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CONGRESS**
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Representative survey of knowledge of traffic rules among the German population

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How enduring is traffic knowledge?

**Driver education,
theory and practical test
in young adulthood**

**Bicycle safety training
in elementary school**



[1]



[2]

**Lifelong right to drive
without further testing**

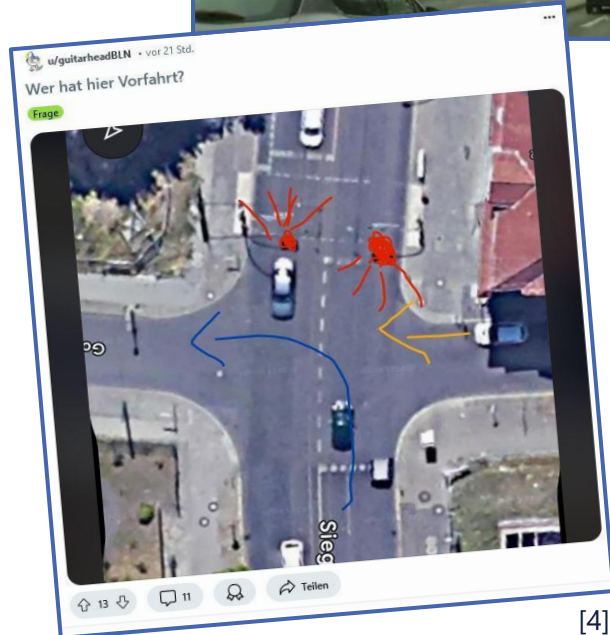
... but (how long) does the
knowledge last?

Aim of the study



[3]

- Traffic regulations change over time: new rules are introduced, and existing ones are expanded or relaxed.
- People search online for the meanings of traffic rules and discuss them with family or peers.



[4]

What is the **general public's level of knowledge** about road safety rules among different **age groups** and **modes of transportation**?

Which rules to choose...

- The **German Road Traffic Regulation** (StVO) consists of over 50 sections covering general and more specific traffic rules, traffic signs, and fines.
- The question pool for the **driver's licence theory test** contains approximately 1,200 questions.
- In addition, there are **informal rules** (primarily taught in road safety education for children).



Which rules to choose... and how to ask about them?



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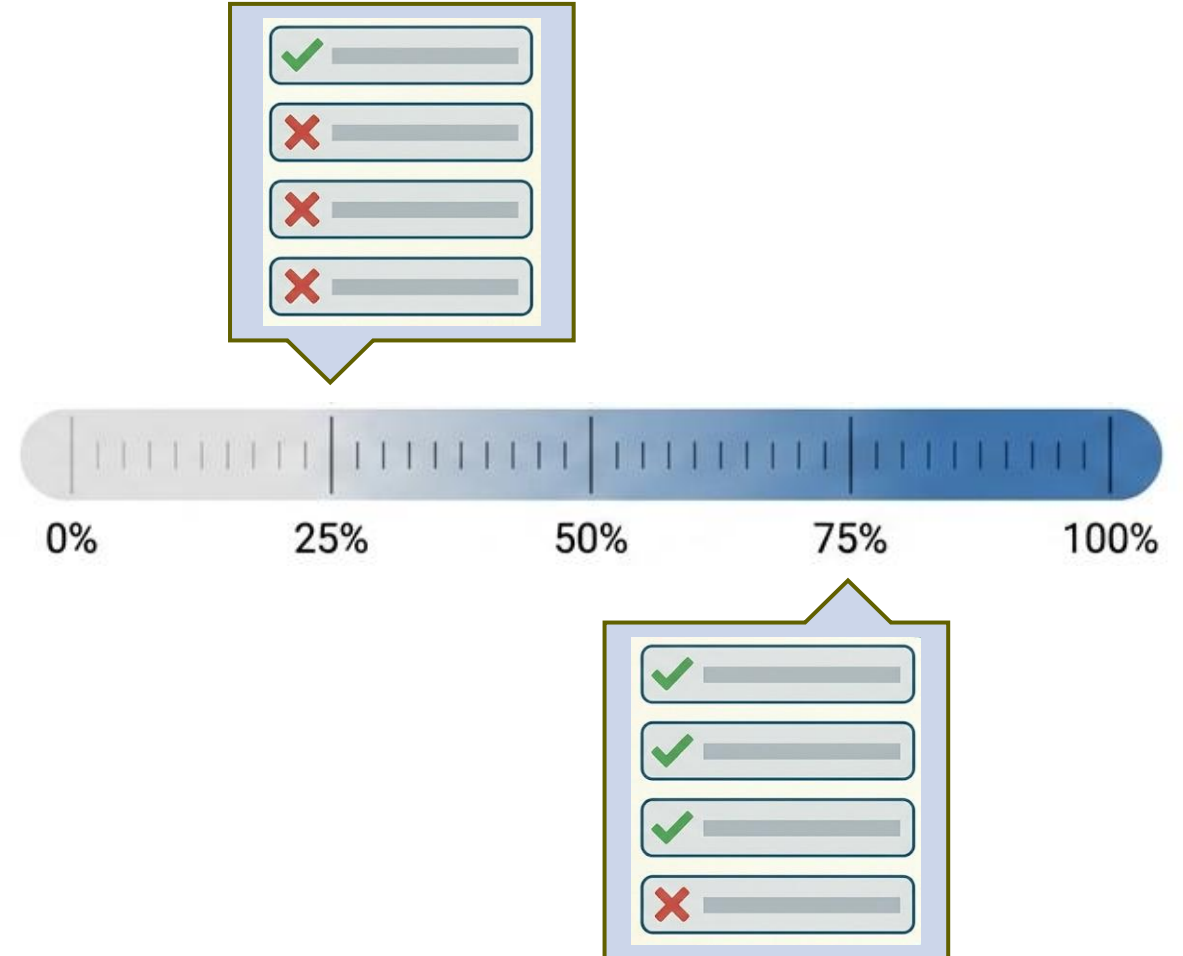
- objective safety
- conflict potential
- traffic flow
- recent trends



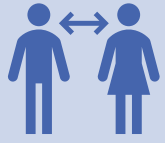
- multiple-response items with three to five answer options, partly supported by images
- two free-response items
- self-assessment of answer certainty per item

Knowledge as a continuum

- Within the **German theoretical driving test**, missing one sub-condition fails the whole question.
- Applicants for a driver's licence in Germany usually **prepare intensively** for the test.
- When assessing the general public's knowledge of traffic regulations, it makes more sense to **examine the 'nuances'** of this knowledge.



Participants



50.9% females



mean age = 57,1 years



94.6% driver's licence (car)
20.8% driver's licence (motorcycle)



89.7% at least one car available



62.2% at least one bicycle available

- The survey was carried out by the **Institute for Applied Social Science** (infas Germany).
- Two panels were invited to take part in the study. In the end, **N = 5,186** people completed the questionnaire.
- To ensure **representativeness**, the samples were linked using the blended calibration method and weighted according to gender, age and other characteristics.

Tops & flops

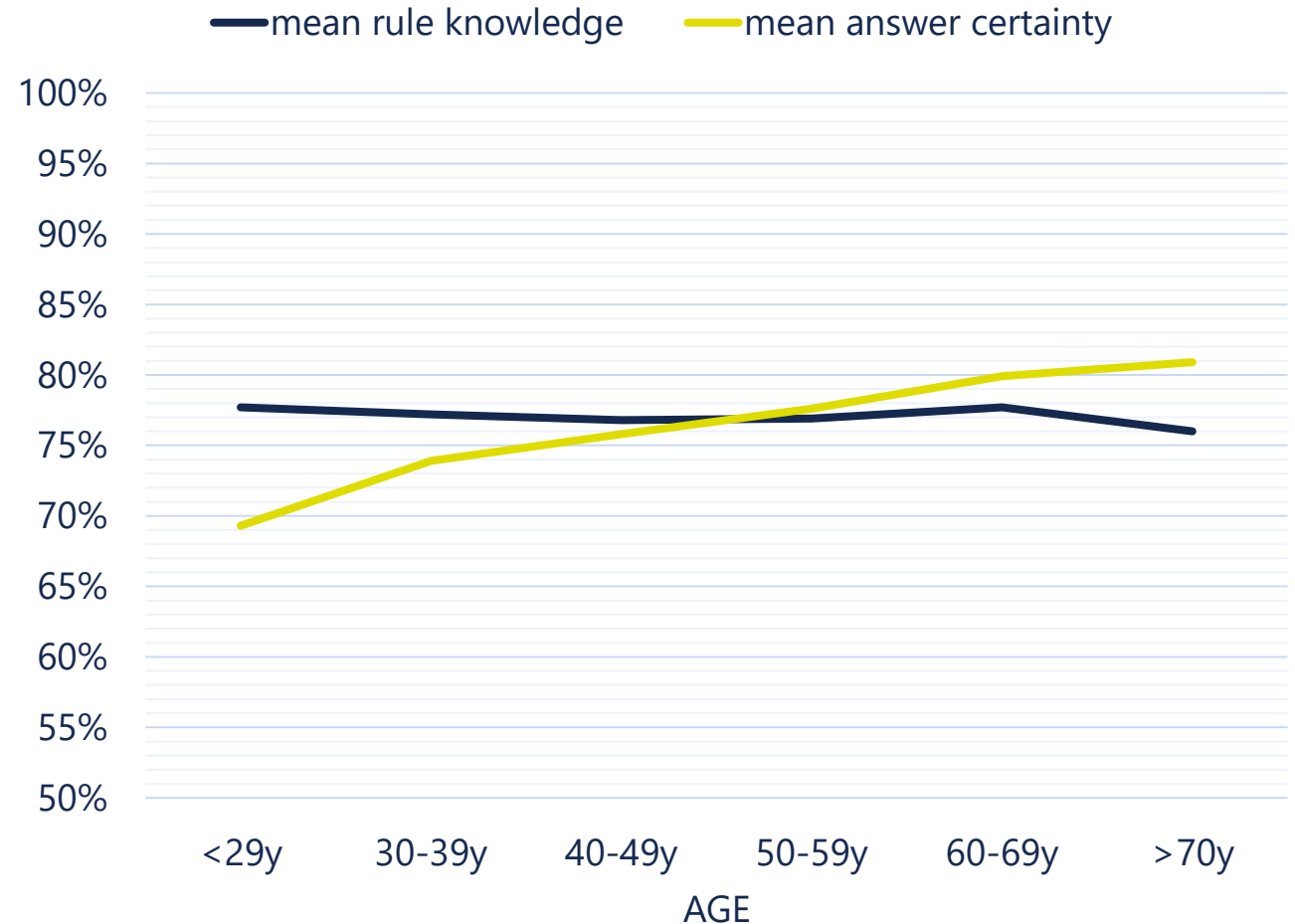
| | |
|--|-------|
| Priority for public transport on rail | 95.5% |
| First aid / What to do in the event of an accident | 94.3% |
| What to do when the barriers at a railway crossing are closing | 93.3% |
| Restriction on parking on pavements | 92.6% |
| Traffic sign 'Grünpfeil' (right turn on red, RTOR) | 90.9% |

| | |
|-------|--|
| 66.3% | Traffic signs for cycling infrastructure |
| 64.6% | Pedestrians' right of way at roundabouts |
| 60.8% | Cyclists riding side by side |
| 56.9% | Children cycling on pavements |
| 53.4% | Longitudinal following distance between cars |

**mean rule
knowledge**

Differences in rule knowledge by age

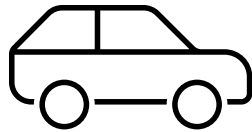
- There are significant differences in rule knowledge between age groups, albeit of **very small effect**.
- Rules with better knowledge among **older participants**, e.g. speed recommendations for cyclists
- Rules with better knowledge among **younger participants**, e.g. regulations on parking electric vehicles



Differences in rule knowledge by transport mode



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People who use the car or the bicycle most frequently have the **highest levels of knowledge**. Cyclists tend to have the highest level of answer certainty.



Pedestrians **lack knowledge** on particular rules and feel most uncertain, but this mainly applies to **car-related rules**.



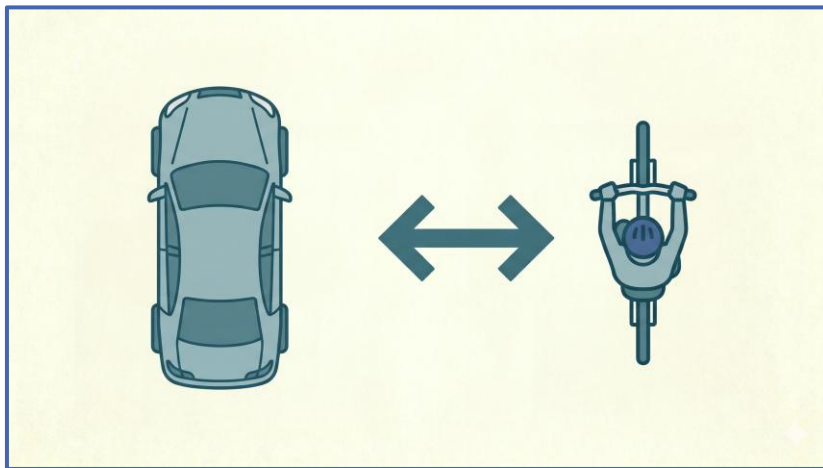
Motorcyclists are overall **less informed** (e.g. about how to behave after accidents), whilst having the **second highest** average of answer certainty.

What if there are no answer options?



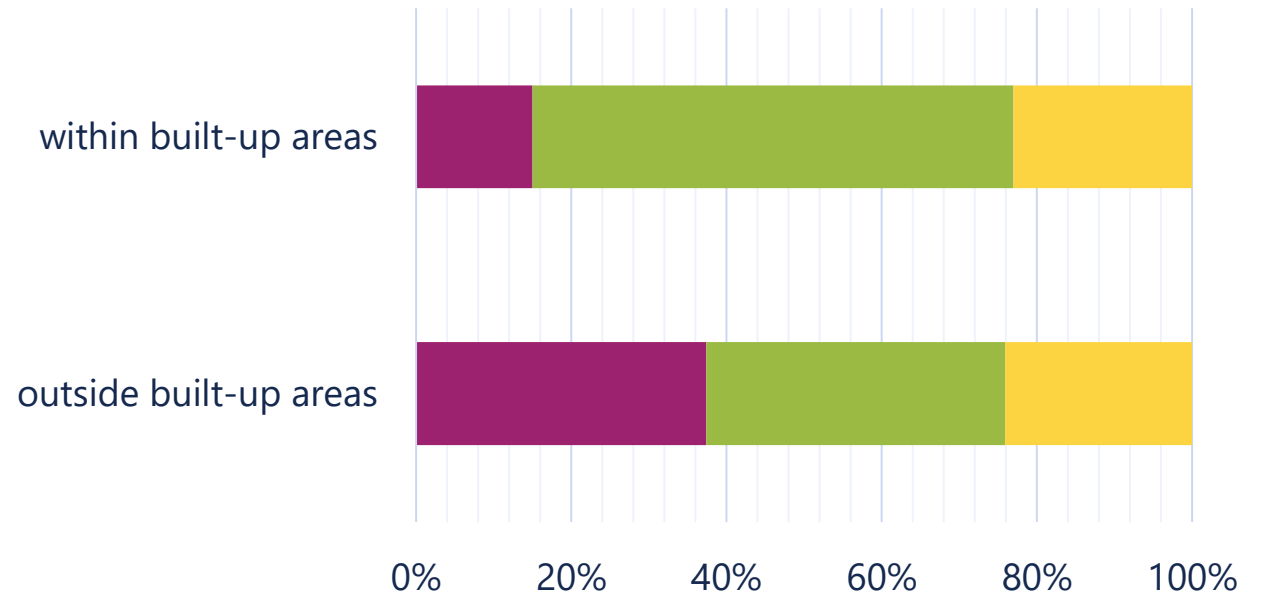
What is the minimum safe distance that must be obeyed when overtaking cyclists?

correct: 1.5m within & 2.0m outside built-up areas



[5]

■ underestimated ■ correct ■ overestimated



Take home message

- The general public's knowledge of traffic rules can be considered **satisfactory**.
- Efforts should be made to improve knowledge regarding **vulnerable road users** like pedestrians, cyclists & children.
- Note: The results depend on the level of difficulty of the questions; **no psychometric validation** of the test was carried out in this study.
- The assessment of the public's knowledge of the traffic rules **on a regular basis** is recommended.



References



- [1] <https://www.verkehrswacht-medien-service.de/grundschule/die-radfahrausbildung/die-radfahrausbildung-arbeitsheft-portal-fuer-klasse-3-4/> (24-04-2026)
- [2] TÜV | DEKRA arge tp21
- [3] <https://www.n-tv.de/img/23970518-1678291667000/16-9/1136/Schilder.jpg> (24-04-2026)
- [4] <https://www.reddit.com/r/StVO/> (27-04-2026)
- [5] created by Google Gemini 3



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