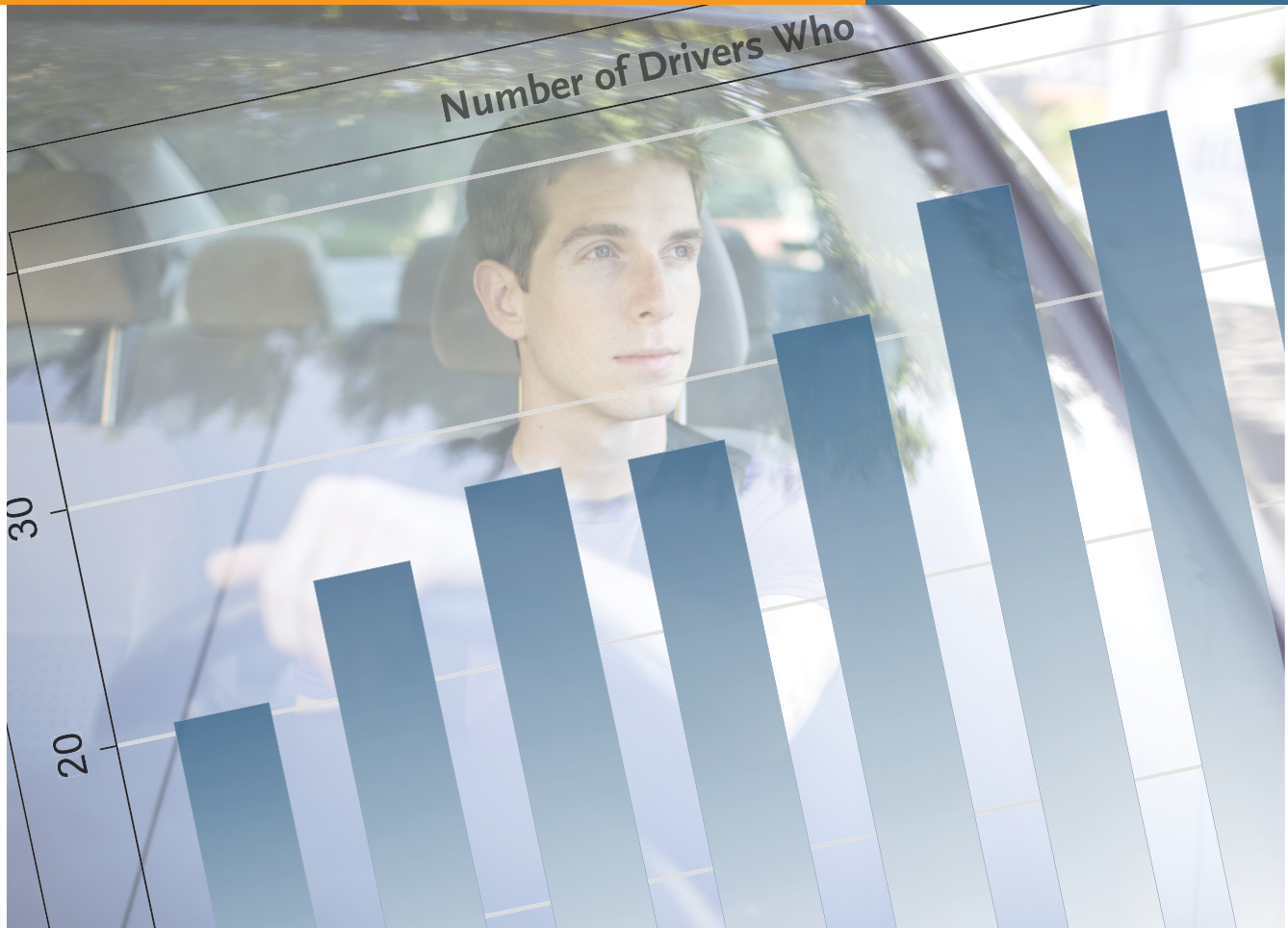




THE ROAD SAFETY MONITOR 2011

DISTRACTED DRIVING TRENDS



The knowledge source for safe driving

The Traffic Injury Research Foundation

The mission of the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) is to reduce traffic-related deaths and injuries. TIRF is a national, independent, charitable road safety research institute. Since its inception in 1964, TIRF has become internationally recognized for its accomplishments in a wide range of subject areas related to identifying the causes of road crashes and developing programs and policies to address them effectively.

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DISTRACTED DRIVING IN CANADA: TRENDS

This fact sheet summarizes national results from *The Road Safety Monitor (RSM)*, 2011 on distracted driving in Canada. The RSM is an annual public opinion survey conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) under sponsorship from the Brewers Association of Canada and Transport Canada. The survey takes the pulse of the nation on key road safety issues by means of a telephone and on-line survey of a random, representative sample of Canadian drivers.

Previous RSM surveys have touched on driver distraction in general. More recently, the increased use in cell phones has led to a growing interest in driver distraction involving the use of cell phones. Of interest, results of the 2010 RSM on distracted driving revealed that the majority of Canadians (72.2%) think about cell phones first when asked about distracted driving, meaning that a majority equate it with cell phones. These previous results suggest that Canadians may not be fully aware of the broad range of activities that can distract a driver. In order to build on previous RSM results regarding distraction, this current fact sheet describes results from the 2011 RSM with a focus on trends in cell phone use and driving.

How often do Canadians use their cell phone while driving? In 2011, Canadians were asked how often they use their cell phones while driving. More specifically, respondents were asked how often they talk on their hands-free phone while driving, how often they talk on their hand-held phone while driving, and how often they text while driving. This question was also asked in 2010. In 2011 it was found that 18.1% of respondents reported that they often talk on their hands-free phone while driving, 4.8% indicated that they often talk on their hand-held phone while driving, and 4.0% reported that they often text message on their phone while driving. For comparison, in 2010, 19.9% reported that they often talk on their hands-free phone while driving and this was not significantly different from the 18.1% reporting this in 2011 (Robertson et al. 2011).

Significantly more Canadians (8.0%) indicated that they often talk on their hand-held phone while driving in 2010 compared to 2011 (4.0%) (Robertson et al. 2011). Finally, in 2010, 5.2% reported that they often text message on their phone while driving which is not significantly different from the 4.8% reported in 2011 (Robertson et al. 2011). In sum, fewer Canadians report talking on their hand-held phone while driving in 2011 compared to 2010. However, there was no difference in the percentage of Canadians reporting talking on their hands-free phone while driving, and no difference in the percentage reporting texting while driving in 2011 compared to 2010.

How many Canadians use their cell phone while driving in a seven day period? Respondents were also asked how many minutes they spent using a cell phone while driving during the past seven days. In 2011, it was found that the majority of Canadians (63.7%) reported that they had not used their cell phone while driving in the last seven days which means 36.3% had.

This question was also asked in previous RSM's from the years 2001 through to 2006 as well as in 2010. Results based on these trends are shown in Figure 1. It appears from these data that reported cell phone use while driving during the past seven days had been slowly increasing from 2001 to 2006: in 2001, 20.5% of respondents indicated that they had used their cell phone while driving in the past seven days; in 2002, this percentage increased to 25%, then in 2003 to 27.5%, and in 2004 to 32%; it decreased slightly in 2005 to 31.1%, although this difference between 2004 and 2005 is not significant, and the increasing trend continues in 2006 to 37%. This information was not available for the years 2007 through to 2009 as the question was not asked during these years, so it is not possible to say whether this trend continued. However, in 2010 the percentage reporting cell phone use while driving within the last seven days (36.8%) was close to what was reported in 2006 (37%), as was the case with the percentage reported in 2011 (36.3%). It appears the trend may have stabilized between 2006 and 2011 after an increase from 2001 through 2006. It should be noted that many jurisdictions began introducing laws banning the use of hand-held phones in particular. Specifically, Newfoundland and Labrador introduced a ban on hand-held phone use and texting while driving in 2003; Quebec and Nova Scotia introduced their ban on hand-held phones while driving in 2008; Ontario introduced their ban on hand-held phones while driving in 2009; British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba introduced hand-held phone bans in 2010; and the Yukon, New Brunswick, and Alberta introduced hand-held bans in 2011 (Alberta's law also encompasses other distracted driving activities including reading and writing). Albeit speculative, such laws may have influenced the trend. The effect of such laws, however have not yet been thoroughly researched. This will have to be further monitored.

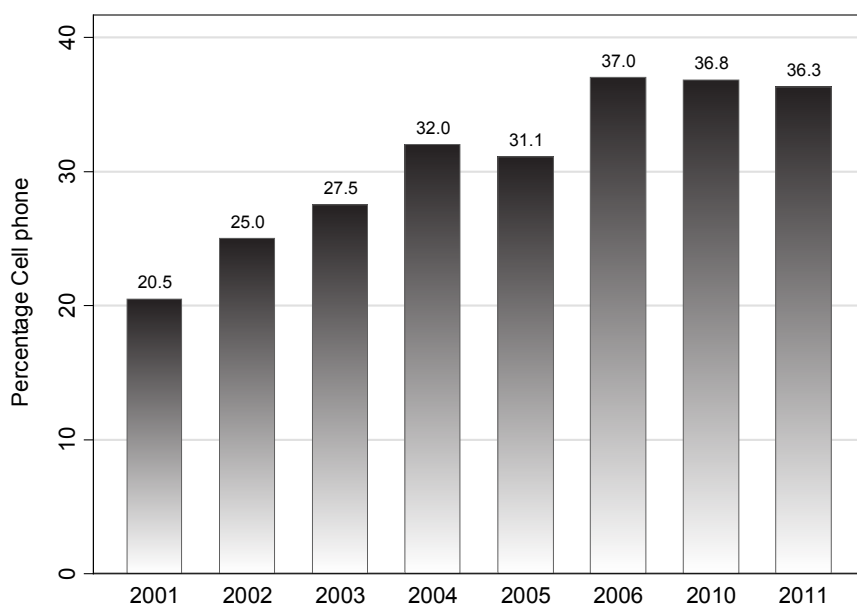


Figure 1: Percentage who used a cell phone while driving in last seven days by year

How many minutes do Canadian drivers spend using their cell phones? Of the 36.3% of respondents who indicated they have used their cell phone while driving in the past seven days (see Figure 1), the majority (65.2%) said they used their cell phone for 10 minutes or less in the past week. About one fifth (22.1%) of respondents indicated they used their cell phone for between 11 and 30 minutes and the remaining 12.7% used their phone for more than 30 minutes while driving in the past week. This question was also asked in previous RSM's from the years 2001 through to 2006 as well as in 2010.

In terms of trends for frequency of use, there was some variation in the trend from 2001 to 2006 (see Figure 2). Of those who reported using their cell phone while driving during the last seven days, in 2001 57.5% used their cell phone for 10 minutes or less. This increased to 69.4% in 2006. In 2010, the percentage was lower at 66.1%, and was even lower in 2011 at 65.2%. Overall, this represents a significant increase from 57.5% in 2001 to 65.2% in 2011.

Consistent with an overall increase in those using their cell phone for 10 minutes or less a week, there seems to be an overall decrease in those using their cell phones for more than 30 minutes from 2001 to 2006. In 2001 19.4% of respondents reported that they used their cell phone for more than 30 minutes in the previous week which decreased to 15.9% in 2006. In 2010, this percentage was even lower at 13.5% and decreased again to 12.7% in 2011. Again, the difference between 2001 (19.4%) and 2011 (12.7%) was significant. There was no clear trend in the percentage of Canadians using their cell phones for between 11 and 30 minutes over this same time period and no significant difference between 2001 (23.1%) and 2011 (22.1%) was found.

In sum, when comparing data from 2001 to 2011, the percentage of respondents reporting using their cell phone for 10 minutes or less a week increased significantly. Consistent with this increase in using a cell phone while driving for 10 minutes or less, there was a significant decrease in those using their cell phones for more than 30 minutes in 2001 compared to 2011. As for those who reported using their cell phones for between 11 and 30 minutes, the percentage was nearly the same in 2001 (23.1%) compared to 2011 (22.1%). So, while more Canadians admit to using their cell phone while driving today (36.3%) compared to 2001 (20.5%), a greater proportion of those who admit to this are using their phones for shorter periods of time compared to 2001 (65.2% vs. 57.5%).

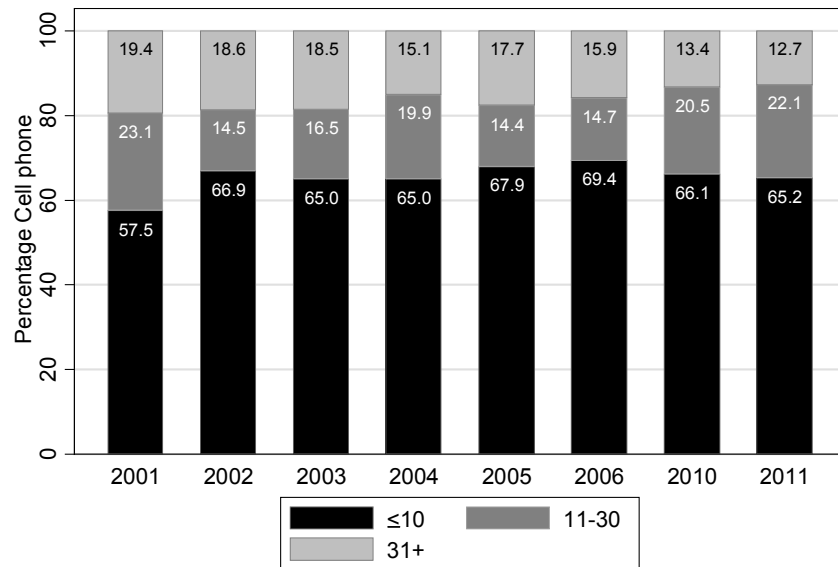


Figure 2: Minutes of cell phone use while driving in past seven days by year

How many Canadians who are distracted have to brake or steer to avoid a crash? Respondents were also asked how many times, if any, they have had to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision because they were distracted in the last month. Results from the current survey show that less than one quarter of respondents (22.9%) reported that they had to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision because they were distracted by something outside their vehicle and 5.9% reported that they had to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision because they were distracted by something inside their vehicle. Furthermore, of the 22.9% of respondents who indicated that they had to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision in the last month because they were distracted by something outside their vehicle, 49.5% had to do so on one occasion, 32.1% had to do so on two occasions, and the remaining 18.4% had to brake or steer between three and 10 such occasions in the last month. As for those who had to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision because they were distracted by something inside their vehicle (5.9%) in the last month, 48.1% had to do so on one occasion, 28.7% had to do so on two occasions, and 23.2% had to do so between three and 15 occasions.

Canadians were also asked about near misses due to distraction in 2006 and in 2010. No other years of data are available. Results from the 2010 RSM found that 27.3% had to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision because they were distracted by something outside their vehicle and 12.6% had to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision because they were distracted by something inside their vehicle in the last month.

Results from the 2006 RSM were similar to those in 2011 when asked about distractions outside the vehicle. To illustrate, in 2006, 20.2% had to brake or steer to avoid a crash because of a distraction outside the vehicle compared to 22.9% in 2011. With regards to distractions inside the vehicle in 2006, the percentage having to brake or steer to avoid a crash (9.5%) was between the percentages reported in

2011 (5.9%) and 2010 (12.6%) (Vanlaar et al. 2007). Although there was a change in survey method from a telephone survey in 2006 to part telephone and part online in 2010 and 2011, no significant difference as a result of changing the methodology was found. More data are needed and will be collected in the future to monitor trends.

Where does the issue of distracted driving sit on the public agenda? Canadians were asked about a series of specific road safety concerns and how serious they perceive those problems to be. In 2011, 73.5% rated distracted drivers as a very or extremely serious problem.

This question was also asked from 2001 to 2008 and in 2010 (see Figure 3). Note that the wording of this question changed from 2005 to 2006. Specifically, from 2001 through to 2005 the question read, “drivers distracted by such things as tape decks, CD’s or radios”. In 2006 this changed to simply, “distracted drivers” and this change may be reflected in respondents’ answers with the jump from 41.1% in 2005 to 68.7% in 2006. As can be seen in Figure 3, concern about drivers distracted by such things as tape decks, CD’s or radios slowly decreased from 39.7% in 2001 to 33.4% in 2004, and increased to 41.1% in 2005.

Beginning in 2006, when asked about level of concern about distracted drivers in general, this decreased from 68.7% in 2006 to 61.7% in 2008. This question was not asked in 2009 so it is not possible to know if this downward trend continued in 2009 or if it began to increase, as the percentage increased to 75.2% in 2010 and decreased slightly to 73.5% in 2011. So while the years 2006 to 2011 are not directly comparable to the years 2001 to 2005, there may be an increase in concern given that the percentages in 2010 and 2011 are higher than those from 2006 to 2008. These results will have to be further monitored to confirm whether concern about distracted drivers is in fact on the rise or not.

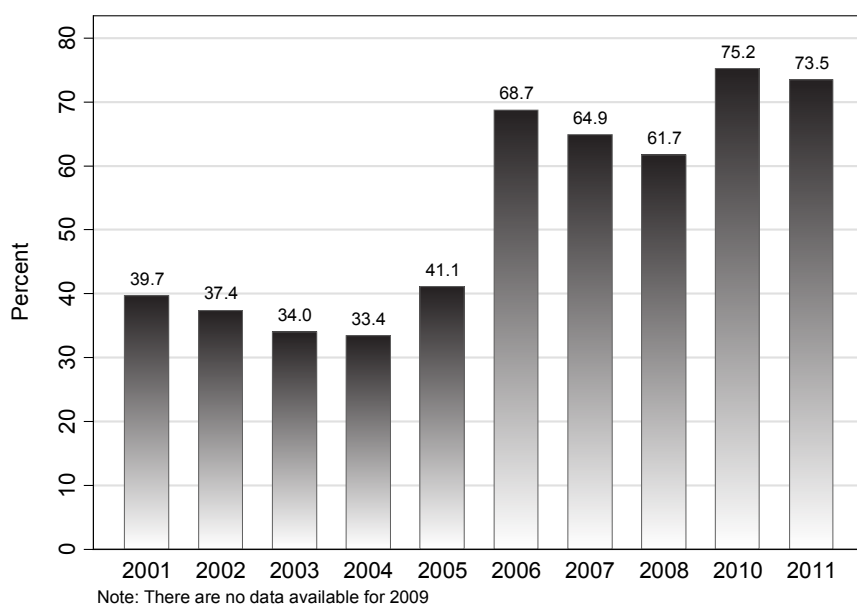


Figure 3. Percentage that perceive distracted drivers as a very or extremely serious problem (From 2001-2005: “Drivers distracted by such things as tape decks, CD’s or radios”; from 2006-2011: “Distracted drivers”)

Where does the issue of drivers using cell phones sit on the public agenda? In terms of concern about drivers using cell phones, the percentage rating this as a very or extremely serious problem was 66.2% in 2011. This question was also asked from 2001 to 2008 and in 2010. Figure 4 shows that the percentage rating drivers using cell phones as a very or extremely serious problem has remained relatively stable since 2001 when the percentage was 66.8% compared to 66.2% in 2011. In 2008 concern about drivers using their cell phones was at its lowest at 60.1% and at its highest in 2010 at 72.1% (see Figure 4). Unfortunately, no data are available for 2009. These trends will have to be further monitored to determine whether this drop in 2011 represents a true decrease or not.

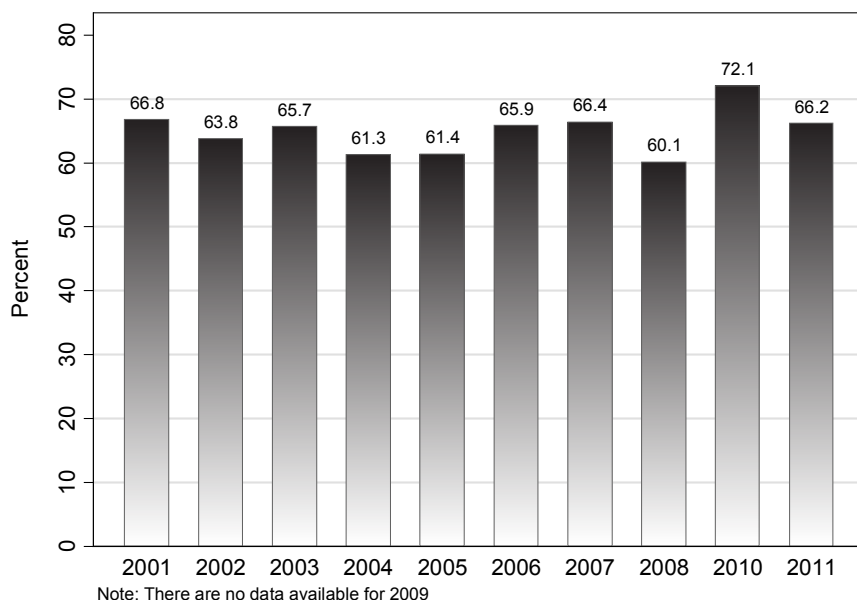


Figure 4. Percentage that perceive drivers using cell phones as a very or extremely serious problem

Where does the issue of drivers texting messages on their phone sit on the public agenda? When asked about drivers texting messages on their phone while driving, the percentage rating this as a very or extremely serious problem was 85.1% in 2011. This question was first asked in 2010 where the percentage was 90.2%. Compared to other road safety issues such as drinking and driving and excessive speeding, in 2011, for the second year in a row, the issue that most Canadians expressed concern about was texting while driving. Of interest, a 2011 and 2010 poll by the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) also found that texting while driving has risen to the top of Canadians' road safety concerns for the second year in a row. This trend will have to be monitored further.

Level of support for various measures. Canadians were asked about the extent to which they agree with the use of various measures for dealing with distracted driving. In 2011, 61.7% agreed that greater awareness and education efforts are needed to alert drivers to the problem of distracted driving. This question was asked in 2006 and in 2010. No other years of data are available. In the 2006 RSM this percentage was 64.1% and in 2010, it was 70.2%.

Canadians were also asked whether they agree that the use of cell phones while driving should be banned. As can be seen in Figure 5, 66.8% of Canadians in 2011 agreed or strongly agreed with this. This question was also asked from 2001 to 2005 and in 2010. Data regarding this question were not available from 2006 through to 2009. Figure 5 shows that in 2001, this percentage was 61.6% and decreased to 53.5% in 2005. However, in 2010 more Canadians agreed with this measure, as 67.5% agreed or strongly agreed that the use of cell phones should be banned, and in 2011, 66.8% agreed with this measure. Note that the difference between 2005 and 2010 and the difference between 2005 and 2011 were both significant. In sum, it appears that many Canadians agree that the use of cell phones while driving should be banned and this has increased significantly since 2005. These data will have to be further monitored to determine if this trend continues.

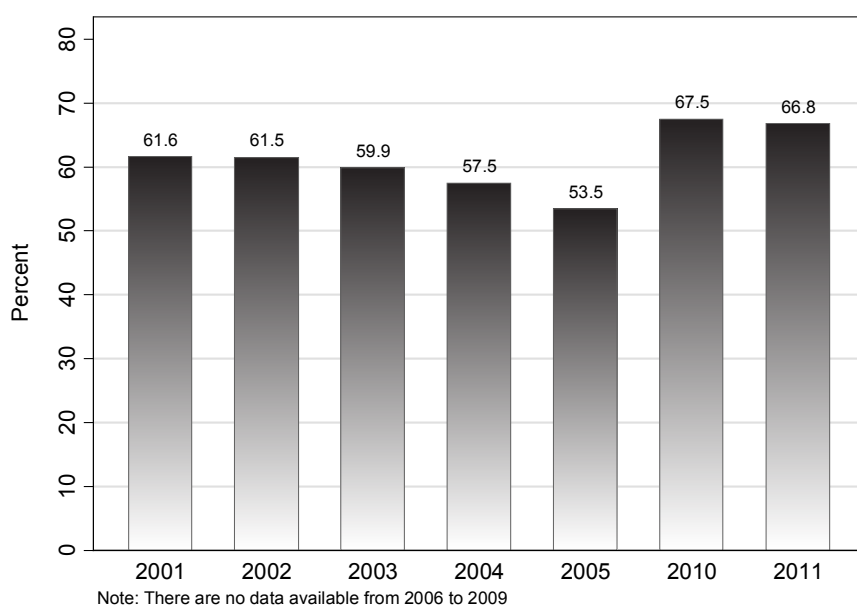


Figure 5. Percentage who agree or strongly agree that the use of cell phones while driving should be banned

About the poll. These results are based on the RSM, an annual public opinion poll developed and conducted by TIRF. A total of 1,208 Canadians completed the poll in September and October of 2011. Results can be considered accurate within plus or minus 2.8%, 19 times out of 20. The majority of the questions were answered using a scale from one to six where six indicated high agreement, concern, or support and one indicated low agreement, concern or support. For the third time, some respondents were contacted by phone (303 in 2011; 401 in 2010; 600 in 2009) and some on-line (905 in 2011; 800 in 2010; 600 in 2009).

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