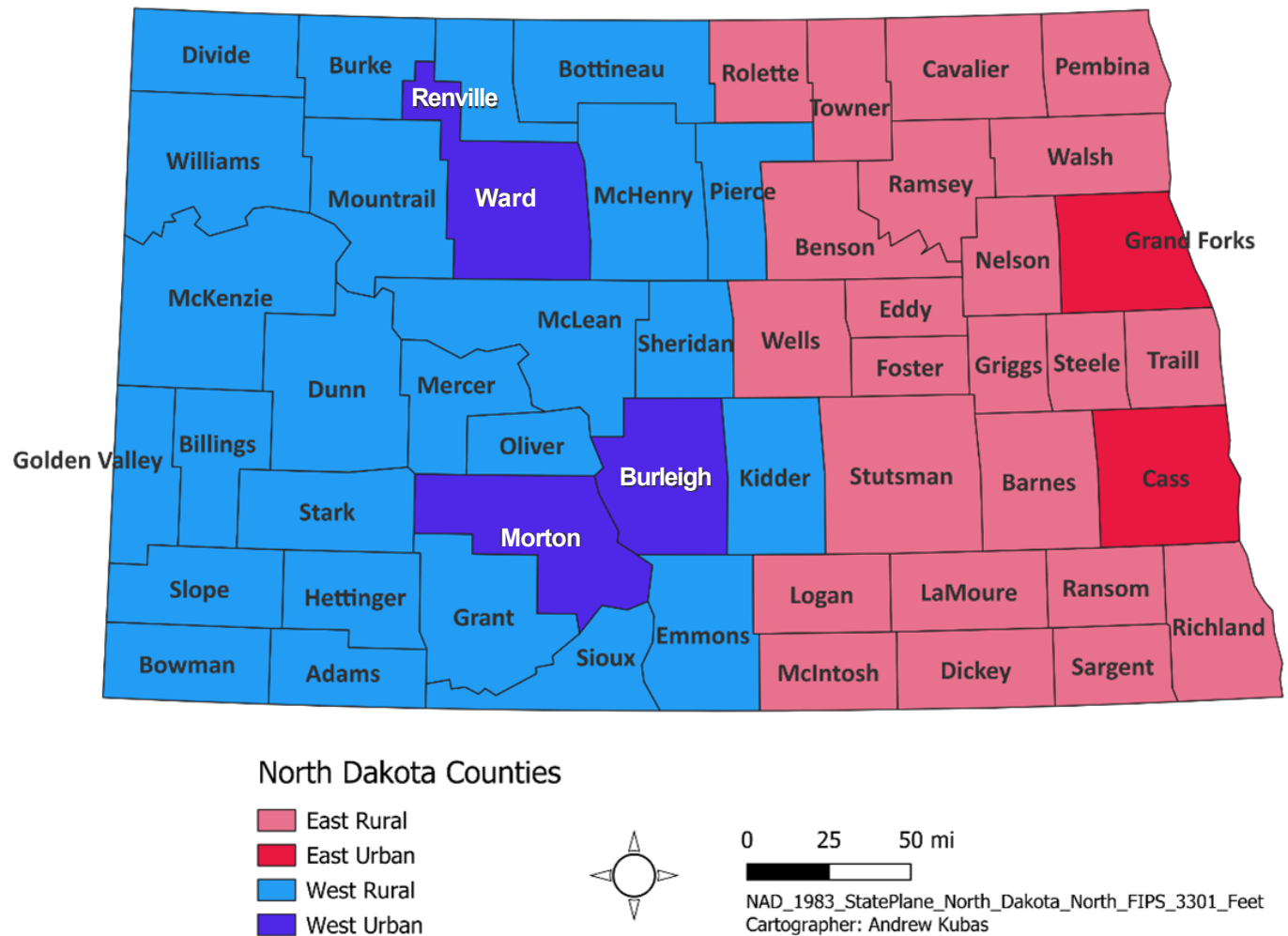
North Dakota County Stratification

Geography

Drivers living in urban counties were more likely to use seat belts even though they believed the chances of receiving a ticket for not wearing a seat belt were lower than rural drivers. Rural drivers were more likely to speed in a 80 mph zone and were less supportive of a ban on handheld devices while driving.

Region

Respondents from the eastern half of the state were more likely to have read, seen, or heard messages related to impaired driving. Drivers from the west were more likely to have read, seen, or heard messages related to Vision Zero efforts.



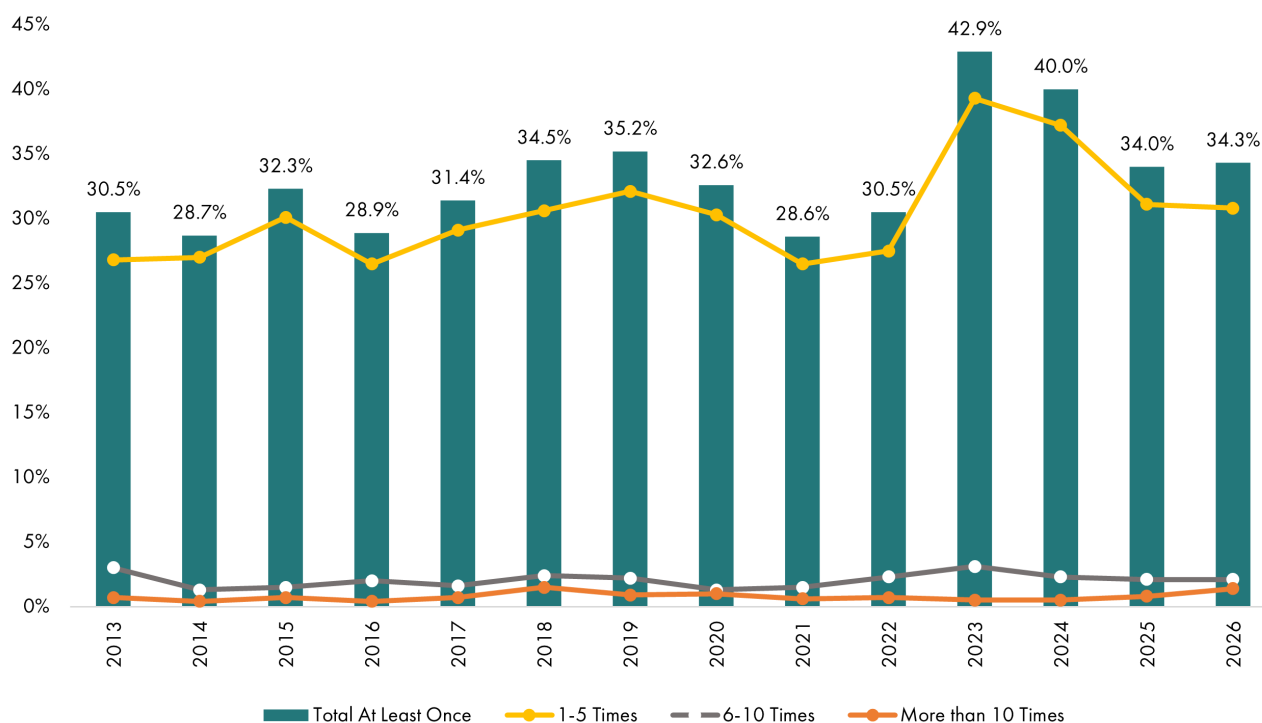
Alcohol Impaired Driving

Among respondents who drink alcohol, 34.2% reported driving a vehicle during the past two months within two hours of drinking one or two drinks. A smaller share, 6.3%, reported driving after drinking three or more drinks.

Among those respondents who do not drive after drinking alcohol, 69.0% were “very likely” to designate an alternate driver, primarily a sober driver within the group, with the remainder calling a family member/friend, or using ride share services or taxis.



Driving after Drinking Activity: Driving after Drinking 1-2 Drinks



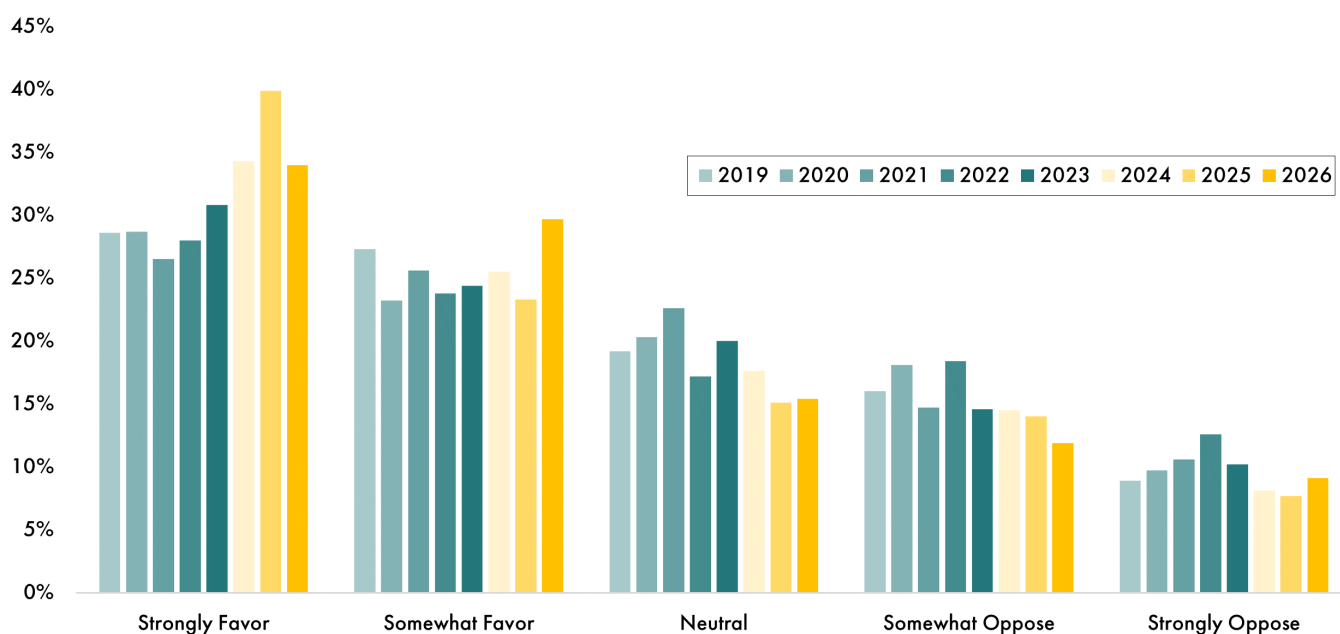
Distracted Driving

Respondents supported a ban on hand-held cell phone use while driving with 63.7% “strongly” or “somewhat” in favor of such a ban compared to 9.1% “strongly” opposed to a ban.

There was an even distribution of responses when asked to rate the likelihood of using a phone while driving: roughly one-third of respondents (28.2%) self-reported that they were “likely” or “very likely” to use a phone, roughly one-third (34.3%) indicated usage as “somewhat likely,” and roughly one-third (37.5%) answered that the chances were “very unlikely” or “unlikely”. The most commonly reported purpose for cell use while operating a vehicle was phone calls (75.8%) and texting (19.5%). Of those using a phone while driving, about three-in-four do so by leveraging hands-free technology. North Dakota drivers believe a ticket for distracted driving is just as “unlikely” as it is “likely”.

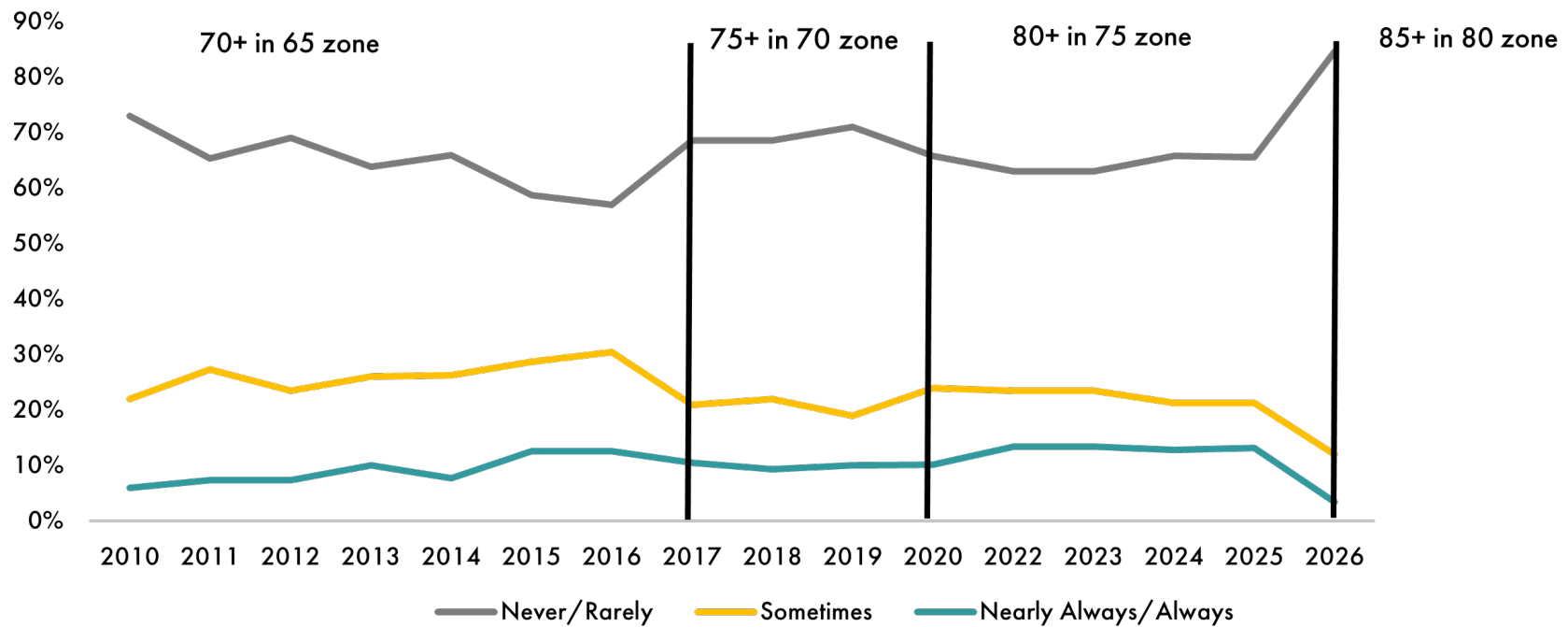


Driver Preferences for Banning Handheld Cell Phone Use While Driving



Speeding

As of 2026, the majority (51.8%) of drivers self-report rarely or never going more than 85 miles per hour in an 80 mph speed zone. This is the highest percentage in the history of this survey, though it should be noted that 2026 was the first time asking about an 80 MPH speed zone.



YOUNG MALE AND FEMALE DRIVERS

High-risk males (HRM) and high-risk females (HRF), drivers aged 18-to-34-years-old, show significantly different behaviors and views compared to other drivers.

Driving Behaviors

The survey showed 78.2% of HRM drivers “always” wear a seat belt while driving or riding in a vehicle, a smaller number than the 83.6% of HRF, and the 86.9% of other drivers.

HRF are more likely to drive after consuming one to two drinks compared to their male cohort. HRF (68.8%) and other drivers (69.1%) would designate an alternative driver more often than HRM (69.0%).



Perceived Likelihood of Ticket

All respondents had a low expectancy of law enforcement ticketing drivers for seat belt violations. HRM (7.3%) felt chance of being ticketed for not wearing a seat belt were less when compared to HRF drivers and the balance of the population.

HRF (15.7%) were more likely to expect a citation for speeding, compared to HRM (11.3%) and other drivers (18.3%) that had similar expectations. The perceived deterrent effect and threat of DUI arrest was highest with HRF. The perceived likelihood for a distracted driving citation was highest among the HRF.

