

# Direct Line & Brake Reports on Safe Driving

## Roads policing and criminal justice report



Produced by:



Working in partnership with:



**direct line**

Brake asked 1,037 drivers about the state of roads policing and the criminal justice system. The survey was carried out online in April 2019 by independent market research company, Surveygoo.



**Every one of us is a road user and we all rightly expect to be able to carry out journeys, returning to our homes, loved ones and lives safely and without incident. Likewise we expect our families, friends, colleagues and businesses to utilise the road network safely and efficiently without harm, delays or incident.**

Tragically, however, we know that this is not always the case and through my work in forensic collision investigation, investigating the very worst collisions on our roads, I see the devastating impact of dangerous driving, first-hand.

We all appreciate the vital role the police play in enforcing the law and keeping dangerous drivers off the road. However, equally important is their role as a deterrent, preventing dangerous driving from happening in the first place and this report makes a clear case for the value that drivers place on having a visible police presence on our roads.

The consequences of road traffic collisions are widespread and catastrophic, causing sudden and traumatic suffering to those involved and their families, as well as the wider impact on public services, businesses, other road users and the economy. Finding out the true cause of these serious collisions is essential to fully provide answers to victims and their families and to ensure that our roads and vehicles are designed and engineered with safety in mind.

This report highlights the premium drivers place on identifying crash causation over allowing traffic flow to resume and their support for improving road collision investigation – a reassuring finding for myself and colleagues. Unless we are able to fully establish and understand the underlying causation of road traffic collisions we will struggle to achieve Brake's Vision Zero goal of zero road deaths and serious injuries. Road collisions are often complex and multi-faceted incidents which may be the result of a combination of events, issues or behaviours. However, whatever the cause, research such as this helps those working in road safety, including vehicle manufacturers, road engineers and the emergency services, to understand what went wrong and how it can be prevented in the future.

I welcome any research into road safety and believe that through establishing and sharing knowledge, we can truly make a difference and help make our roads safer for everyone.



**Frances Senior**

Brake trustee  
Capability Manager,  
Forensic Collision Investigation Network,  
National Police Chiefs' Council





## direct line

**We firmly believe that reducing deaths and serious injury on UK roads requires a combination of education, legislation and enforcement – all three are equally important.**

However, enforcement without educating the public may limit a true shift in driver behaviour, as we saw with hand-held mobile phone usage while driving. Even with a 45% increase in fixed penalty notices issued since 2014, fatal collisions caused by a driver using a mobile phone have increased by 57% in the same period. While more drivers are being penalised for using their phones, there is concern that the message about the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving is not getting through. Raising further awareness of the risks involved is, therefore, imperative to changing attitudes.

This year Direct Line is campaigning to reform the law by calling for penalty points to be given to those found not to be wearing a seat belt. Since wearing a seat belt was made mandatory for drivers in 1983, they have proven to be one of the most effective safety devices in vehicles. However, 27% of people who died in vehicles in road collisions in 2017 were still not wearing a seat belt.

It is no coincidence that statistics tell us that those who refuse to wear a seat belt are also likely to be breaking the law. Of those either killed or seriously injured while not wearing a seat belt in a collision, 31% were impaired by drugs, 28% were driving above the speed limit and 51% were participating in criminal activity. Penalty points may be the deterrent they need and may be the tipping point for reducing needless deaths on our roads.

The consequences of not wearing a seat belt are well known due to years of education, hard-hitting media campaigns and enforcement through on-the-spot fines. It is now second nature for most people to put on a seat belt, but a small minority do not, which is why we believe now is the time to introduce penalty points to deter the hardcore group who still refuse. We're pleased this report highlights public support, with over 75% supporting the introduction of penalty points. This reinforces research Direct Line undertook earlier in the year. Reforming the law in this way would be a great example of how enforcement, greater public awareness and legislative change can work hand-in-hand to ultimately enhance road safety.



**Steve Barrett**  
Head of Car Insurance  
Direct Line





## **Investment in roads policing has plummeted in recent years, best illustrated by the significant reduction in the number of dedicated roads policing officers.**

This report finds that this change has not gone unnoticed, with drivers highlighting the visible decrease in the number of officers seen patrolling our roads, and points to the potential knock-on effects of this real, and perceived, reduction in enforcement. The decrease in police resource has also paralleled the stagnation in the UK's road safety record, and with the number of sanctions for non-speeding offences (mostly detected by officers, not cameras), also decreasing, the case could be made for a link between roads policing officer numbers in the UK and road safety.

Evidence suggests that a visible police presence is the most effective deterrent to crime that there is, and this applies to road crime too. With fewer police officers on the roads acting as a deterrent to drivers breaking the law, research indicates that drivers will have a reduced expectation of getting caught and therefore believe they can get away with dangerous driving behaviour, such as using their mobile phone behind the wheel. Only with increased investment in roads policing can we start to turn this situation around.

Effective enforcement isn't solely about police resources, however. Ensuring that our justice system deals with law-breaking drivers effectively and that the most dangerous offenders, such as those who repeatedly break the law, are dealt with strongly and removed from our roads, is a key piece in the road safety jigsaw. It could be argued that at present this isn't the case, particularly with so many drivers free to drive on the roads despite receiving 12 penalty points within a three-year period, which should see them face a ban. The existence of the 'exceptional hardship' claim is the reason for this anomaly and we agree with the majority of UK drivers who want to see this loophole closed.

This report will serve to highlight the state of roads policing and how our criminal justice system deals with dangerous drivers, seeking the views of drivers on police numbers, dangerous driving levels and the criminal justice system. I hope that the findings from this report will contribute to the debate around road enforcement, highlighting areas where action and further investigation is needed to help keep our roads safe for all.

**Mary Williams** OBE  
Chief executive



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## SECTION 1 – ROADS POLICING

In this section we asked drivers for their views on a variety of issues regarding the current state of roads policing, from policing levels to dangerous driving deterrents.

**In question 1 we asked drivers if, over the past five years, they think they have seen an increase in, a decrease in, or about the same, numbers of: police cars, speed cameras, speeding vehicles, drivers using a mobile phone, dangerous or aggressive driving around cyclists, and dangerously driven lorries or vans on our roads.**

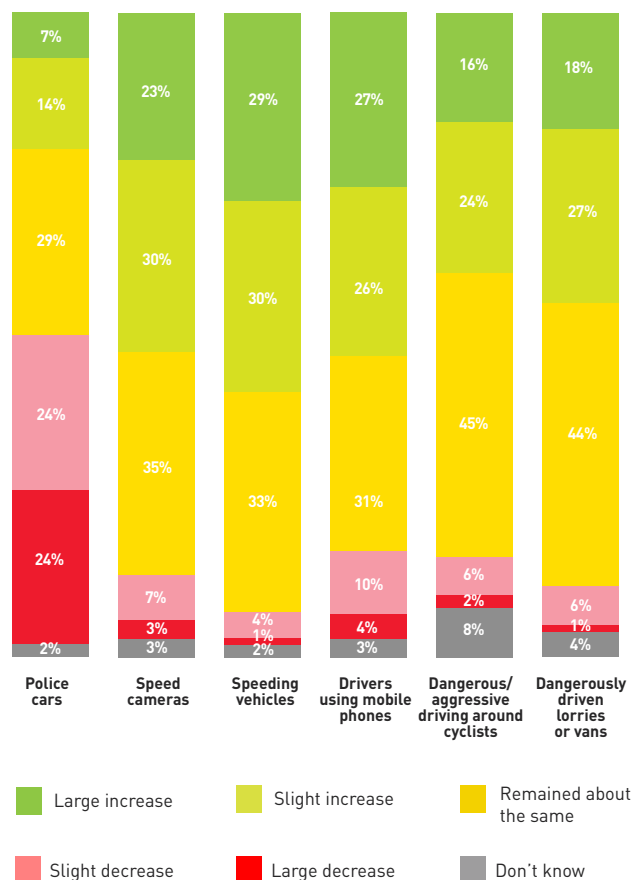
One-fifth of drivers (21%) think there has been an increase in the number of police cars on the roads in the past five years, with almost half of drivers (48%) thinking they have seen a decrease. For speed cameras, more than half of drivers (53%) think there has been an increase in their numbers and only one in 10 (10%) think there has been a decrease.

When asked about various elements of dangerous driving, nearly six in 10 drivers (59%) think they have seen an increase in speeding vehicles and more than half of drivers (53%) think they have seen an increase in drivers using mobile phones.

For dangerous driving around cyclists, a similar number of drivers think there has been an increase (40%) as those who think levels have remained about the same (45%). Similarly, for dangerously driven lorries or vans, 45% of drivers think there has been an increase in this activity and 44% think the numbers have remained about the same.

A clear pattern that emerged from the questions about dangerous driving was that very few drivers think there has been a decrease in these activities over the past five years. Only 5% of drivers think there has been a decrease in speeding vehicles, 14% think there has been a decrease in drivers using mobile phones, 8% think there has been a decrease in dangerous driving around cyclists and 7% think there has been a decrease in dangerously driven lorries or vans.

**Q1. Over the past five years, do you think you have seen an increase in, a decrease in, or about the same, numbers of: police cars, speed cameras, speeding vehicles, drivers using a mobile phone, dangerous or aggressive driving around cyclists and dangerously driven lorries or vans on our roads?**



### DAINGEROUS DRIVING STATISTICS

The following statistics provide the actual trends for instances of dangerous driving discussed in question 1.

#### Speeding

Speed compliance in Britain has remained broadly similar in recent years, with 54% of car drivers exceeding the limit on 30mph roads in 2014 and 52% of car drivers recorded exceeding 30mph limits in 2017.<sup>1</sup> The number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued for speed limit offences (detected both by roads policing officers and cameras) has increased by 8% from 1.86 million in 2014 to 2.02 million in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

#### Mobile phone use

The number of fatal crashes linked to drivers using a mobile phone increased by 57% between 2014 and 2017 (from 21 fatal crashes to 33).<sup>3</sup> There has, however, been a 45% decrease in the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued for use of a handheld mobile phone whilst driving over the same time period.<sup>4</sup>

Continued→





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## DANGEROUS DRIVING STATISTICS (Continued)

### Cyclist casualty rates

The number of people killed while cycling decreased by 11% between 2014 and 2017 (from 113 deaths to 101).<sup>5</sup> The fatality rate has remained broadly stable, with 33 cyclists killed per billion vehicle miles travelled in 2014 and 31 cyclists killed per billion vehicles miles travelled in 2017.<sup>6</sup>

### Van and lorry casualty rates

The number of vans involved in fatal crashes increased by 12% between 2014 and 2017 (from 169 fatal crashes to 189). The number of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) involved in fatal crashes decreased by 2% from 2014 to 2017 (from 265 HGVs involved in fatal crashes to 259).<sup>7</sup>

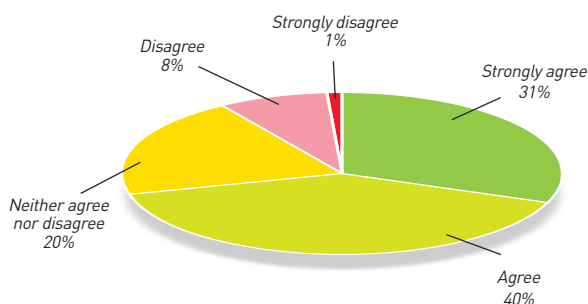
In question 2, we asked drivers to rate their agreement with the following statements about road danger, police presence and speed cameras on the roads:

- I feel the roads are more dangerous now than they were five years ago
- A visible police presence deters people from breaking road traffic laws
- I think there should be more police cars patrolling the roads
- Speed cameras deter people from breaking speed limits and speed camera fines should be higher
- I think there should be more speed cameras on our roads
- I would welcome random alcohol and drug testing by the police (currently they can only stop people if they suspect someone is driving under the influence or if the driver is acting suspiciously)

### Question 2a

Seven in 10 drivers (71%) feel that the roads are more dangerous now than they were five years ago, with only one in 10 (9%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement. This correlates with the findings of question 1, with drivers thinking they have seen an increase in dangerous driving behaviours such as speeding and drivers using mobile phones.

#### Q2a. I feel the roads are more dangerous now than they were five years ago

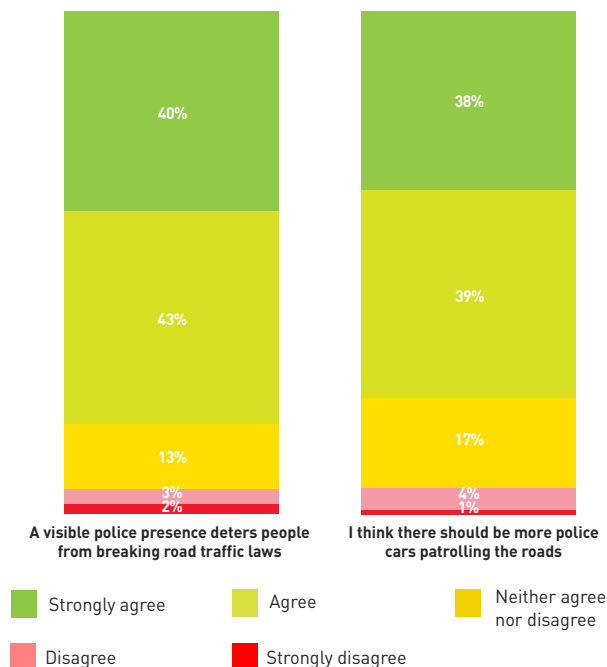


### Question 2b

When asked about the police presence on the roads, eight in 10 (83%) drivers agree or strongly agree that a visible police presence deters people from breaking road traffic laws with very few drivers (5%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement. More than three-quarters of drivers (77%) agree or strongly agree that there should be more police cars patrolling the roads with very few drivers (5%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement.

These findings are perhaps unsurprising given the answers to the previous questions, with drivers agreeing that they feel the roads are more dangerous now, compared with five years ago (question 2a) and thinking that there are fewer police cars on the roads over the same period (question 1).

#### Q2b. Rate your agreement with each of the following statements...



## ROADS POLICING NUMBERS

Roads policing is a vital part of road safety. Roads policing officers enforce traffic laws and ensure that anyone driving dangerously is caught and appropriately punished. They often focus their enforcement action around the 'fatal four' – the four main causes of serious injury and death on the roads:

- Inappropriate or excessive speed
- Not wearing a seat belt
- Driver distractions including using mobile devices such as phones
- Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs

Roads policing numbers are in decline. As of March 2019, there were 4,457 full-time equivalent roads policing officers in England and Wales, a 4% decline from 2018 (4,658 officers). This decline has been a trend in recent years, with a 5% decrease in officers from 2018-2017 and a 7% decrease from 2017-2016.<sup>8</sup>

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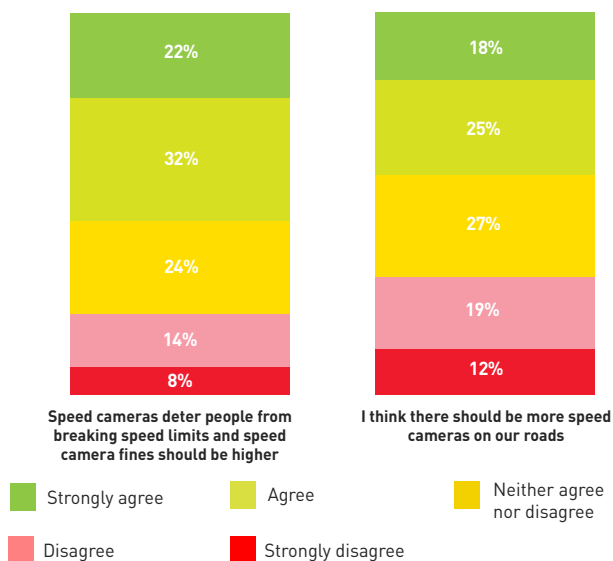


## Question 2c

When asked whether speed cameras deter people from breaking speed limits and if speed camera fines should be higher, more than half of drivers (54%) agree or strongly agree with this statement, and only a fifth (22%) disagree or strongly disagree.

Drivers were more mixed in their views of whether there should be more speed cameras on our roads. Four in 10 drivers (43%) agree or strongly agree that there should be more speed cameras on our roads, but three in 10 drivers (31%) disagree or strongly disagree.

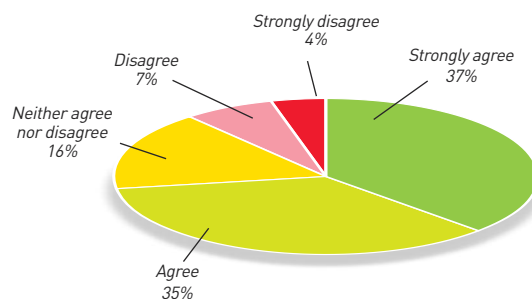
### Q2c. Rate your agreement with each of the following statements...



## Question 2d

When asked if they would welcome random alcohol and drug testing by police, nearly three-quarters of drivers (72%) said they agree or strongly agree with this statement. Just over one in 10 (11%) disagree or strongly disagree with random alcohol and drug testing by the police.

**Q2d. I would welcome random alcohol and drug testing by the police (currently they can only stop people if they suspect someone is driving under the influence or if the driver is acting suspiciously)**



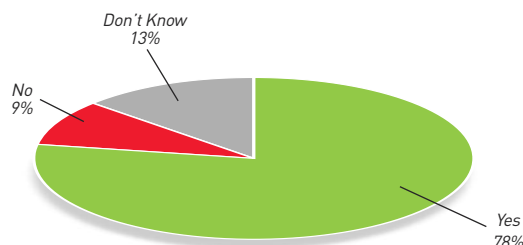
**In Question 3, we asked drivers their views on the police being able to use dashboard camera (dashcam) footage submitted by the general public, and whether they would submit footage of unsafe driving behaviour to the police.**

Dashcams are becoming ever more common in the vehicles on our roads, raising questions regarding whether or not the footage that they capture should be used to tackle unsafe driving.

## Question 3a

More than three-quarters of drivers (78%) say that the police should be able to use dashcam footage submitted by the public as part of roads policing. Less than one in 10 (9%) said that the police should not use the footage submitted to them.

**Q3a. Should the police use dashcam footage of unsafe driving, submitted by the general public, as part of roads policing?**



## SPEED CAMERAS

There are several different kinds of speed camera in use on the roads in Britain:

- fixed cameras, which measure the speed of passing cars and take photographs of those that break the speed limit;
- mobile cameras held by police officers, placed on tripods, or fixed in police cars, which can visit different locations; and
- average speed, or time-over-distance, cameras, which measure the time it takes a vehicle to travel between cameras and calculate the average speed.

There is overwhelming evidence that speed cameras are effective in reducing speeds and preventing crashes and casualties. A comprehensive four-year national evaluation of more than 4,000 speed camera sites across the UK, published in 2006, found a 70% reduction in speeding at fixed sites, a fall of 6% in average speeds and a 42% reduction in deaths and serious injuries. Recent studies on average speed cameras, which can help enforce speeds over a longer stretch of road than fixed or mobile cameras, found that these systems are effective in reducing collisions, especially those of a high severity, with one report finding that installing average speed cameras resulted in a 36.4% reduction in the mean rate of fatal and serious collisions at the camera site.<sup>10</sup> Technological developments have led to a significant reduction in installation costs of such cameras, likely resulting in increasing numbers of these devices on the roads in the future.



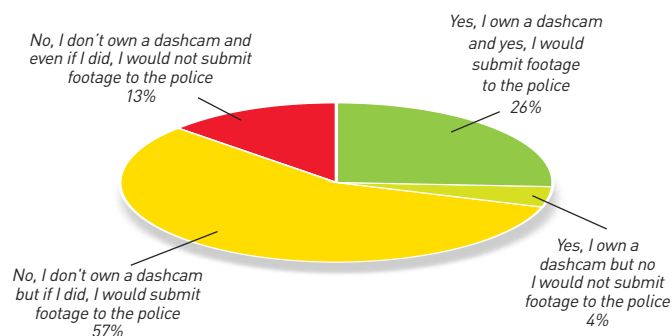
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### Question 3b

Three in 10 drivers (30%) own a dashcam. Most drivers (83%) said they would submit footage of unsafe driving to the police if a mechanism to do so existed, and this was a majority view regardless of whether they owned a dashcam or not.

**Q3b. Do you own a dashcam and would you submit footage of unsafe driving to the police if a mechanism to do so existed?**

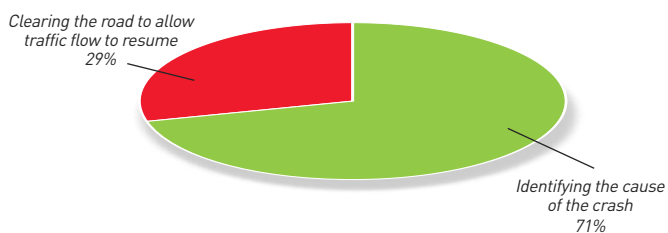


In question 4 we asked drivers what the priority for police should be following a serious crash and whether there should be an independent safety agency to investigate the causes of deaths and injuries from road crashes to prevent further crashes and save lives.

### Question 4a

Seven in 10 drivers (71%) stated that the priority for police following a serious crash should be identifying the cause of the crash, more than double the proportion (29%) who thought that the priority should be clearing the road to allow traffic flow to resume.

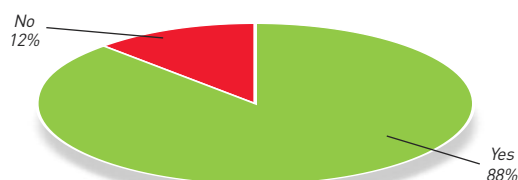
**Q4a. Following a serious crash that kills or injures, after victims have been taken away, the priority for the police should be...**



### Question 4b

Nearly nine in 10 drivers (88%) stated that there should be an independent safety agency to investigate the causes of deaths and injuries from road crashes. Only one in 10 (12%) stated that there should not be one.

**Q4b. There are independent safety agencies that investigate the causes of deaths and injuries on railways, boats and planes with the goal of eliminating causes and saving lives. Should there be one for road crashes too?**



### ROAD COLLISION INVESTIGATION

Non-road modes of transport, such as air and rail, have dedicated collision investigation branches to investigate the causes of deaths and injuries and make recommendations to prevent future casualties. No such agency currently exists in the UK to investigate road crashes despite roads causing many more deaths than other modes of transport. By way of comparison across different modes of transport, in 2017, 1,793 people lost their lives on the roads in Britain, compared with seven passenger deaths on railways<sup>11</sup> and 21 deaths caused by aviation crashes.<sup>12</sup>

At present, information about the perceived causes of road crashes is recorded by police at the time of collisions, for criminal prosecution purposes and to inform statistics collated and published by the Department for Transport. This information mainly provides basic data including, for example, modal choice of victims, age of victims, time of day. There is additional data available from hospitals relating to presentation of injuries. Collectively, however, this information is not adequate to investigate and determine the most effective countermeasures to tackle road casualties and road safety advocates, including Brake, have therefore supported the establishment of a road collision investigation branch.







## SECTION 2 – CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In this section of the report we asked drivers for their views on how the justice system deals with certain aspects of dangerous driving, particularly regarding repeat offenders.

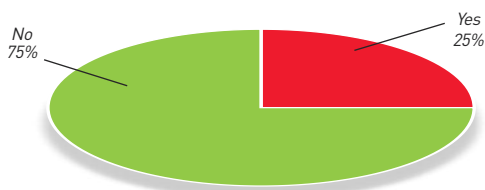
**In question 5, we asked drivers if they think it is right that some drivers who accrue 12 points should be let off a driving ban.**

Prior to responding to this question, it was stated that most drivers who accrue 12 penalty points on their licence within a three-year period face an automatic driving ban, but some are allowed to continue driving.

Three-quarters of drivers (75%) do not think that it is right that some drivers who accrue 12 points should be let off a driving ban.

A previous Brake and Direct Line report, from 2013<sup>13</sup>, asked drivers the same question with a similar proportion (78%) thinking it is not right that some drivers who accrue 12 points should be let off a ban, indicating that this is a consistently held view.

**Q5. Do you think it is right that some drivers who accrue 12 points should be let off a driving ban?**



### PENALTY POINT SYSTEM AND DRIVING BANS

Drivers convicted of a motoring offence, such as speeding, can be fined and have their driving record endorsed with penalty points. These endorsements remain on a driving record for either four or 11 years depending on the seriousness of the offence. Drivers who build up 12 or more penalty points within a period of three years can be disqualified from driving.

Driving bans and their length are decided at the discretion of the Court based on how serious they think the offence is.

Typically, a driving ban can last:

- Six months, if you get 12 or more penalty points within three years
- One year, if you get a second disqualification within three years
- Two years, if you get a third disqualification within three years

Drivers who have been banned for 56 days or more must apply for a new licence before driving again.

In some cases, a driver who has reached 12 points and faces a ban can claim 'exceptional hardship' if they believe that the ban will cause them hardship, such as if they need to drive for work or if they are a carer and need use of a car. This is, again, at the discretion of the Court but may result in the driver avoiding a ban. As of March 2019, there were 11,140 drivers with 12 or more points on their licence.<sup>14</sup>

**In question 6, we asked drivers for their views on driving disqualifications, seat belt offences, driver assistance technology and roads policing investment. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with various statements.**

### Question 6a

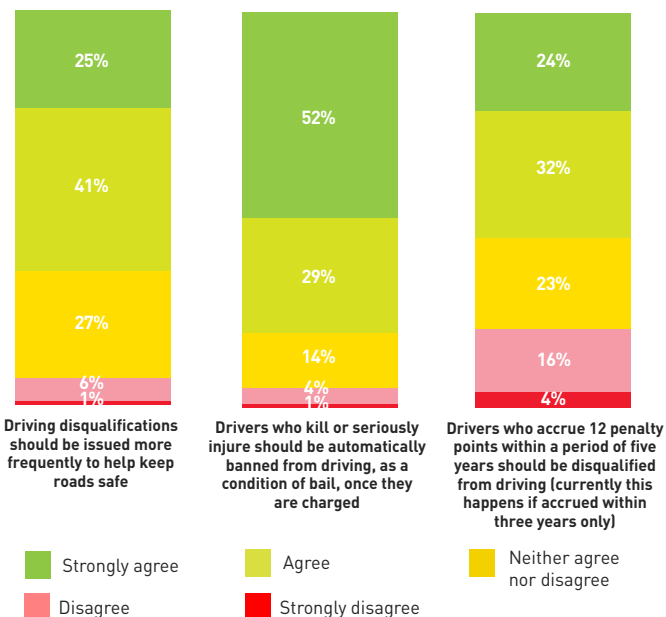
Two-thirds of drivers (66%) agree or strongly agree that driving disqualifications should be issued more frequently to help keep roads safe, with 7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement.

Eight in 10 drivers (81%) agree or strongly agree that drivers who kill or seriously injure should automatically be banned from driving once they are charged, with 5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

When asked whether they agree or disagree that drivers who accrue 12 penalty points within a period of five years (hypothetically extending the current three-year period) should be disqualified, drivers' responses were mixed. More than half of drivers (56%) agree or strongly agree with this statement but a fifth (20%) disagree or strongly disagree and slightly more (23%) neither agree nor disagree.

Appraising the responses to these questions collectively, the use of driving disqualifications to tackle dangerous driving is generally agreed upon among drivers.

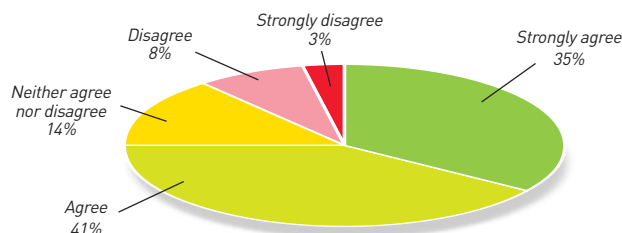
**Q6a. Rate your agreement with each of the following statements...**



### Question 6b

Three-quarters of drivers (76%) agree or strongly agree that failing to wear a seat belt should result in penalty points on a driver's licence. Only one in 10 (11%) disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

**Q6b. Failing to wear a seat belt should be an endorsable offence (i.e. result in penalty points)...**



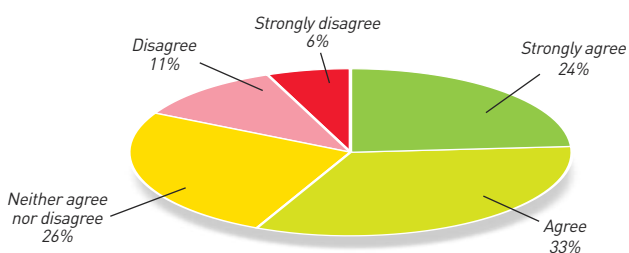
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## Question 6c

When asked if, instead of speed cameras, it would be better if vehicles were fitted with technology that means they know, and travel within, speed limits, more than half of drivers (57%) agree or strongly agree, with just under one-fifth (17%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

**Q6c. Instead of speed cameras, it would be better if vehicles were fitted with technology that means they know, and travel within, speed limits**



## SEATBELTS

Seatbelts are proven to save lives yet 27% of people who died in cars on the roads in 2017 were not wearing a seatbelt, up from 20% in 2016, and the highest level since 2013. That equates to 212 people killed in a car while not wearing a seatbelt, with a total of 787 people killed in cars in 2017.<sup>15</sup>

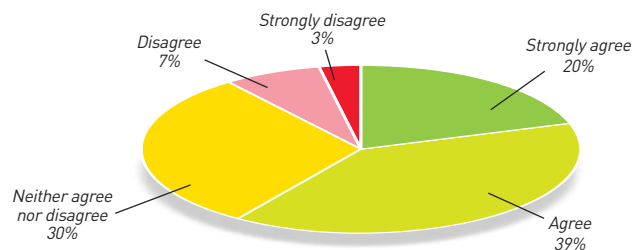
The current penalties for not wearing a seatbelt are a £100 Fixed Penalty Notice or up to a £500 fine if the case is taken to court. The driver is responsible for ensuring that they and any passengers under the age of 14 are belted up. Adult passengers are responsible for ensuring they are belted up and can also receive a fine if they are caught not wearing a seatbelt.<sup>16</sup>

Recent research carried out by Direct Line found that 72% of the public would support the introduction of penalty points for people caught not wearing a seatbelt<sup>17</sup> and a report by Direct Line and the Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Transport Safety recommended introducing three penalty points for not wearing a seat belt, greater enforcement of the seat belt law through targeted, intelligence-led measures and increasing public perception of enforcement, as evidence shows that this has a significant impact on seat belt wearing.<sup>18</sup>

## Question 6d

When asked if the Government should make roads policing a priority for investment, six in 10 drivers (59%) agree or strongly agree that they should; three in 10 (30%) neither agree nor disagree; and only one in 10 (10%) disagree or strongly disagree.

**Q6d. The Government should make roads policing a priority for investment**



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