

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%

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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%

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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?*

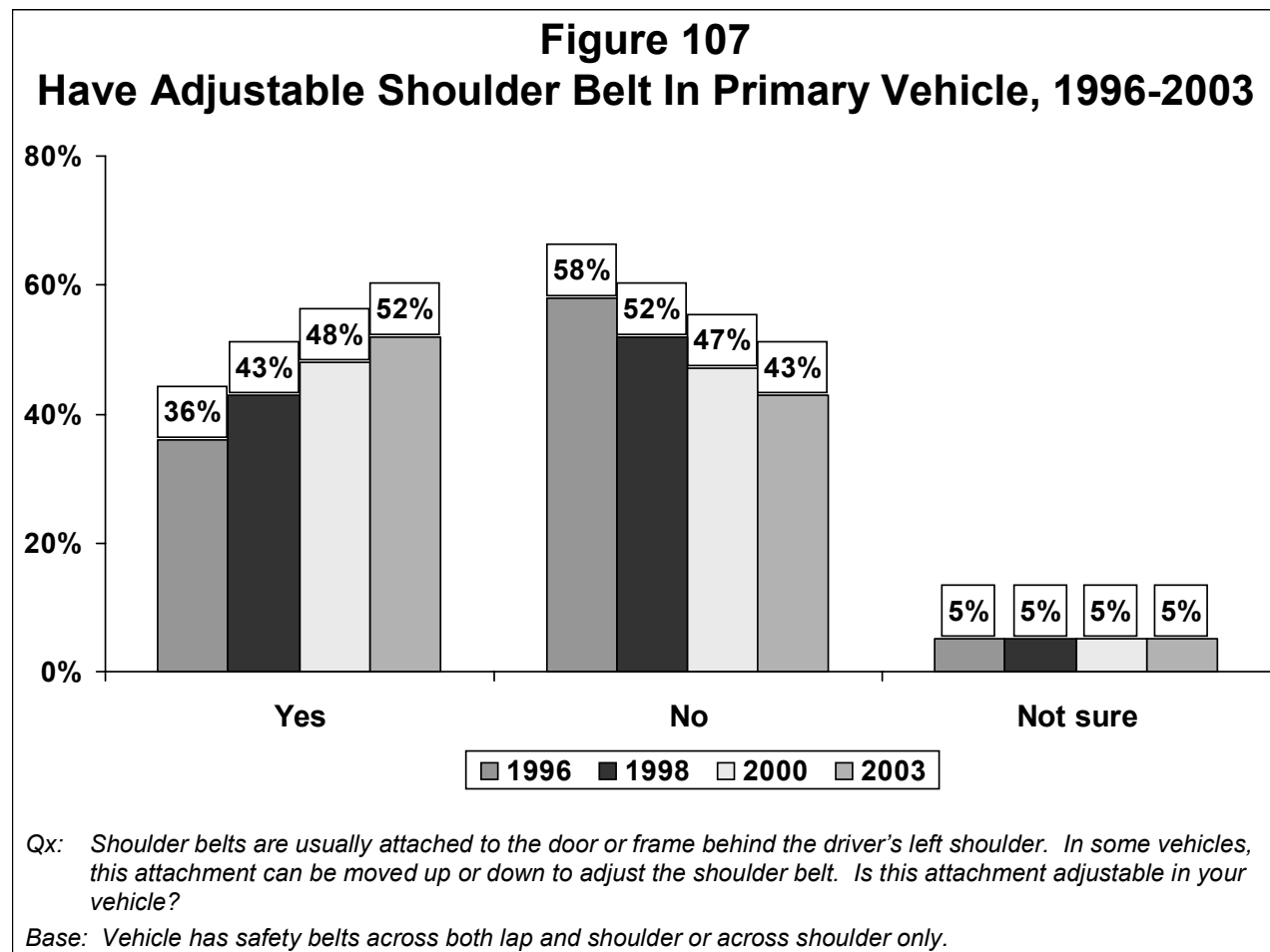
Base: *Vehicle driven most often has safety belts.*

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%.

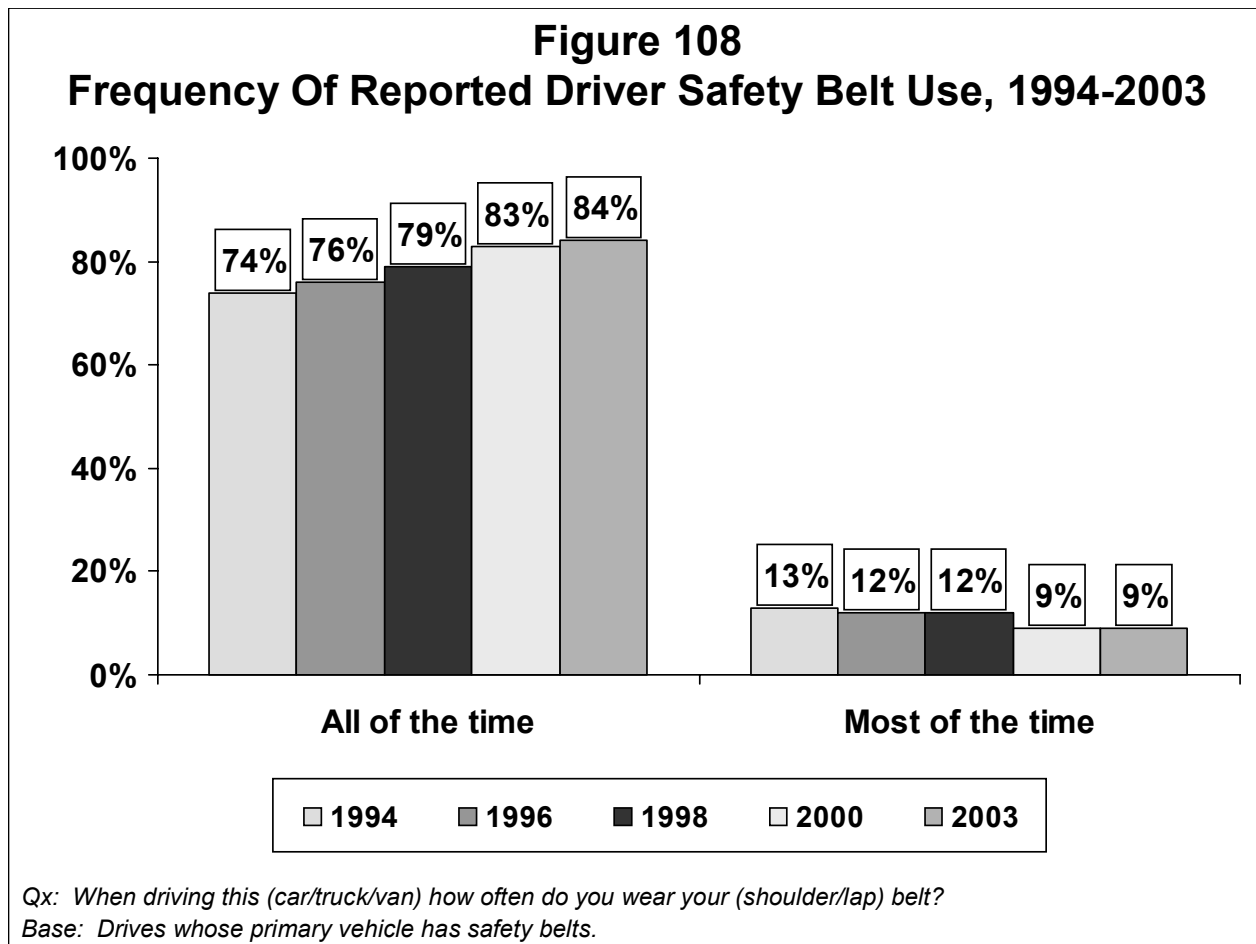
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The 2003 survey continued to show rapid penetration of the vehicle fleet by adjustable shoulder belts. Fifty-two percent of drivers in 2003 had adjustable shoulder belts in their primary vehicle compared to 36% in 1996. (This question was not asked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



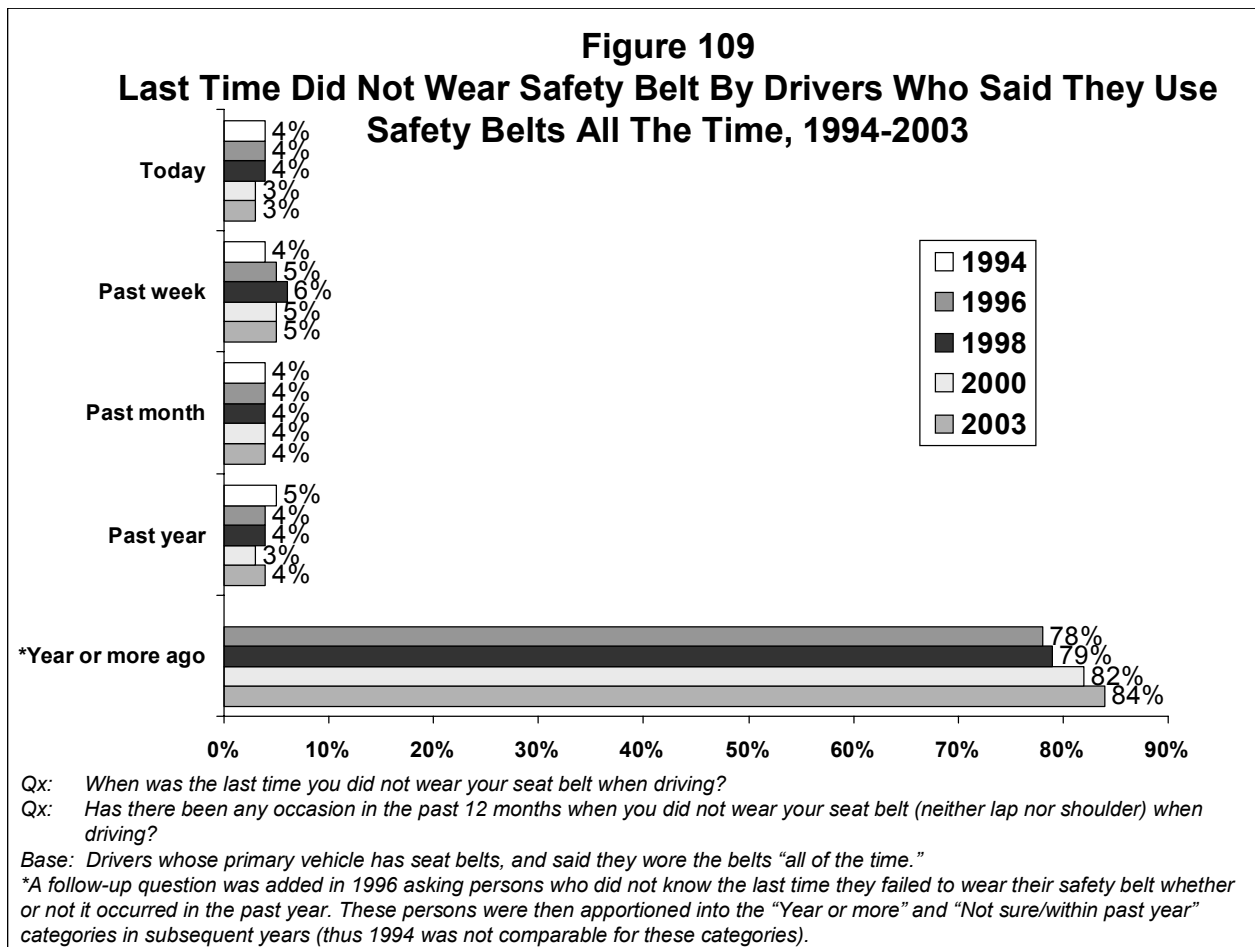
Driver's Use Of Safety Belts, 1994-2003

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).



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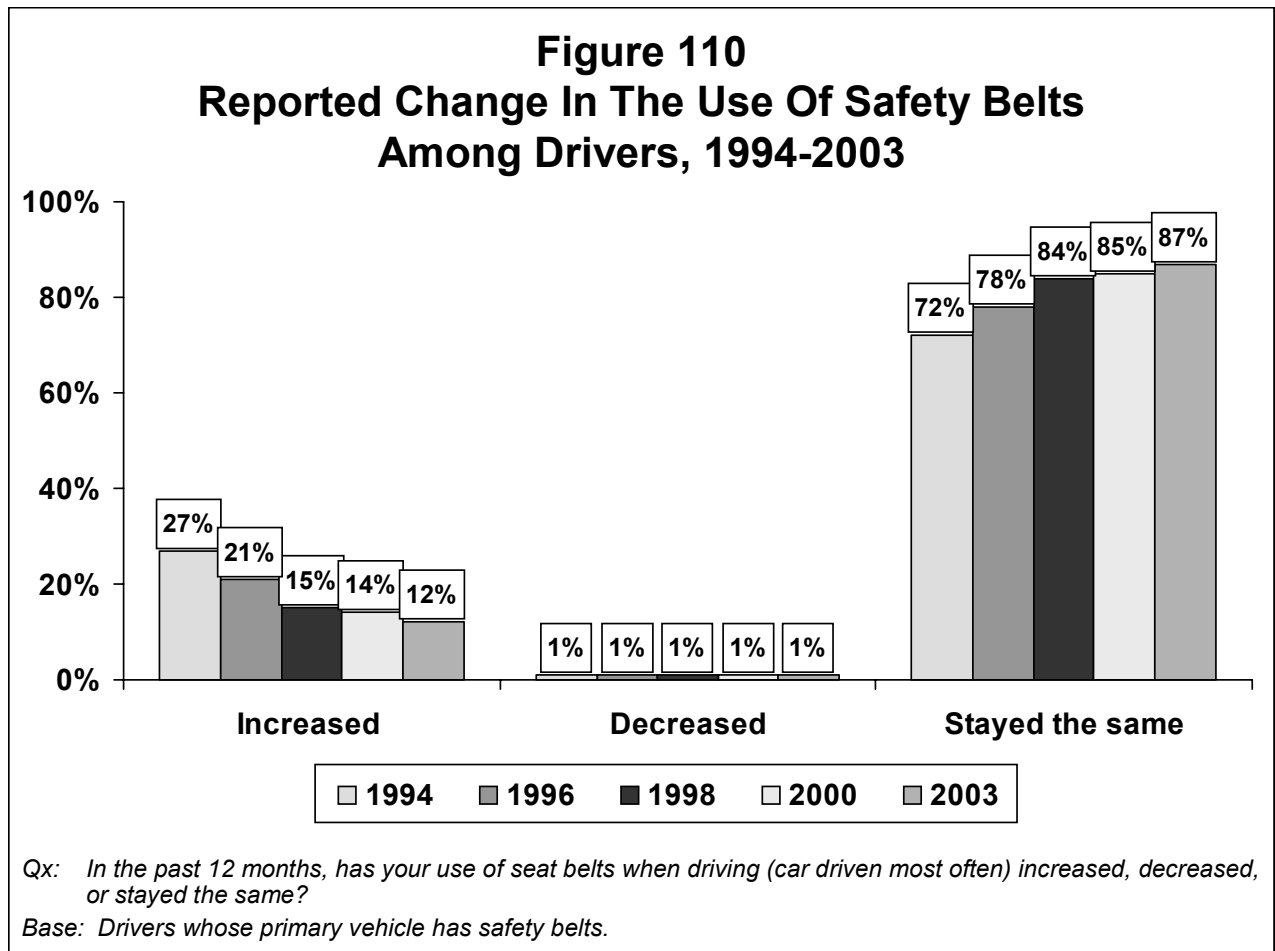
Although more people reported using safety belts “all of the time” in 2003, a portion of these full-time users still indicated that they had not worn their safety belts recently while driving. On a follow-up question, 7%¹⁵ of drivers in 2003 indicated they had not used their safety belt at least once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



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

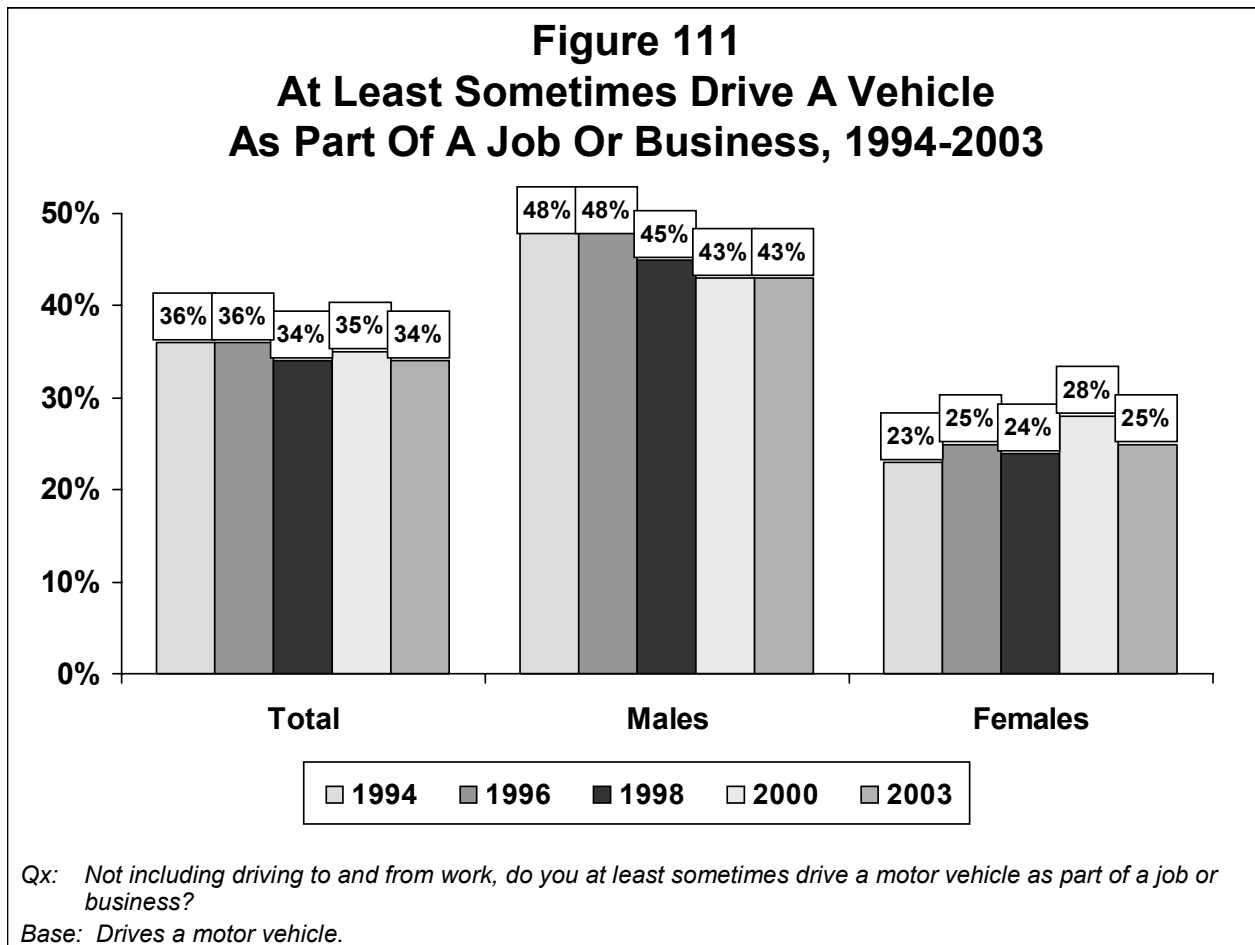
Reported Changes In Driver Safety Belt Use, 1994-2003

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.



Driving On The Job, 1994-2003

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



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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%

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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%

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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?

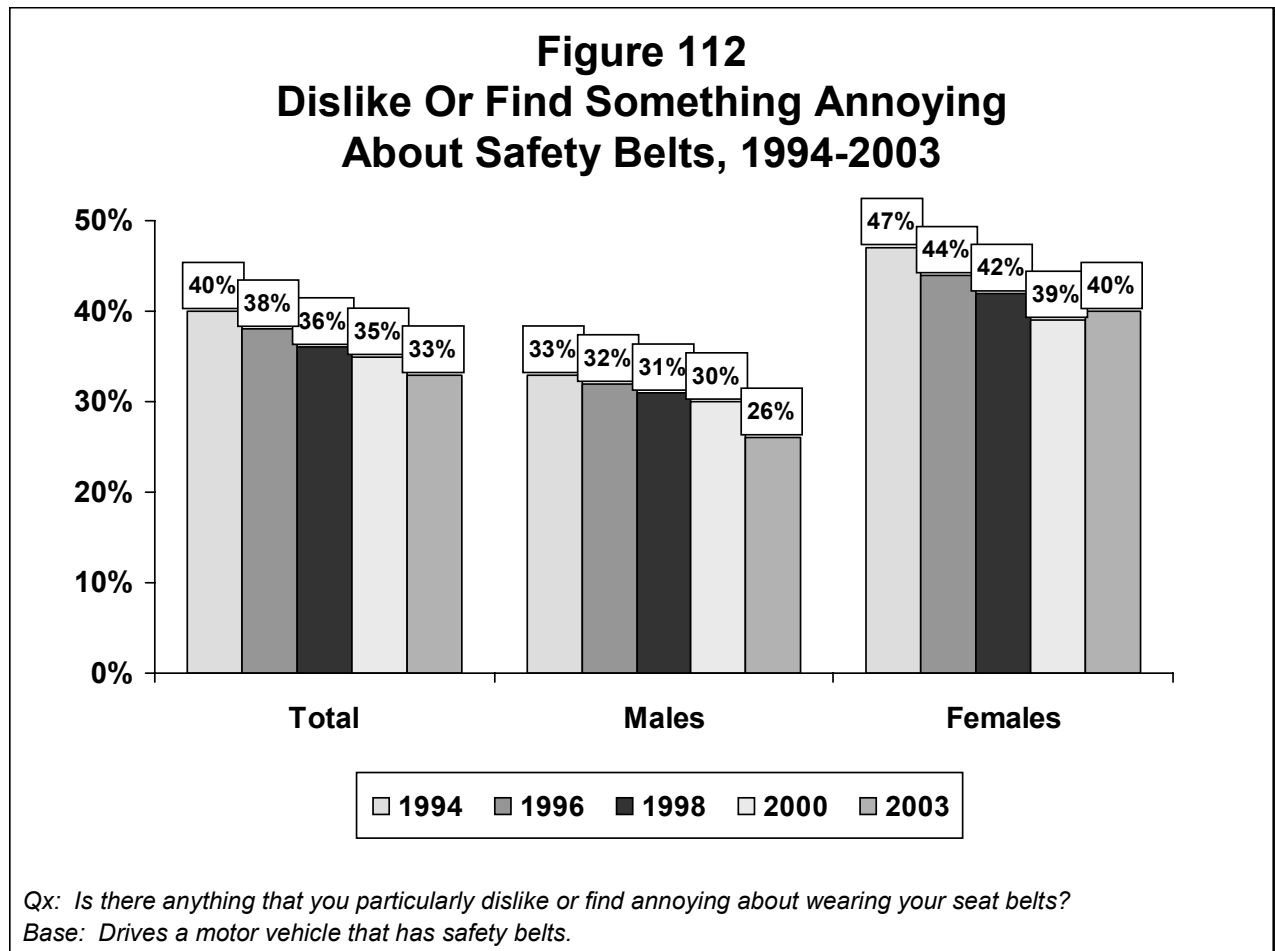
Base: Drivers whose primary vehicle has safety belts, and who at least on occasion do not wear their safety belt.

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.



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.*

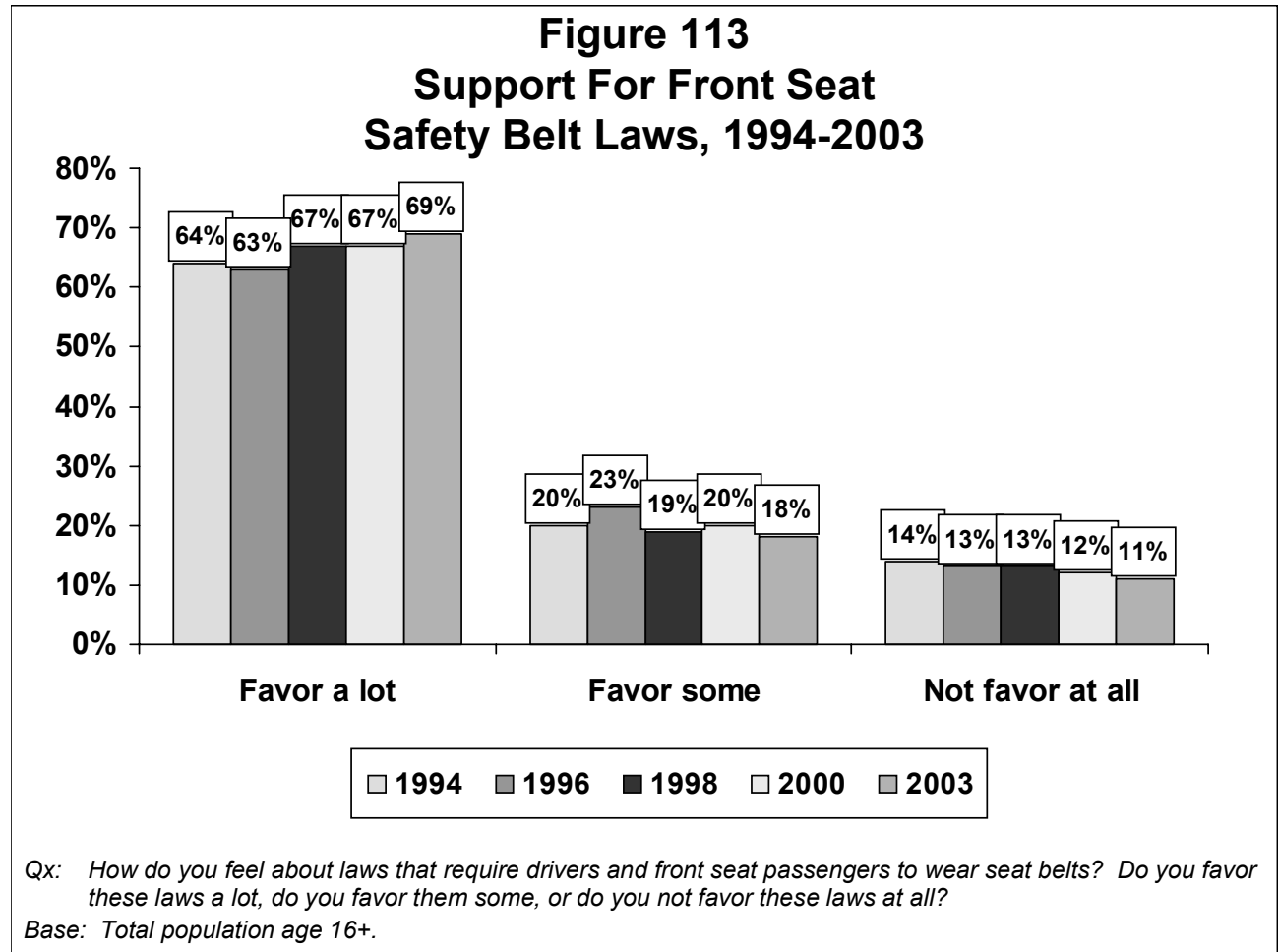
Qx: *Do you agree or disagree that if it is your time to die, you'll die, so it doesn't matter whether you wear your seat belt.*

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

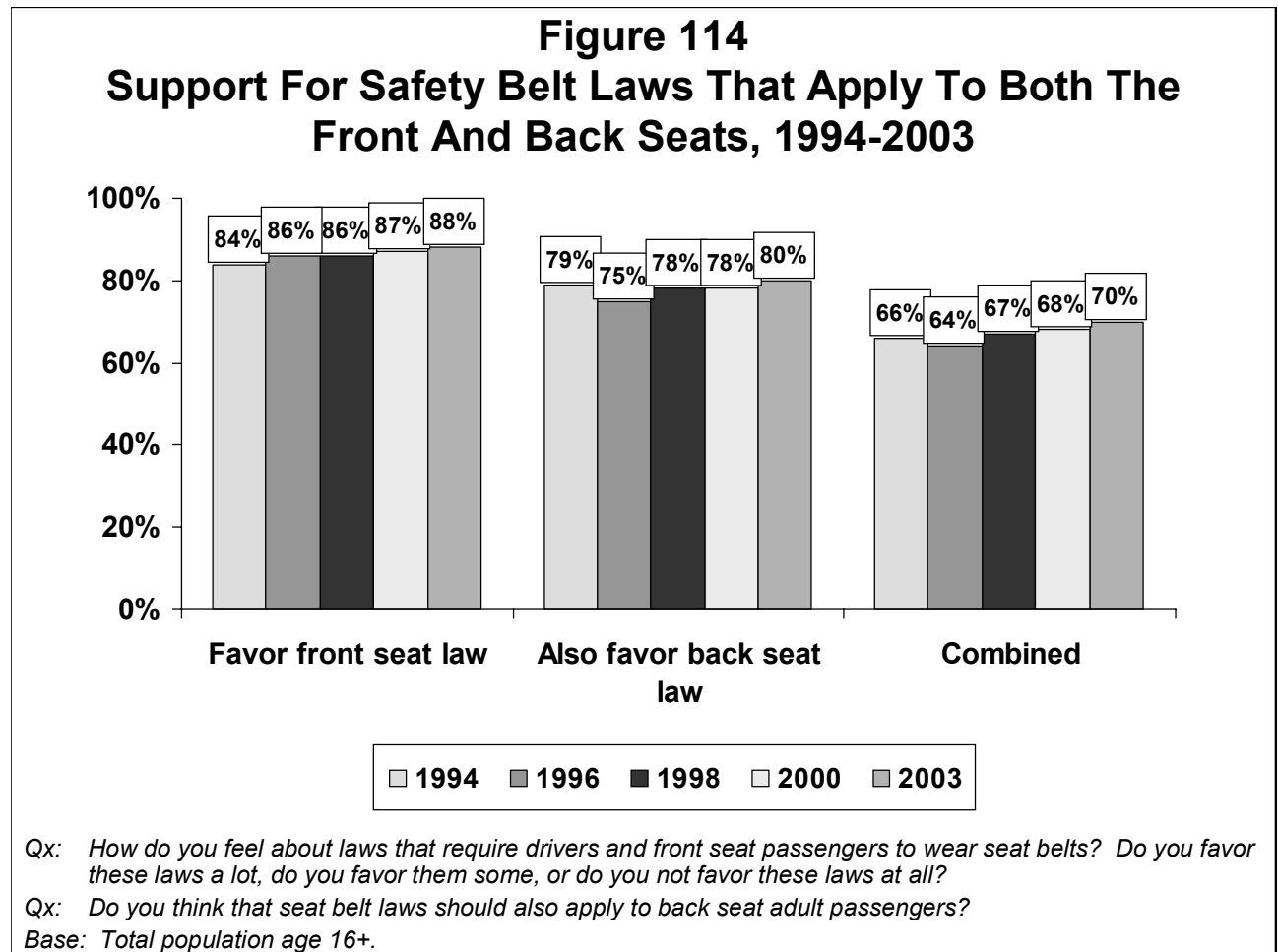
Safety belt laws have been enacted throughout the country to increase safety belt use. The 2003 survey found continued strong support for laws that applied to drivers and front seat passengers, as 88%¹⁶ favored such laws “a lot” or “some”. The 2000 figure was 87%.



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

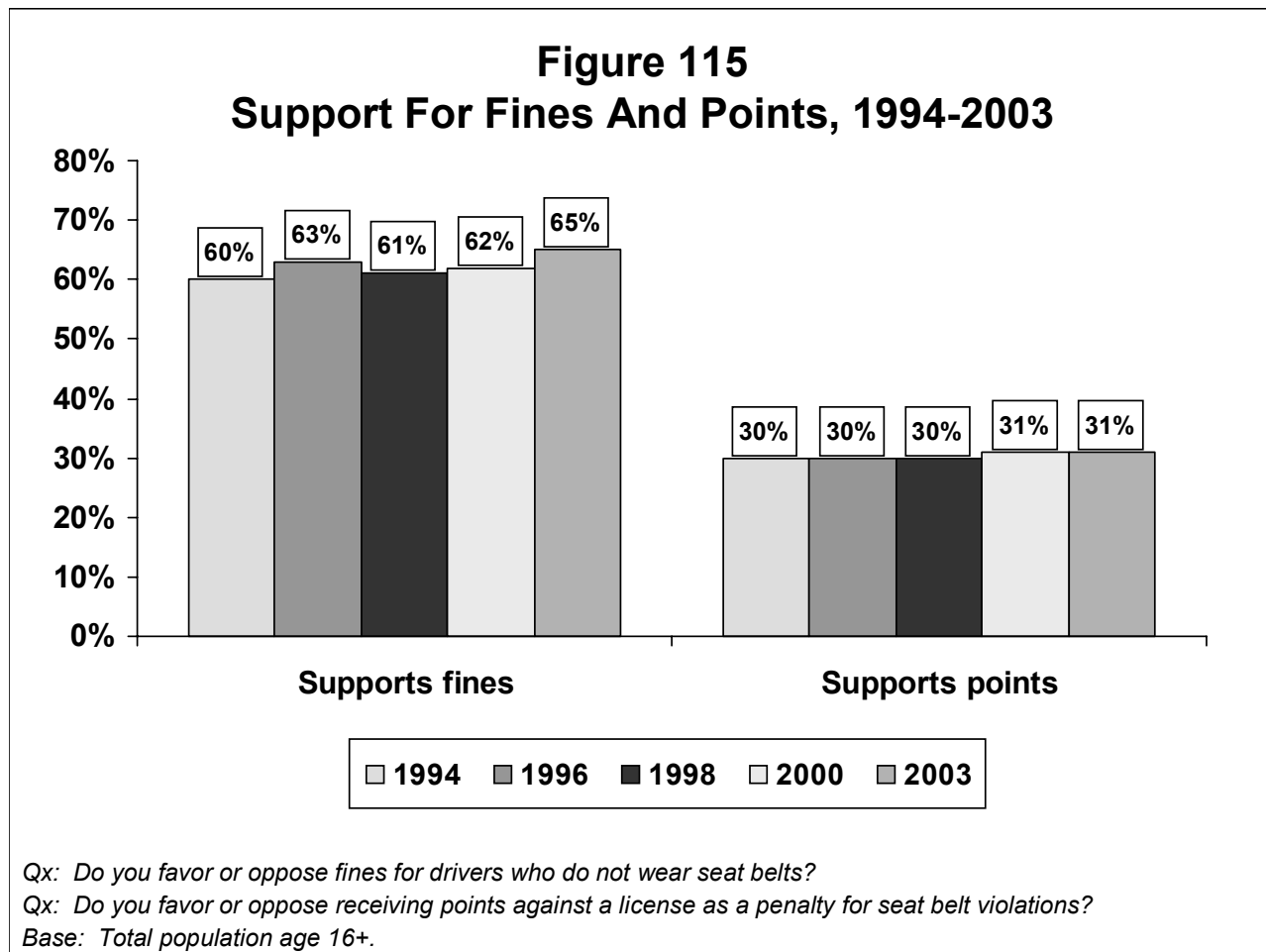
Support For Safety Belt Laws That Apply To Both The Front And Back Seats, 1994-2003

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.



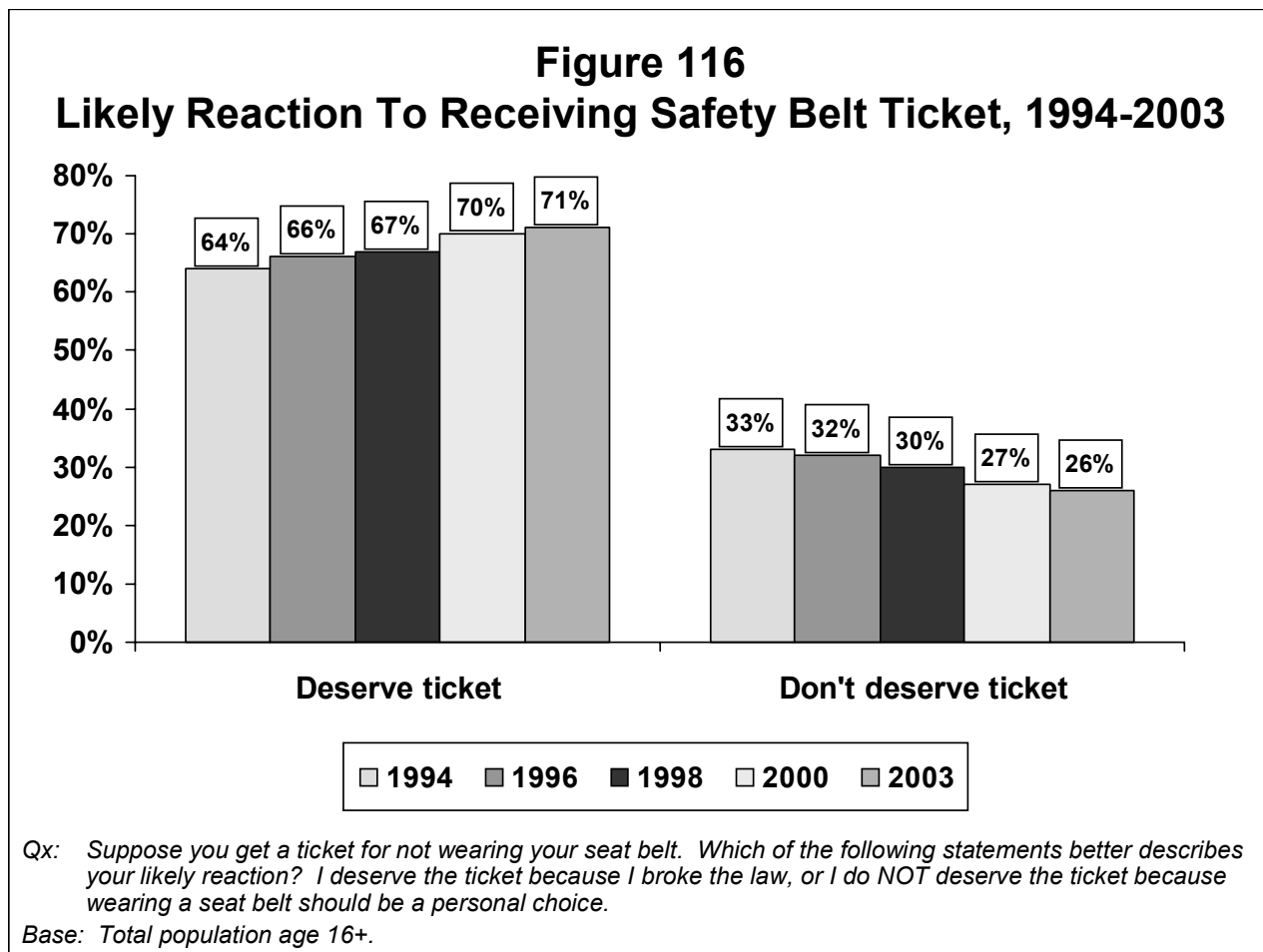
Support For Fines And Points, 1994-2003

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.



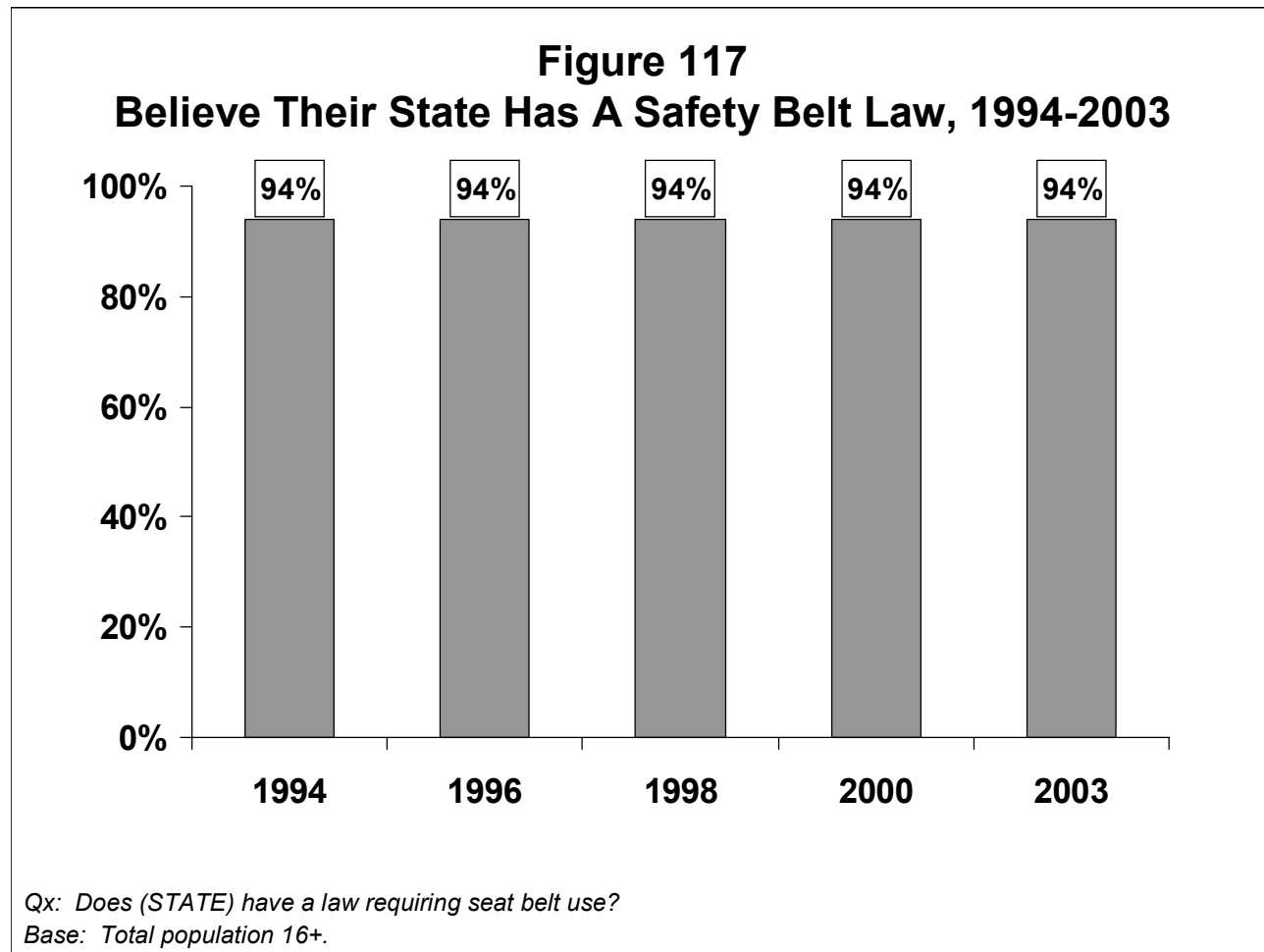
Likely Reaction To Receiving Safety Belt Ticket, 1994-2003

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.



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

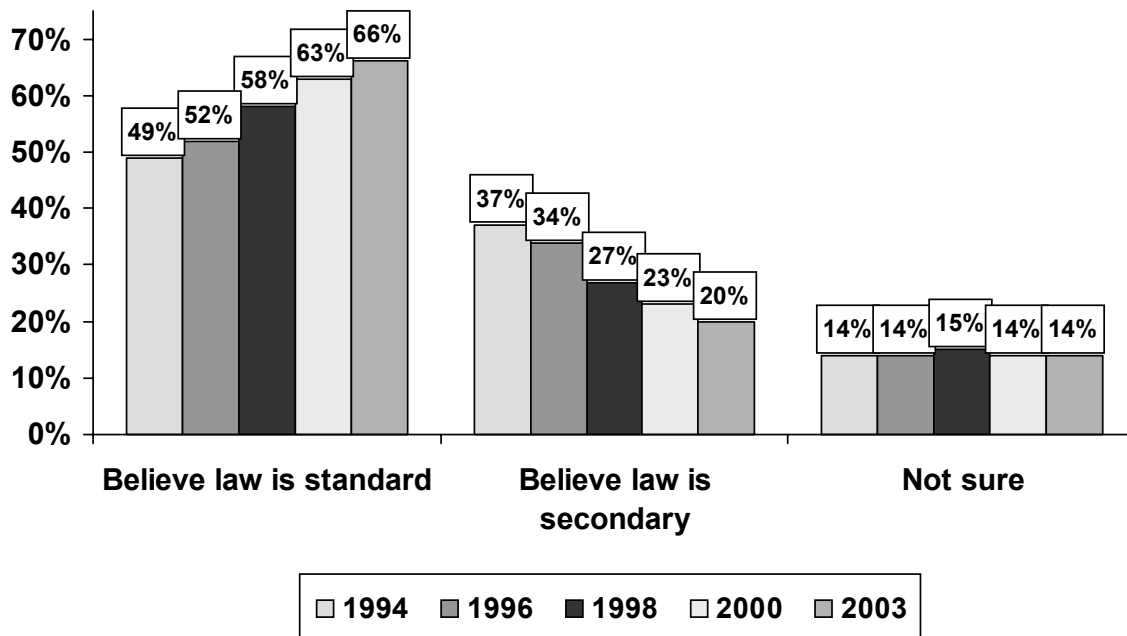
The interviewers asked all respondents if their State had a law requiring safety belt use. The response did not change across the five administrations of the survey; 94% believed there was a safety belt law. During the 1994 survey, 47 States had safety belt laws that applied to adults. In all subsequent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



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



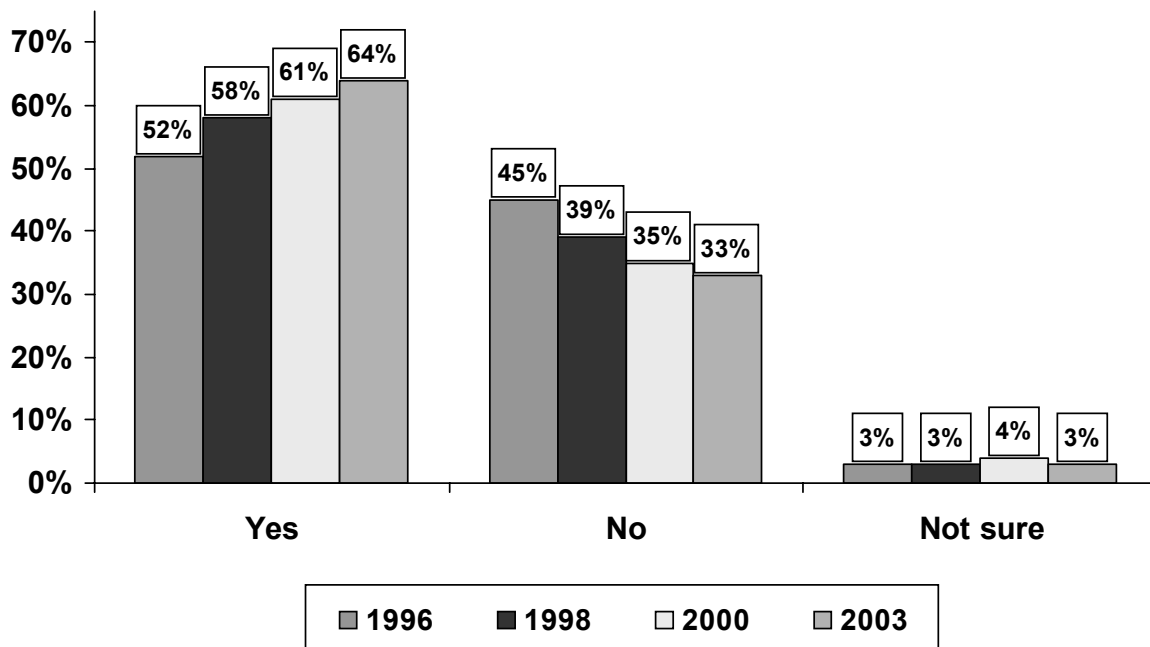
Qx: According to your state law, can police stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation, or do they have to observe some other offense first in order to stop the vehicle?

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



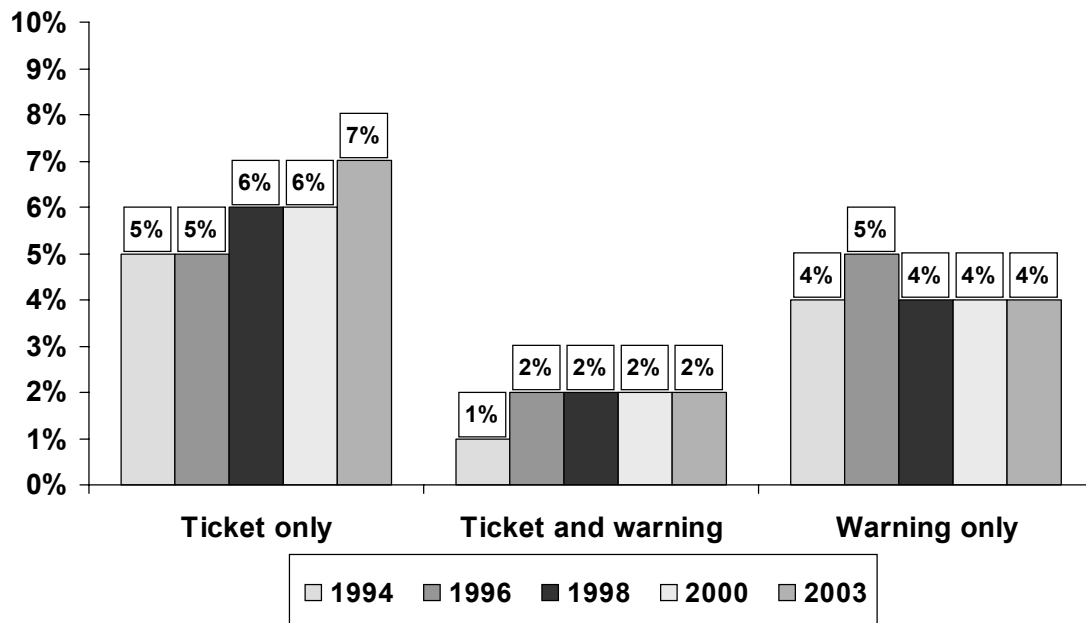
Qx: In your opinion, should police be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being broken?

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.

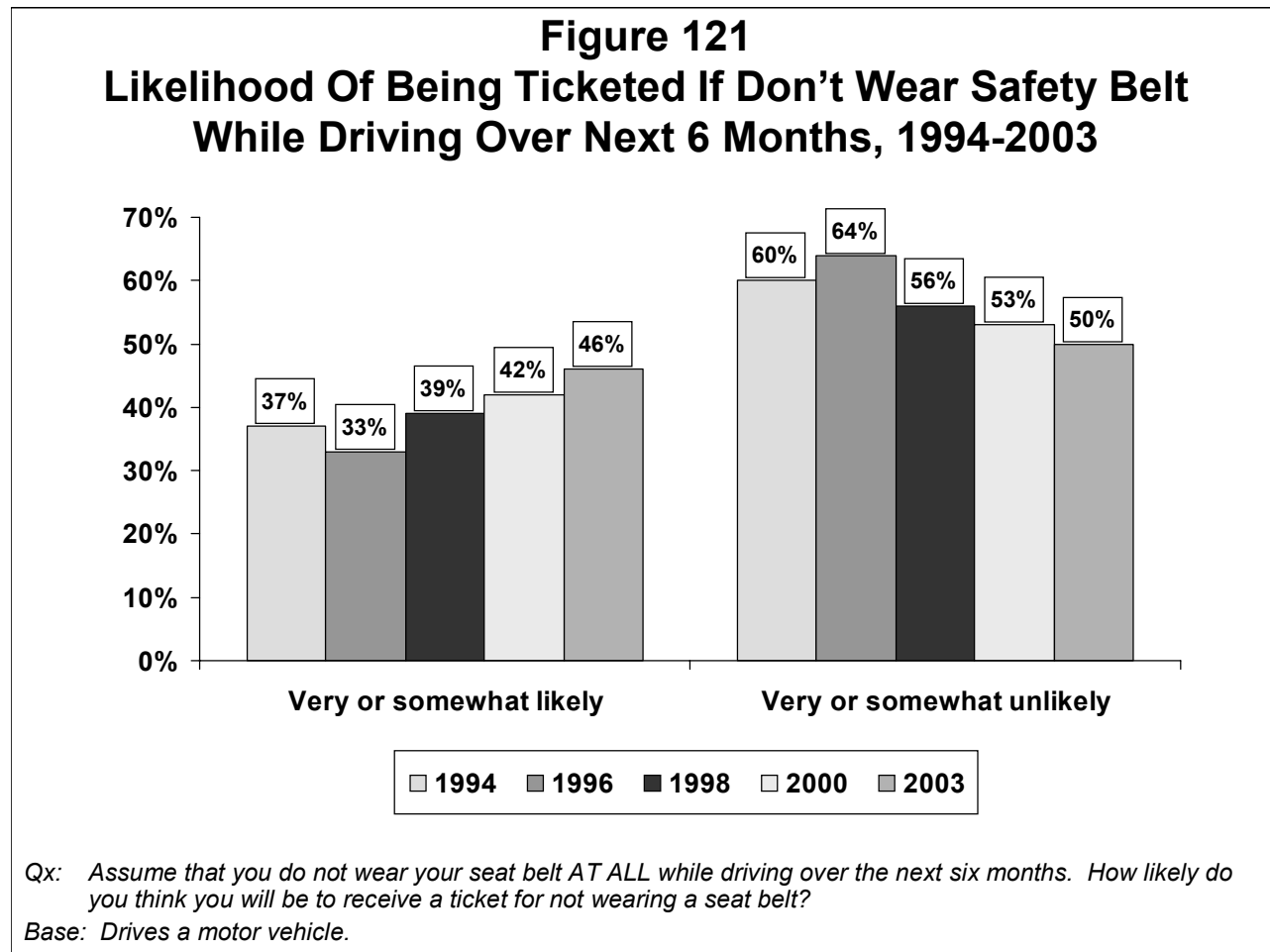
Figure 120
Ever Received A Safety Belt Ticket Or Warning, 1994-2003



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.

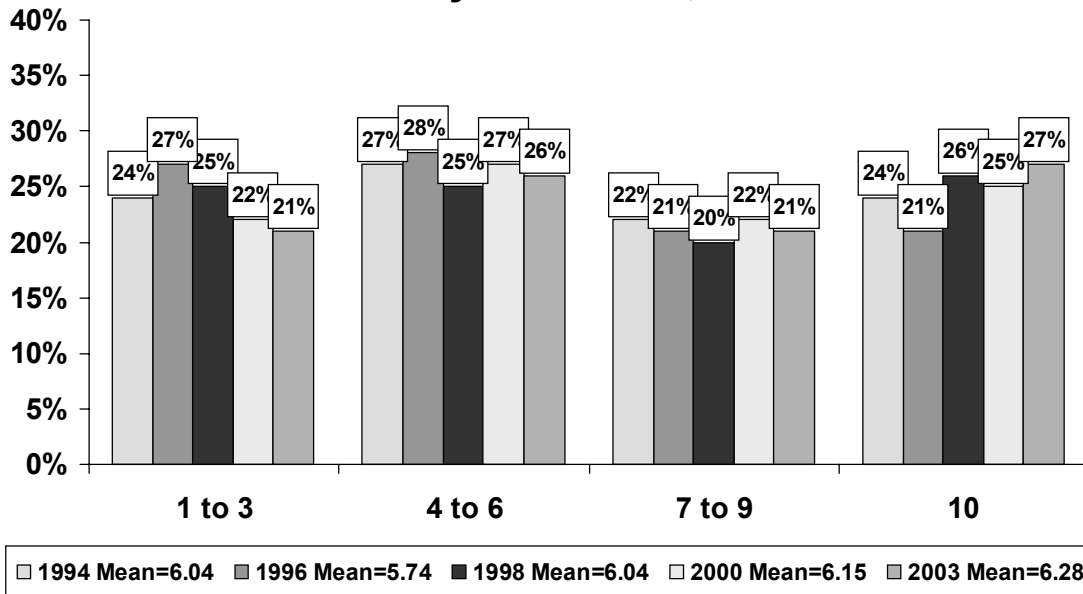


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Level Of Support For Enforcing Safety Belt Laws, 1994-2003

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.