

PRESSE RELEASE

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PUBLICATION OF THE EUROPEAN BAROMETER SURVEY  
OF RESPONSIBLE DRIVING

## Connected objects, rudeness and, drowsiness: scientists explain our driving behaviour

**On the eve of the summer holiday departures, the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation is releasing the results of the 5th European Barometer survey of responsible driving. How do drivers view their own driving ? What is their relation to connected objects ? How do they prevent the risk of drowsiness at the wheel? As passengers, are they active to positively influence their driver ? Conducted by Ipsos on a sample of 11,038 persons in 11 European Union countries, this vast survey has identified Europeans' driving practices to help direct safety messages more effectively in each country. This year, the partner scientists of the magazine *Cerveau & Psycho* (Brain & Psychology) provide us with the keys to understanding how the brain works when we are driving.**

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## Connected objects omnipresent for European drivers

Europeans see distraction as one of the main causes of road fatalities (54%) along with driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs (56%). It is even the main cause of fatalities quoted in the Netherlands (72%), Italy (69%), United Kingdom and Greece (57%).

**Awareness of this risk is so great that 84% of respondents say they are willing to never telephone again while driving – with or without a hands-free kit – to bring down the number of road fatalities. Even so, many still use connected objects when driving, with practices varying between countries:**

- ▶ **45% telephone using Bluetooth** (53% in Greece but 38% in the United Kingdom)
- ▶ **41% set their GPS while driving** (51% in Germany and Poland but 29% in Spain)
- ▶ **30% telephone without a hands-free kit** (51% in Greece but 12% in the United Kingdom)
- ▶ **30% use an ear bud, ear phones or headphones** (52% in Greece but 12% in France)
- ▶ **24% send and receive texts and emails** (33% in Italy but 13% in the United Kingdom). Even 38% of European drivers aged under 35 engage in this dangerous behaviour;
- ▶ **16% use an app to let other drivers know about road and traffic incidents** (27% in Poland but 7% in the United Kingdom).

**It is therefore not surprising that 7% of Europeans (13% in Italy but 4% in the United Kingdom and Slovakia) admit having had – or almost having had – an accident because they were using their mobile phone while driving.**

## What the scientists say When drivers use their smartphone, they quite literally forget they are driving

*“A mobile phone within a driver’s reach considerably complicates the situation because smartphones have brought into our cars a whole world that was not there before in this environment. Refocussing our attention is much slower and far less efficient when we are engaged in using our smartphone. Carefully reading a short text immediately reduces our awareness to what is happening around us as a result of a phenomenon that leads to our field of attention being significantly less. Furthermore, as soon as we use a smartphone, driving is relegated to second place of what we refer to as prospective memory, that is, the memory of what you have to do “afterwards”. As strange as it may seem, you temporarily forget that you are driving and this state of forgetfulness can be extended under the effect of what I have called “attention captivation”, that is, a sequence of cognitive, motor and emotional reactions that increases proportionally to the extent that what we are reading on the screen interests us or concerns us personally<sup>1</sup>.”*

*Jean-Philippe Lachaux,  
Director of Research, Lyon Neuroscience Research Centre,  
Cerebral Dynamics and Cognition team*

1. Find out more: *Cerveau&Psycho*, No 101 July-August, “SMS, téléphone, GPS: fatales distractions...” (SMS, phone calls and Satnav represent deadly distractions), in the special issue of “Pour un cerveau responsable au volant” (How to keep your head behind the wheel), in partnership with the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation.

## Dangerous and uncivil behaviour on Europe's roads

A majority of European drivers admit breaking certain basic road rules:

- ▶ 89% admit they exceed the speed limit (93% in Sweden and Germany)
- ▶ 63% admit they fail to keep a safe distance with the car in front (78%);
- ▶ 56% forget to indicate when overtaking or turning (63% in France)
- ▶ 55% drive in the middle or outside lane despite the inside lane being free (78% in Greece)
- ▶ 55% forget to slow down around road works (67% in Belgium) despite the potential risk for contractors
- ▶ 21% admit that they sometimes drive without attaching their seatbelt (49% in Greece)
- ▶ 11% drive in the emergency stopping lane on the motorway despite it being reserved exclusively for emergency stopping and emergency services (27% in Greece).

One in 10 European drivers still say they knowingly get behind the wheel when over the legal alcohol limit and 4% even when they feel the effects of alcohol (28% in Greece and 23% in Belgium where the limit is 0.5 g/l). This indulgence has serious direct consequences as 7% of European drivers have had – or have nearly had – an accident attributable to excessive alcohol consumption (9% in Greece and 8% in Belgium).

Moreover, while **81% of European drivers say they have already been afraid of another driver's aggressive behaviour** (87% for French, Spanish and Greek drivers), all aspects of rudeness listed in the questionnaire have increased, without exception, but with notable differences between countries:

- ▶ 56% (+2 pts compared with 2017) admit to swearing at other drivers (71% of Greeks compared with 28% of Swedes)
- ▶ 50% (+4 pts) admit to sounding their horn excessively at drivers who annoy them (66% of Spaniards compared with 31% of Swedes)
- ▶ 34% (+3 pts) undertake on the inside on the motorway (46% of Dutch compared with 17% of Slovaks)
- ▶ 32% (+1 pt) admit to deliberately tailgating the car in front when the driver annoys them (52% of Greeks compared with 23% of Slovaks)
- ▶ 17% (+2 pts) are quick to get out of their car to argue with another driver (29% of Poles compared with 8% of British).

The drivers considered the most courteous are the Swedes, followed by the Slovaks and the British. The Greeks are considered the rudest by their neighbours, just ahead of the Spanish, Italians and French.

## What the scientists say Narcissism and "cockpit effect": an explosive cocktail

*"Not all drivers have the same level of aggressive and rude response. Personality factors can explain why some are more prone to this behaviour than others. For example, feeling that someone has not given away when you have priority or that the driver has cut in showing a lack of respect are attitudes that are probably exacerbated in people with a high degree of narcissism.*

*Additionally, the fact of being seated in a closed space gives a feeling of anonymity and creates a psychological distance from others, which may have considerable consequences. This is the so-called "cockpit effect", a factor that is conducive to aggressive behaviour. Several studies have also shown that traffic density creates the frustration of not being able to achieve a goal as a result of being blocked by an obstacle. This can provoke a series of negative emotions that are conducive to the release of hostile thoughts<sup>(2)</sup>."*

*Laurent Begue,  
Professor of Social Psychology Grenoble-2 University  
Member of the Institut Universitaire de France  
Director of the Maison des sciences de l'Homme-Alpes*

2. Find out more: *Cerveau&Psycho*, No 101 July-August, "Quand la voiture rend agressif" (When cars cause aggressiveness), in special issue of "Pour un cerveau responsable au volant" (How to keep your head behind the wheel), in partnership with the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation.

## “The others are the dangerous ones”

Even though Europeans admit that they behave dangerously, they judge their own attitude behind the wheel very positively. 97% use at least one positive adjective to describe their driving and they claim to be attentive (74%), calm (57%) and courteous (26%). Contrariwise, very few claim to be stressed (11%) and virtually never aggressive (3%), irresponsible (1%) or dangerous (1%). **But, when judging other drivers’ behaviour, European drivers are far less indulgent, as 83% use at least one negative adjective to describe others’ driving:** 47% consider them irresponsible, 34% stressed, 31% aggressive and 30% dangerous.

## What the scientists say Why do we always think we are the “best driver”?

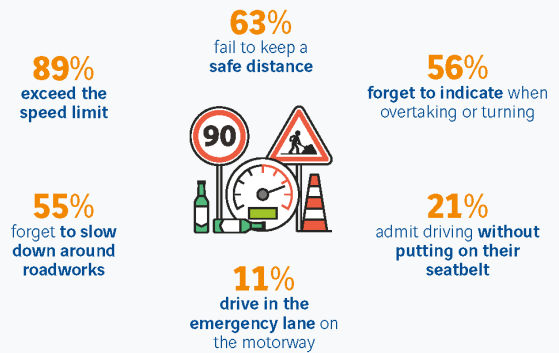
*“Each in our own way, we think that we drive better and more safely than the others. And yet this is a cognitive bias called “auto-complacency” that leads people to rely on internal factors to explain positive events and external factors to explain negative events. When driving, we consider ourselves cautious and careful “an internal characteristic” yet at the same time we adopt behaviour that is not cautious (because it is dictated by the circumstances in which we find ourselves – external explanation). In short, “I am a careful driver but, on that day, I had to speed otherwise I would have missed my plane”.*

*Another form of rationality explains this paradox. This is an optimism bias that leads a driver to think that positive events are more likely to happen to him or her than to other drivers. For example, when we think that accidents only happen to others, it is because we are victim of a cognitive bias: comparative optimism. Auto-complacency bias and comparative optimism are traps inherent in our psychologies that should warn drivers to stop abnegating their responsibility and thinking that they will always come out on top<sup>(3)</sup>.”*

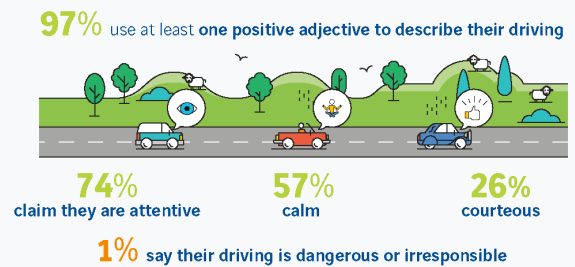
Stéphanie Bordel,

Social psychology researcher at CEREMA<sup>(4)</sup>, and Alain Somat,  
Professor of Social Psychology at Rennes-2 University

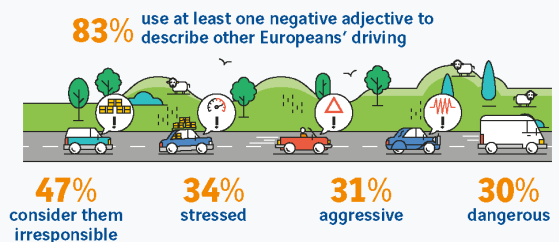
WHILE MANY EUROPEAN DRIVERS BREAK THE ROAD RULES...



...THEY TEND TO JUDGE THEIR OWN DRIVING POSITIVELY...



...AND IT IS “ALWAYS THE OTHERS” WHO ARE DANGEROUS



Source: 2018 European Barometer on Responsible Driving, VINCI Autoroutes Foundation and Ipsos.

3. Find out more: Cerveau&Psycho, No 101 July-August, “L’illusion du ‘meilleur conducteur’” (The better driver illusion), in Special Issue “Pour un cerveau responsable au volant” (How to keep your head behind the wheel), in partnership with the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation.

4. CEREMA: Centre of studies and expertise on risks, environment, mobility and planning.

## Driver drowsiness: lack of sleep compounded when leaving on holidays

28% (+1 pt) of European drivers say they sleep six hours or less on weeknights, that is one hour less than recommended by specialist sleep doctors. **This chronic sleep debt is made worse around holiday departures because of the associated additional lack of sleep:** 80% of European drivers go to bed later or get up earlier than usual (almost 9 Polish drivers out of 10), 76% finish getting ready later on the eve of their departure (88% of Greeks) and 67% leave at night time (almost 8 Poles out of 10).

This situation is compounded **by excessively long drive times that continue to grow with the average pause taken after 3 hours 16 minutes driving**, 2 minutes more than in 2017 and 10 more than in 2016 (and up to 4 hours 16 minutes for Poles, but 2 hours 48 minutes for French drivers). Only 26% of Europeans comply with the recommended pause every two hours. Additionally, **the rate of driver drowsiness-related incidents is on the rise:** 26% (+1 pt) of Europeans feel they may have dozed off for a few seconds while driving (33% in France compared with 16% in the United Kingdom, and 16% (+2 pts) admit having veered into the emergency stopping lane or onto the road shoulder as a result of a moment of distraction or dozing off (26% in France compared with 9% in Greece and the Netherlands).

These driver drowsiness-related events **are far from being anecdotal, as 9% of Europeans have had – or have almost had – an accident as a result of dozing off** (13% in Greece). This is more than the accidents or near accidents caused by telephoning while driving or the excessive consumption of alcohol (7%). **And yet, 36% of Europeans identify drowsiness as one of the main causes of fatalities on motorways. For the French, who seem to be particularly aware of this risk, drowsiness remains the most frequently quoted (52%) cause of motorway fatalities, and rightly so.**

Best practices for combating the risk of driver drowsiness are adopted by many Europeans but unfortunately too few still fail to comply. In fact, the figures are slightly worse:

- ▶ **83% (-1 pt) of Europeans schedule their departure time to coincide with when they are the least tired** (94% of Greeks but only 62% of Dutch)
- ▶ **75% (-2 pts) set back their departure time when they are too tired** (87% of Poles but only 45% of Dutch)
- ▶ **72% (-1 pt) swap drivers during the trip** (75% of Swedes but only 59% of British)
- ▶ **58% (-2 pts) have a nap during their break**, with the Belgians (83%) setting the example, but only four Greeks out of 10 adopt this practice, despite it being the most effective way of preventing driver drowsiness.

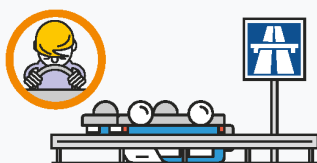
Despite 17 hours without sleep having the same effect as 0.5 g of alcohol in the blood, driver fatigue does not yet seem to be taken as seriously by European drivers for the protection of others, **as 38% of Europeans do not insist on preventing an overly tired driver from getting behind the wheel** (compared with 16% for someone over the drink driving limit).

### Q What the scientists say

*“Problems of distraction and inattentiveness are compounded by fatigue which reduces the effectiveness of the frontal part of the brain – the prefrontal cortex – one of the functions of which is to rapidly manage the time for allocating attention resources as a function of an overview of the current situation.”*

Jean-Philippe Lachaux, Director of Research,  
Lyon Neuroscience Research Centre

#### RISKY BEHAVIOUR AND STILL TOO MANY INCIDENTS



**44%** admit **having got behind the wheel** because they had to, **despite feeling very tired**

**26%** have already felt they may have **dozed off for a few seconds while driving**

**16%** have already **crossed into the emergency lane**

**9%** have **had or almost had an accident due to drowsiness**

#### BEST PRACTICES THAT NEED TO BE MORE WIDESPREAD

**83%** schedule their departure time for when they know they will be the least tired

**58%** stop on the way for a nap; the most effective way of beating drowsiness

**75%** set back their departure time when they are tired

**62%** insist on an **overly tired driver** taking the wheel

**72%** swap drivers during a trip

## Passengers can play a crucial role in improving driver behaviour

**Almost 1 European driver out of 2 does not think that the presence of passengers can influence their driving:** 49% say that they are no more or less careful when driving alone or with passengers.

**And yet, the passenger is sometimes witness to the driver's behaviour and also a protective observer ready to intervene for his or her own protection,** that of the driver and of any other passengers, by asking the driver to behave more responsibly. This interventionism is particularly prevalent in Greece but far less present in the Netherlands:

- ▶ 82% of Europeans have had occasion to ask drivers to slow down because they were exceeding the speed limit (94% in Greece but only 68% in the Netherlands)
- ▶ 74% have prompted drivers to take a break after driving for two hours if they have not done so themselves (90% in Greece but only 60% in the Netherlands)
- ▶ 69% have asked them not to answer a call or read a text (80% in Greece but only 53% in the Netherlands)

▶ 62% have asked them not to park in a mobility space even if there were no other spaces available (77% in Greece but only 36% in the Netherlands).

**However, passengers can also have a negative influence by encouraging drivers to adopt risky behaviour. For example:**

- ▶ **35% have refused to stop or extend a break so as not to waste time** (57% in Greece but only 25% in the Netherlands)
- ▶ **32% have told the driver to double park for a few minutes** (56% in Greece but 20% in Slovakia)
- ▶ **32% have told the driver to speed up so as to arrive at the destination sooner** (51% in Greece but 20% in France)
- ▶ **18% have told the driver to answer his or her own call** (32% in Greece but 10% in France and Great Britain).

**For this reason, on the eve of the departure for the summer holidays, the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for responsible driving is reminding everyone of a few simple rules to limit the risk of driver drowsiness, which remains the principal cause of motorway fatalities:**

- **Get a full night's sleep the night before setting off**
- **Avoid travelling at night (between 10.00 pm and 6.00 am)**
- **Stop for regular breaks on long trips, at least every two hours**
- **Stop on a rest area as soon as the first signs of fatigue appear and take a short nap**
- **Remember to swap drivers regularly.**
- **Remain alert and avoid distractions (telephone, setting the GPS, etc.).**



## Méthodologie de l'enquête

For this Barometer survey of European driving habits, Ipsos carried out an Internet survey between 19 January and 27 February 2018, on a sample of 11,038 Europeans aged 15 and over, with at least 1000 respondents in each of the survey countries. The quota method was used to ensure the representativeness of each national sample.

## About the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving

Created in February 2011, the VINCI Autoroutes Foundation for Responsible Driving is a laboratory, observatory and source of information specifically focused on improving road safety. It aims to help bring about changes in driver behaviour and to encourage drivers to contribute to their own safety. Its actions include: information campaigns to raise awareness of road risks; funding for innovative scientific research in certain areas of risky driver behaviour that have not been sufficiently explored or are poorly identified by road users; and, finally, to fund initiatives by non-profit associations or citizen initiatives aimed at encouraging responsible driving.

<http://fondation.vinci-autoroutes.com> and Twitter account: **@FondationVA** (in French only)

<http://roulons-autrement.com> and Twitter account: **@RoulonsA**

## About Cerveau & Psycho

Distributed in 50,000 copies, the monthly magazine Cerveau & Psycho provides insight in advances made in the fields of psychology and neurosciences with a feature on a key topic in each issue, cognitive sciences news, experts' views and chronicles.

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