

FEMALE DRIVERS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1963-2013: FROM A MINORITY TO A MAJORITY?

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16. Abstract <p>This study examined the changes in the relative proportions of male and female drivers in the United States from 1963 through 2013. The analysis used data from the Federal Highway Administration.</p> <p>During the period examined, the proportion of female drivers has gradually increased. In 1963, females represented 39.6% of all drivers. Females became a majority in 2005. In 2013, they constituted 50.5%.</p> <p>Although female drivers are currently a slight majority, the likelihood of them being on the road depends not only on their relative numbers, but also on the relative amount of driving that they do (with females driving less than males). A consideration of both the percentage of drivers by gender and the average annual miles driven by gender reveals that, in 1963, 23.8% of drivers on the road were females, which increased to 40.8% by 2013.</p>					
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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Approach.....	1
Results.....	1
Discussion.....	2
References.....	3

Introduction

Two years ago, I published a study that examined the changing gender demographics of U.S. drivers from 1963 to 2010 (Sivak, 2013). That study found that, whereas in 1963 females represented only about 40% of all drivers, by 2010 that percentage increased to just above 50%. However, because females drive less than males, the overall likelihood that a given driver on the road in 2010 was a female was still less than 50%. The present study extends this analysis through 2013.

Approach

Annual data on the number of licensed drivers were obtained from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA, 2015). Data from 1963 through 2013 were examined (the data for the earliest and latest year available, respectively).

Results

Figure 1 shows female drivers as a percentage of all drivers from 1963 through 2013. In 1963, females constituted 39.6% of all drivers—the minimum during the examined period. Since 1963 this percentage has gradually increased. The first year in which female drivers became a majority was 2005. In 2013, females constituted 50.5% of all drivers—the maximum during the examined period.

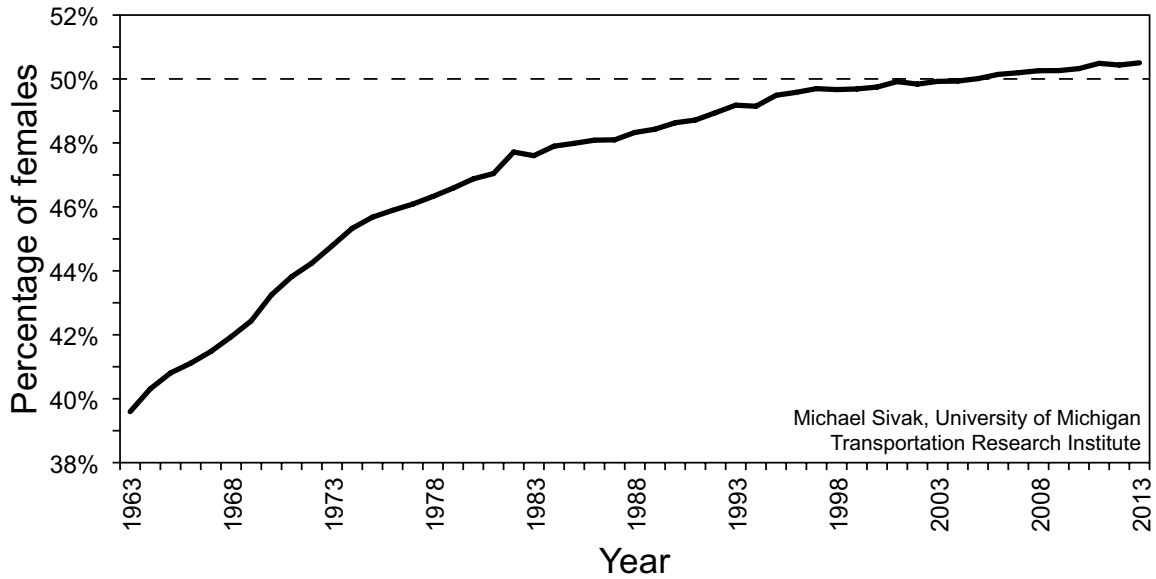


Figure 1. Females with a driver's license as a percentage of all persons with a driver's license, 1963 through 2013.

Discussion

Although female drivers are currently a slight majority, the likelihood of them being on the road depends not only on their relative numbers, but also on the relative amount of driving that they do. The average annual miles driven by gender in 1969 and 2009 (the nearest years to 1963 and 2013 with available data) are shown in Table 1. The best estimate is that, from 1963 to 2013, the average distance driven increased by about 33% for males and 89% for females. Consequently, while in 1963 the average male drove about 2.1 times the distance of the average female, in 2013 that multiple was down to about 1.5.

Table 1
Average annual miles per licensed driver by gender in 1969 (NPTS, 1973)
and 2009 (NHTS, 2011).

Year	Male	Female
1969	11,352	5,411
2009	15,139	10,244

A consideration of both the percentage of drivers by gender and the average annual miles driven by gender reveals that, in 1963, 23.8% of drivers on the road were females, which increased to 40.8% by 2013.

As pointed out in Sivak and Schoettle (2012), the observed gender trends in driver licensing will likely have major implications on the extent and nature of vehicle demand, energy consumption, and road safety. This is the case because, compared to males, females are more likely to purchase smaller, safer, and more-fuel efficient vehicles; females drive less; and females tend to have a lower fatality rate per distance driven.

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