From research to real-world impact:

THE STATE OF DISTRACTION

A national look at what competes for drivers' attention

MIT AGELAB

StateFarm®

The Challenge

Americans spend substantial time behind the wheel, where smartphones, connected devices, navigation, entertainment, passengers, and increasingly integrated vehicle technologies create more opportunities for attention to shift away from the primary driving task.

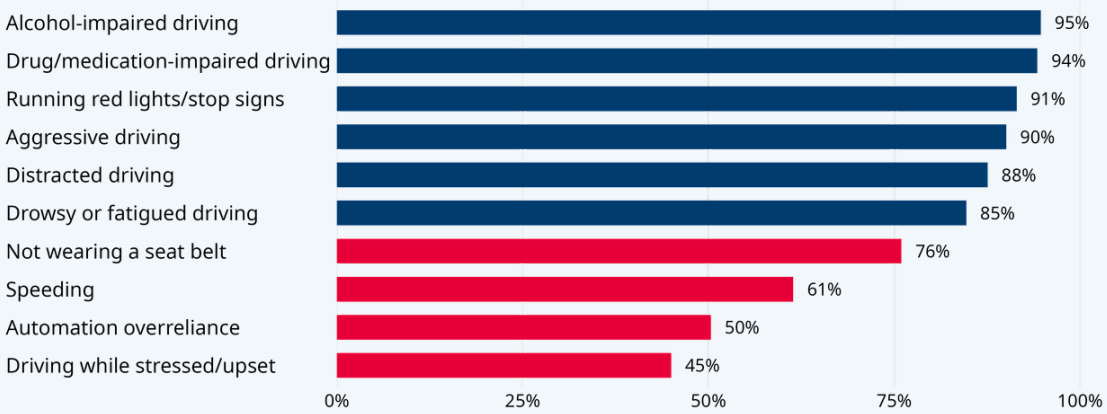
Decades of safety communications have created significant public recognition of risks such as impaired driving. However, other factors, including speeding, stress, automation over-reliance, and other forms of distraction, are still perceived as less risky.

DRIVERS DO NOT PERCEIVE ALL RISKS EQUALLY.

88%

Say distraction influences people's driving quite a bit or a great deal.

Percentage of drivers who consider each behavior to be "very" or "extremely" risky



KEY INSIGHTS

45%

Consider driving while stressed or upset highly risky.

Of drivers experience stress behind the wheel at least sometimes

Of those drivers say stress worsens their ability to pay attention

DISTRACTION INCLUDES WHAT DRIVERS DO AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL, COGNITIVE, AND EMOTIONAL STATE.

The Research

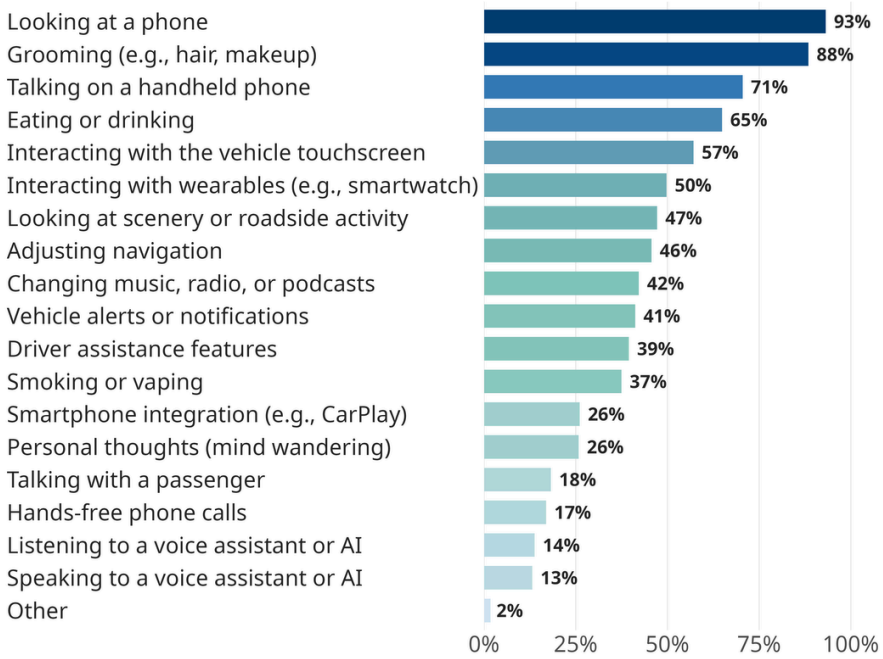
Led by Dr. Pnina Gershon, a research scientist at the MIT AgeLab Center for Transportation & Logistics and founder of the MIT AWARE initiative*, the team, in collaboration with State Farm®**, launched a multi-year research program focused on driver distraction and supporting safer driving behavior.

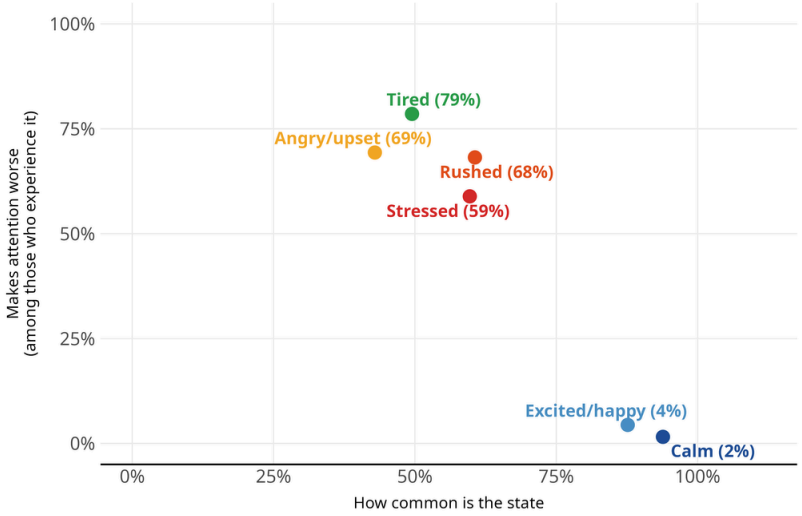
Drivers tend to define distraction narrowly, often thinking of it as something a driver is actively doing, such as texting, using a phone, or interacting with a screen. Visual/manual activities, such as looking at the phone, grooming, talking on a handheld phone, or eating, are the most widely recognized distractions. In contrast, other features like the use of voice assistants and driver assistance features are considered less distracting activities.

49% **Of the drivers reported that their attention is split between driving and something else at least sometimes.**

What do drivers consider distracting?

Share of U.S. drivers who consider each of the following a distraction (multiple responses allowed)





Drivers recognize that their mental and emotional state can affect their ability to pay attention to the driving task.

Drivers are much more likely to say that feeling tired, angry, rushed, and stressed makes their ability to pay attention to driving worse.

Drivers rarely report that feeling calm or feeling excited/happy worsens their attention while driving.

Driving situations most likely to trigger strong emotions.

Share of US drivers who say each situation is likely to make them feel strong emotions that may influence their ability to pay attention to the road while driving.

79% Aggressive drivers

66% Heavy traffic

63% Running late

58% Poor weather

57% Vehicle malfunctions

53% Getting lost or missing a turn

MIT AGELAB

StateFarm®

The Impact

Drivers report a wide range of demands that compete with the primary driving task for their attention, including passengers, navigation, vehicle technology, personal thoughts, stress, fatigue, and emotion. Distraction is not defined by a single behavior or device. A driver's attention can be shaped by what they are doing, how they are feeling, and what is happening around them. Future driver-support strategies can consider not only whether attention has shifted, but also the driver state and context surrounding that shift, creating opportunities for support before, during, and after the drive.

THE STATE OF DISTRACTION IS BROADER THAN A SINGLE DEVICE OR BEHAVIOR

About the study: Data for this research were collected by NORC at the University of Chicago from their AmeriSpeak Panel, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. To be eligible for the study, respondents had to report that they had a current, valid driver's license and drive one or more days per week on average. Surveys were conducted online and in English between July 16-27, 2026. The final sample was comprised of 1,203 Americans, aged 18 and up. During analysis, survey responses were weighted to represent the US population.

About AWARE* at the MIT AgeLab: AWARE is a research initiative focused on developing intelligent vehicle systems that can better understand drivers and support them in real-world conditions. Based at the MIT AgeLab and Center for Transportation & Logistics, AWARE brings together naturalistic driving research, advanced simulation, behavioral science, and artificial intelligence to study how driver state, behavior, and context interact across the driving journey. Its research examines areas such as distraction, fatigue, impairment, workload, automation use, driver monitoring, and human-machine interaction, with the goal of moving beyond simply detecting driver behavior toward systems that can sense, interpret, respond, and promote safer and more appropriate driver engagement. Through this work, AWARE is building the evidence and methods needed to support the next generation of adaptive, human-centered mobility technologies.

About State Farm:** For over 100 years, the mission of State Farm has been to help people manage the risks of everyday life, recover from the unexpected and realize their dreams. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company and its affiliates are the largest providers of auto and home insurance combined in the United States. Its more than 19,200 agent offices and over 62,000 employees serve over 96 million policies and accounts – including auto, fire, life, health, commercial policies and financial services accounts. Commercial auto insurance, along with coverage for renters, business owners, boats and motorcycles, is also available. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company is the parent of the State Farm family of companies. State Farm is ranked No. 32 on the 2025 Fortune 500 list of largest companies. For more information, please visit http://www.statefarm.com.

Interested in shaping what comes next?
Visit us at **https://ctl.mit.edu/aware-initiative** and **https://agelab.mit.edu/**