U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
NHTSA

Traffic Safety Facts
RESEARCH NOTE

DOT HS 813 799 May 2026

Seat Belt Use in 2025 – Overall Results

The national estimate of seat belt use by adult front-seat passengers of passenger vehicles in 2025 was 91.3 percent, not statistically different (at the .05 level) from 91.2 percent observed in 2024. This estimate represents the percentage of occupants who are belted during an average daylight moment.

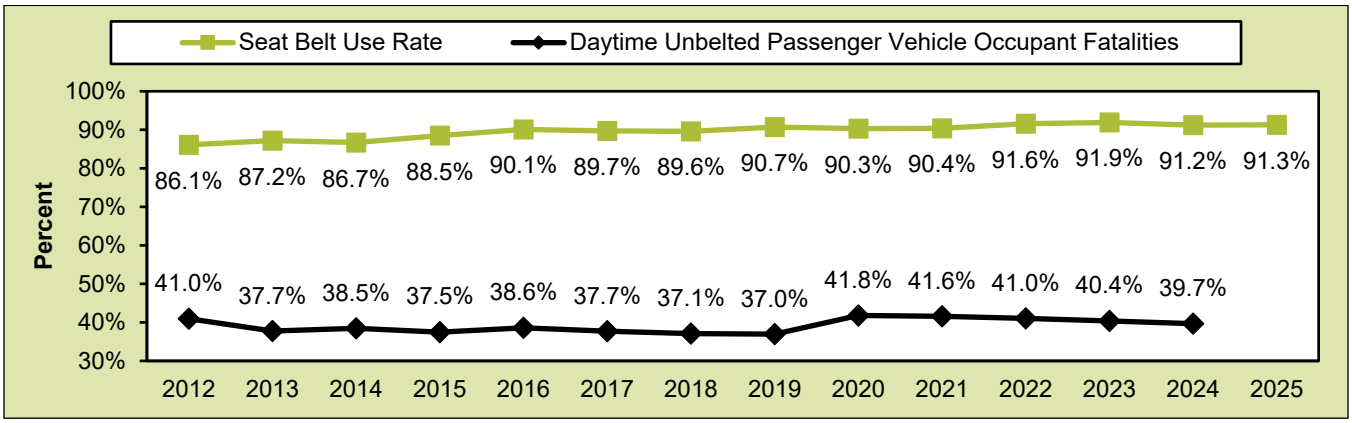
Figure 1 displays an increasing trend of seat belt use over the 14-year period 2012 to 2025, contrasted with the percentages of unbelted passenger vehicle occupant fatalities during daytime.[1]

The 2025 survey identifed three significant changes in seat belt use compared to 2024 – in the Northeast, Midwest, and West – as shown in Table 1. Seat belt use continued to be higher in the States where vehicles can be pulled over solely for occupants not using seat belts ("primary law States") compared to the States with weaker enforcement laws ("secondary law States") or no seat belt laws for adults (Figure 2).

Data collection for 2025 occurred in early June, immediately following the *Click It or Ticket* campaign. Compared to 2024, the number of occupants observed increased by 2.5 percent.

These results are from the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS), the only survey that provides nationwide probability-based observed data on seat belt use in the United States. Conducted annually by NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NOPUS implemented a redesigned sample in 2024. Details of the redesign are availabe in the *Seat Belt Use in 2024 – Overall Results* publication (NCSA, 2025), in the section titled "The 2024 NOPUS Redesign."

Figure 1. National Seat Belt Use Rate and Daytime Percentages of Unbelted Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities



Note: The FARS data was revised this year to reflect the adult front-seat passenger population observed for the NOPUS seat belt use rate by adding the following criteria: adult occupants (ages 8+) who were drivers or right-front passengers.
Source: NOPUS, FARS 2012-2023 Final File, and FARS 2024 ARF; FARS 2025 is not available yet.

[1] The FARS 2025 data on the percentage of unbelted passenger vehicle front-seat occupant fatalities during daytime will be available in early 2027.

Table 1. Seat Belt Use by Major Characteristics

Occupant Group[1]	2024		2025		2024-2025 Change		
	Belt Use[2]	95% Confidence Interval[3]	Belt Use[2]	95% Confidence Interval[3]	Change in Percentage Points	95% Confidence Interval[4]	*p* Value[5]
All Occupants	91.2%	(89.0, 92.9)	91.3%	(89.2, 93.0)	0.1	(-1.1, 1.3)	.85
Drivers	91.2%	(89.1, 93.0)	91.5%	(89.5, 93.2)	0.3	(-1.0, 1.5)	.67
Right-Front Passengers	90.8%	(88.5, 92.7)	90.2%	(87.4, 92.4)	-0.7	(-2.1, 0.8)	.35
Occupants in States With[6]							
Primary Enforcement Laws	91.7%	(89.1, 93.7)	91.9%	(89.4, 93.9)	0.2	(-1.2, 1.7)	.74
Secondary/No Enforcement Laws	89.2%	(86.7, 91.3)	88.7%	(85.7, 91.2)	-0.5	(-2.3, 1.3)	.60
Occupants Traveling on							
Expressways	95.0%	(93.9, 95.9)	94.3%	(93.0, 95.3)	-0.7	(-1.7, 0.3)	.18
Surface Streets	90.0%	(87.4, 92.2)	90.4%	(87.7, 92.5)	0.3	(-1.1, 1.8)	.65
Occupants Traveling in							
Fast Traffic	92.9%	(90.7, 94.6)	93.1%	(91.4, 94.5)	0.2	(-1.2, 1.6)	.77
Medium-Speed Traffic	90.8%	(88.7, 92.6)	91.7%	(89.5, 93.5)	0.9	(-0.8, 2.6)	.30
Slow Traffic	89.6%	(86.7, 91.9)	88.7%	(85.6, 91.3)	-0.8	(-2.7, 1.1)	.38
Occupants Traveling in							
Heavy Traffic	92.9%	(91.4, 94.2)	93.4%	(92.1, 94.4)	0.4	(-0.6, 1.5)	.41
Moderately Dense Traffic	89.9%	(86.3, 92.7)	89.2%	(85.3, 92.2)	-0.7	(-2.2, 0.8)	.35
Light Traffic	84.4%	(80.4, 87.7)	84.4%	(79.4, 88.3)	-0.1	(-4.4, 4.3)	.98
Occupants Traveling Through							
Not Clear Weather Conditions	91.4%	(88.0, 93.9)	93.1%	(91.1, 94.7)	1.7	(-1.5, 4.9)	.29
Clear Weather Conditions	91.1%	(89.0, 92.9)	91.0%	(88.7, 92.9)	-0.1	(-1.3, 1.0)	.81
Occupants in							
Passenger Cars	91.0%	(88.7, 92.8)	91.5%	(89.0, 93.5)	0.5	(-0.7, 1.7)	.40
Vans and SUVs	93.6%	(92.1, 94.9)	93.3%	(91.9, 94.5)	-0.3	(-1.3, 0.7)	.55
Pickup Trucks	85.0%	(81.5, 87.9)	85.6%	(81.6, 88.8)	0.6	(-1.8, 3.0)	.62
Occupants in							
Northeast	**92.0%**	**(87.6, 95.0)**	**93.2%**	**(88.5, 96.0)**	**1.1**	**(0.2, 2.0)**	**.02**
Midwest	**91.7%**	**(88.9, 93.8)**	**88.1%**	**(83.5, 91.5)**	**-3.6**	**(-6.7, -0.5)**	**.03**
South	88.8%	(83.8, 92.3)	89.6%	(84.9, 93.0)	0.8	(-1.6, 3.2)	.48
West	**95.0%**	**(93.5, 96.1)**	**96.2%**	**(94.5, 97.3)**	**1.2**	**(0.9, 1.5)**	**.00**
Occupants in							
Urban Areas	92.3%	(91.0, 93.5)	92.4%	(91.2, 93.5)	0.1	(-0.7, 1.0)	.72
Rural Areas	89.2%	(84.5, 92.6)	89.3%	(84.5, 92.7)	0.1	(-1.9, 2.0)	.95

Occupant Group[1]	2024		2025		2024-2025 Change		
	Belt Use[2]	95% Confidence Interval[3]	Belt Use[2]	95% Confidence Interval[3]	Change in Percentage Points	95% Confidence Interval[4]	*p* Value[5]
Occupants Traveling During							
Weekdays	90.3%	(88.0, 92.2)	90.8%	(88.4, 92.8)	0.6	(-0.9, 2.0)	.42
Weekday Rush Hours	89.6%	(86.6, 92.0)	90.4%	(87.5, 92.7)	0.8	(-0.6, 2.2)	.24
Weekday Non-Rush Hours	91.0%	(89.1, 92.6)	91.3%	(89.2, 93.1)	0.3	(-1.4, 2.1)	.70
Weekends	93.2%	(91.3, 94.8)	92.3%	(90.4, 93.8)	-1.0	(-2.5, 0.6)	.21

[1] Drivers and right-front passengers of all observed passenger vehicles.

[2] Shoulder belt use observed from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

[3] The Wilson confidence interval has the form: $\left\{(2n_{EFF}p + t^2) \pm t\sqrt{(t^2 + 4n_{EFF}pq)}/2(n_{EFF} + t^2)\right\}$, where p is the estimated percentage of Belt Use, $n_{EFF} = n/DEFF$ is the effective sample size (where n is the sample size and $DEFF$ is the design effect), $t \equiv t_{1-\alpha/2}(df)$, is a multiplier from the *t*-distribution with df degrees of freedom, and $q = 1 - p$. For percentages, these endpoints are multiplied by 100.

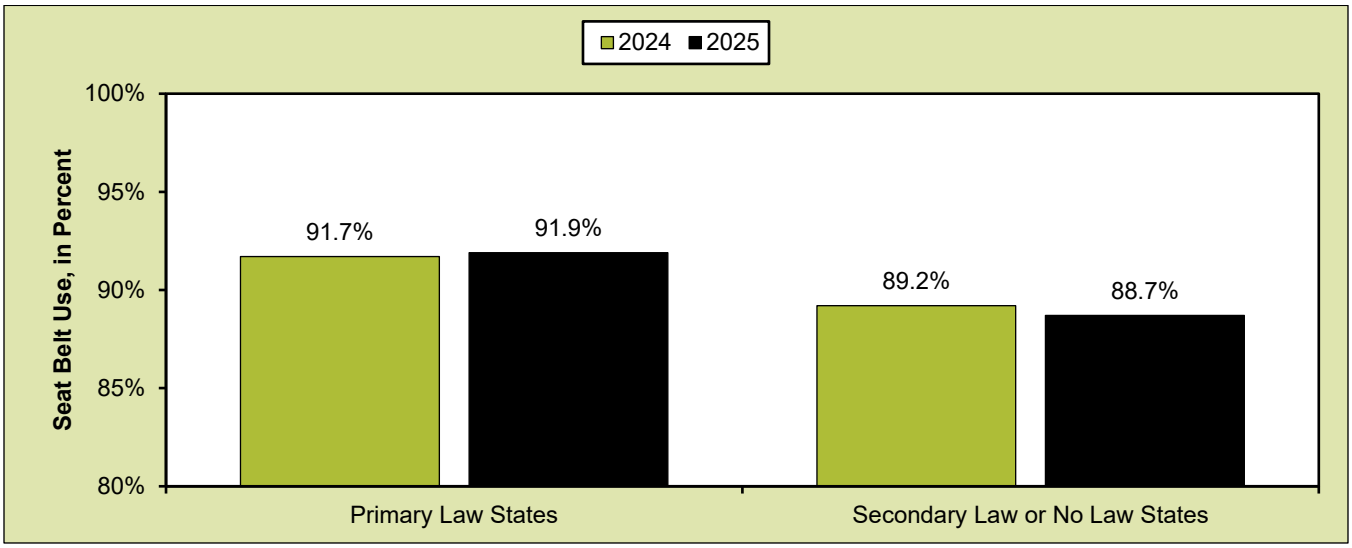
[4] The regular symmetric interval was used for the estimated change in percentage point, which is in the form: $p \pm t_{1-\alpha/2}(df)\sqrt{v(p)}$, where p is the estimated change in percentage point, $v(p)$ is its estimated variance, and $t_{1-\alpha/2}(df)$ is a multiplier from the *t*-distribution with df degrees of freedom.

[5] A p value of .05 or less indicates that there is a statistically significant difference (at the alpha = .05 level) between the year-over-year estimates for the group in question, **indicated with bold type**.

[6] Use rates reflect the laws in effect at the time of data collection.

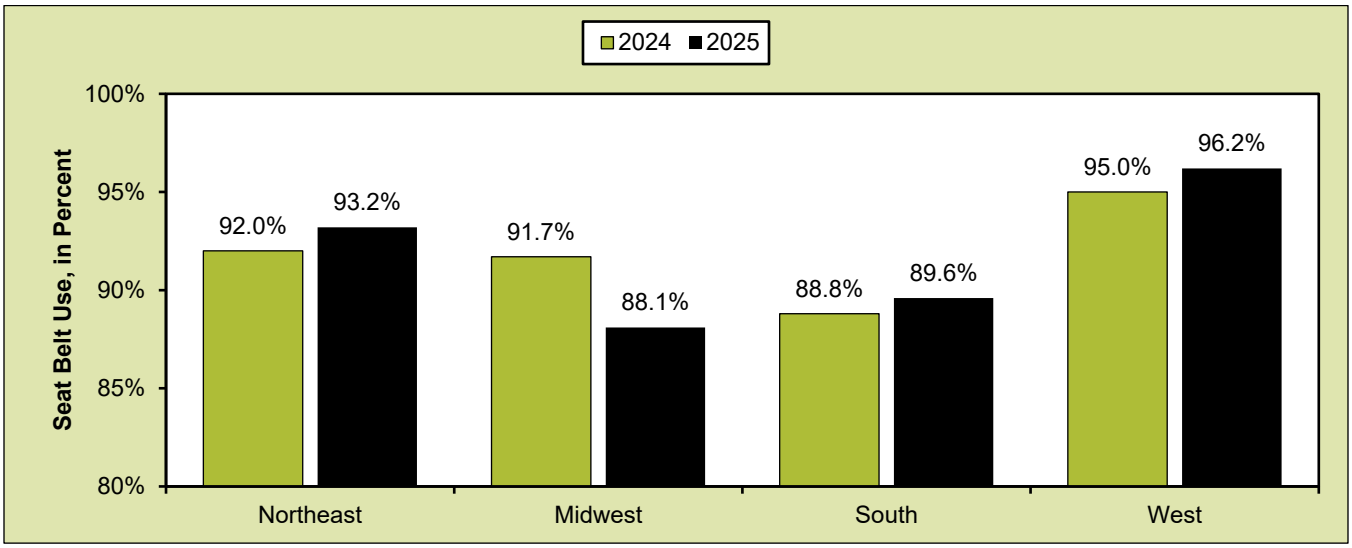
Data Source: NOPUS, NCSA, 2024, 2025

Figure 2. Seat Belt Use by Law Type



Source: NOPUS

Figure 3. Seat Belt Use by Region



Source: NOPUS

Survey Methodology

NOPUS is the only nationwide probability-based observational survey of seat belt use in the United States. The survey observes seat belt use as it actually occurs at randomly selected roadway sites and thus provides the best tracking of the extent to which passenger vehicle occupants in the United States are buckling up.

The survey data is collected by sending trained observers to probabilistically sampled roadways, who observe passenger vehicles from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Observations are made either while standing at the roadside or, in the case of expressways while riding in a vehicle in the traffic. In order to capture the true behavior of passenger vehicle occupants, the NOPUS observers do not stop vehicles or interview occupants. The 2025 NOPUS data was collected from June 2 to June 22, 2025, while the 2024 NOPUS data was collected from June 3 to June 20, 2024.

NOPUS uses a complex, multistage probability sample, statistical data editing, imputation of unknown values, and complex estimation procedures. Table 2 shows the observed sample sizes of the 2025 NOPUS Moving Traffic Survey. A total of 143,212 occupants were observed in the 120,206 vehicles. The observed occupants increased 2 percent and the observed vehicles increased 4 percent from the 2024 sample.

Because the NOPUS sites were selected probabilistically, we can test the statistical significance of the results. Statistically significant changes in seat belt use between 2024 to 2025 are identified in Table 1 by a *p* value that is .05 or less in the table's far-right column.

Table 2. Sites, Vehicles, and Occupants* Observed

Numbers of	2024	2025	Percentage Change
Sites Observed	1,629	1,624	-0.31%
Vehicles Observed	115,543	120,206	4.04%
Occupants Observed*	139,733	143,212	2.49%

* Drivers and right-front passengers only

Data collection, estimation, and variance estimation for the NOPUS are conducted by Westat, Inc., under the direction of NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis.

Definitions

Under NOPUS observation protocols, a driver or right-front passenger is considered "belted" if a shoulder belt appears to be across the front of the body.

A jurisdiction that can enforce traffic laws, such as a State or the District of Columbia, has a "primary enforcement" law if occupants can be ticketed simply for not using their seat belts. Under "secondary enforcement" laws, vehicles must be stopped for another violation, such as an expired license tag, before an occupant can be cited for seat belt nonuse. As of May 31, 2025, primary laws were in effect in 35 States and the District of Columbia, 15 States had secondary laws, and 1 State (New Hampshire) effectively has no adult seat belt law. In New Hampshire, it is legal for occupants over age 18 to ride unbelted (Highway Loss Data Institute, 2025).

The following States had "primary enforcement" seat belt laws in effect as of May 31, 2025.

AL, AK, AR, CA, CT, DE, DC, FL, GA, HI, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MI, MN, MS, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OK, OR, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, WA, WV, WI

"Expressways" are defined as roadways with limited access, while "surface streets" comprise all other roadways.

A roadway is defined to have "fast traffic" if during the observation period the average speed of passenger vehicles that pass the observer exceeds 50 mph, with "medium-speed traffic" defined as 31 to 50 mph, and "slow traffic" defined as 30 mph or slower.

A roadway is defined to have "heavy traffic" if the average number of vehicles on the roadway during the observation period is greater than 5 per lane per mile, with "moderately dense traffic" defined as greater than 1 but less than or equal to 5 vehicles per lane per mile, and "light traffic" as less than or equal to 1 vehicle per lane per mile.

As of 2018 "Not Clear Weather Conditions" includes sites where light precipitation or light fog is present.

The survey uses the following definitions of geographic regions, defined by the States below.

Northeast: CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT

Midwest: IA, KS, IL, IN, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI

South: AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV

West: AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY

Urban and rural area classifications are based on National Center for Education Statistics Locale Classification Boundaries. Urban areas are sites for which the midpoint of the selected road segment falls within territory assigned to a city, suburban, or town locale code (territory inside a Census-define urbanized area or urban cluster). Rural areas are sites for which the midpoint of the selected road segment falls within territory assigned to a rural locale code (Census defined rural territory).

"Weekday Rush hours" are defined as 7 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 to 6 p.m. on weekdays, while "Weekday Non-Rush Hours" comprise all other weekday hours (9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.).

Seat belt use rates reflect the State laws in effect at the time of data collection.

References

Highway Loss Data Institute. (2025, October). *Seat belt and child seat laws by state.* [Web page]. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. www.iihs.org/topics/seat-belts/seat-belt-law-table

National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2019, March). *Lives saved in 2017 by restraint use and minimum-drinking-age laws* (Traffic Safety Facts CrashStats. Report No. DOT HS 812 683). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812683

National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2025, October, Revised). *Seat belt use in 2024 – overall results* (Traffic Safety Facts Research Note. Report No. DOT HS 813 682). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. doi:10.21949/t29h-qq3

For More Information

For questions regarding the information presented in this document, please contact ncsaweb@dot.gov.

Additional data and information on the survey design and analysis procedures will be available in upcoming publications to be posted at https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/#/.

Research has found that lap/shoulder seat belts, when used, reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat passenger car occupants by 45 percent and the risk of moderate- to-critical injury by 50 percent. In 2017 the use of seat belts in passenger vehicles saved an estimated 14,955 lives of occupants 5 and older (NCSA, 2019). For more information on the campaign by NHTSA and the States to increase seat belt use, see www.nhtsa.gov/CIOT.

The NOPUS also observes other types of restraints, such as child restraints and motorcycle helmets, and observes driver electronic device use. This publication is part of a series that presents overall results from the survey on these topics. Please refer to the upcoming research notes and technical reports in the series, such as *Motorcycle Helmet Use in 2025 – Overall Results*, for the latest data on these topics.

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This research note and other general information on highway traffic safety may be found at: https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov.