



# The big debate

# Should jaywalking be allowed?

While some say it can be done safely, others think it should be against the law.

## What you need to know

- Jaywalking is the act of crossing the street where it is not allowed, like outside a crosswalk or against a traffic light. The term was coined in the early 1900s.
- In 1912, Kansas City, Missouri, became the first US city to make jaywalking illegal. In 2021, it became one of the first cities to reverse the law. Others have done the same.
- Today, jaywalking is still illegal in many places in the US, and jaywalkers can be fined by law enforcement.



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
In Hawaii, police gave out more than 30,000 jaywalking citations between 2018 and 2023.

In the early 1900s in the Midwest, the word “jaywalking” was used to describe someone from the countryside who didn’t know how to act on big-city sidewalks and streets. As cars started appearing on roads around that time, pedestrians began getting hurt. Jaywalking soon became illegal in many parts of the country and still is today. People who think it’s OK to jaywalk say that pedestrians should have priority over cars. Those against it argue that the world has changed and cars on streets are a reality. We have to find a way to work together, they say, and following safety rules is the only option. What do you think? Should jaywalking be allowed?

## Yes—people can handle it

Jaywalking may not be ideal, but that doesn’t mean it should be illegal. Studies show that the laws are often unfairly applied to people of color, who get ticketed the most. Besides, stopping people for jaywalking isn’t a good use of police officers’ time. There are bigger crimes that need their attention. A better solution is to design cities with pedestrian-friendly streets so people can walk safely. This means having more crosswalks and stop signs, shorter wait times at traffic lights, and lower speed limits for vehicles. As long as people are crossing the street safely, there’s no need to have police officers monitor them.

## No—rules are rules

It’s simple: Everyone must follow the rules to keep roads safe for pedestrians and drivers. Drivers follow speed limits to keep pedestrians and other drivers safe, and pedestrians have to follow crossing restrictions for the same reasons. It’s not fair or safe to expect drivers to make unexpected or sudden stops. This endangers everyone, especially at night when it’s dark. If people are traveling by foot and in a hurry to get somewhere, they need to plan their commute better to account for any streets they have to cross. It’s not hard for pedestrians to wait a few minutes until the traffic light turns red and the walk sign turns green.

## YES Three reasons jaywalking should be allowed

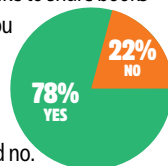
- 1 Merely crossing the street should not be a criminal offense, and the laws are often unfairly applied.
- 2 Police officers have bigger issues to address. They should not be bothered with monitoring pedestrians.
- 3 It would be better to design streets to be safer and more pedestrian-friendly.

## NO Three reasons jaywalking should not be allowed

- 1 Roads are safer if everyone follows the rules, including drivers and pedestrians.
- 2 It’s not fair to make drivers unexpectedly stop in the middle of the street. That could be dangerous for them and others.
- 3 If people plan their walks better, they won’t be in a hurry and will have time to follow the road rules.

## LAST WEEK’S POLL

Last week, we asked if adults should read books for kids. Most of you like to share books written for you with grown-ups: 78% of you said yes, and 22% said no.



## What do you think?

Now that you’ve read a bit more about this issue, visit [kids.theweekjunior.com/polls](https://kids.theweekjunior.com/polls) so you can vote in our debate. Vote **YES** if you think jaywalking should be allowed or **NO** if you don’t. We’ll publish the results next week.

**The goal of the big debate** is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.