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Assessing public opinions on city-wide 30 km/h speed limits: The case of Athens

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Abstract

1. Introduction

In recent years, the introduction of city-wide 30 km/h speed limits has attracted growing attention across Europe as an important policy tool to enhance road safety, improve urban liveability and promote sustainable mobility (Schepers et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2023). By reducing traffic speeds, these measures aim to lower both the likelihood and severity of crashes, encourage walking and cycling and create safer, more environmentally friendly streets for all users, particularly vulnerable groups such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. Following Spain's nationwide adoption of a 30 km/h limit in 2021, Greece became the second European country to implement a similar policy across all urban roads with a single lane per direction (June 2025), marking a major milestone in its road safety agenda.

A growing number of European cities have already adopted 30 km/h limits to improve safety and quality of life in residential areas. Evaluation results from 17 cities, including Paris, London, Brussels and Helsinki, show substantial benefits, including an average reduction of 37% in road fatalities, 18% in emissions, 2.5 dB in noise pollution and 7% in fuel consumption (Yannis & Michelaraki, 2024). Despite these positive outcomes, many drivers may not fully understand the rationale or expected impacts of such measures, potentially influencing their level of acceptance, a key factor for successful implementation.

Although the advantages of lower speed limits are well established in international research (Yannis & Michelaraki, 2025; Van Erpecum et al., 2025), public acceptance remains vital to their effectiveness. Policies that directly affect everyday travel often generate mixed reactions: while some citizens recognize their safety and environmental benefits, others express concerns regarding congestion, travel time, or enforcement fairness. Understanding how the public perceives these measures and which factors shape their acceptance, is therefore essential for designing effective, widely supported and sustainable transport policies.

2. Objectives

The present research aims to assess public opinions on city-wide 30 km/h speed limits in Athens. Specifically, it seeks to identify the factors influencing acceptance of this policy measure, considering both perceptual aspects (e.g. beliefs about safety and congestion impacts, attitudes toward enforcement) and socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. age and gender).

3. Methodology

To achieve this objective, an online survey with targeted questions was conducted and data from 400 residents in Athens were collected and analysed. The sample was carefully balanced by gender and age to ensure it reflected the broader population. To uncover the underlying factors influencing acceptance, a descriptive analysis was conducted. The survey was designed to ensure clarity, cohesion and ease of understanding. In particular, the questionnaire examined attitudes toward the new measures introduced in the Greek Road Traffic Code, with particular emphasis on the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit. Respondents were asked about their level of acceptance and their opinion on its impact on road safety, traffic congestion and enforcement practices.

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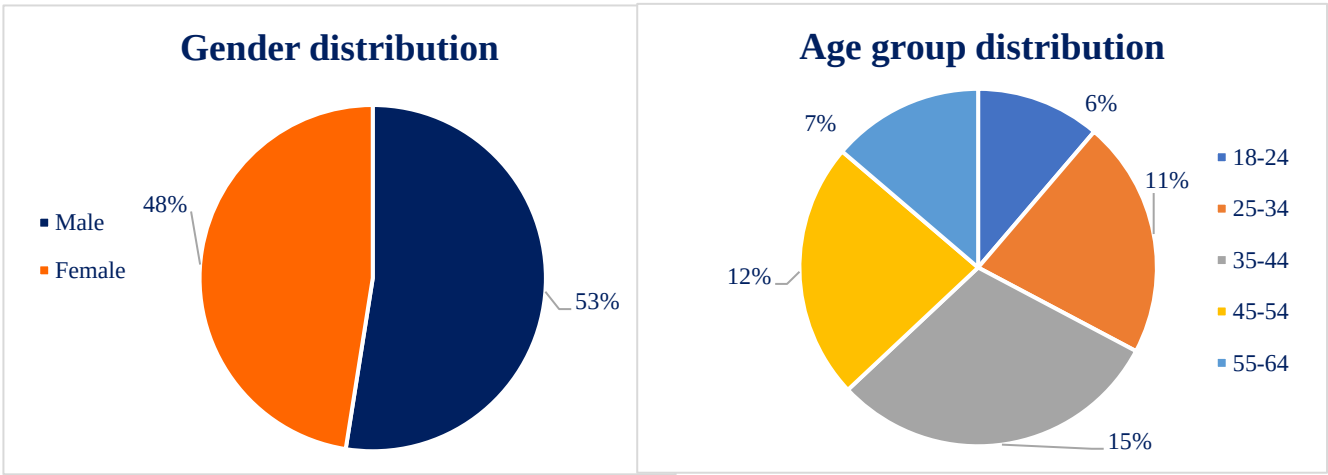
In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the survey included 400 residents of Athens to ensure a representative overview of the population. Key variables recorded were age, gender, income, education, employment status, parental status, household composition and place of residence. The sample had a nearly balanced gender distribution (52% male, 48% female) (Figure 1a). Regarding age, the largest group was 35-44 years (15%), followed by 45-54 years (12%) and 25-34 years (11%), while younger (18-24 years, 6%) and older (55-64 years, 7%) participants were less represented (Figure 1b). Overall, the sample predominantly consisted of economically active individuals whose commuting patterns are directly influenced by urban traffic policies. Figure 1 further illustrates the distribution of the sample with respect to gender, age group and employment status.



(a) (b)

Fig. 1. Sample distribution per (a) gender; (b) age group

Table 1 presents the joint distribution of gender and age within the sample. The largest subgroup consisted of respondents aged 35-44 years, with 69 males and 52 females, amounting to 121 individuals. The 45-54 age group followed with 93 participants (42 males and 51 females), while 86 respondents (46 males and 40 females) were aged 25-34. Younger respondents aged 18-24 years accounted for 45 participants (22 males and 23 females) and the 55-64 age group included 55 individuals (31 males and 24 females). Overall, the sample exhibited a relatively balanced gender distribution across age categories, ensuring that the analysis captures a diverse range of public perceptions toward the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit.

Table 1. Summary of sample demographics based on gender and age

	Male	Female	Total
18-24	22	23	**45**
25-34	46	40	**86**
35-44	69	52	**121**
45-54	42	51	**93**
55-64	31	24	**55**
Total	**210**	**190**	**400**

4. Results

Figure 2 presents the distribution of public acceptance levels regarding the implementation of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit among Athens residents. Acceptance was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from very negative to very positive (1 = very negative, 2 = somewhat negative, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat positive, 5 = very positive).

More specifically, respondents in Athens showed a generally favourable attitude toward the 30 km/h speed limit. Approximately 59% of participants expressed a positive opinion (somewhat positive and very positive), while around 22% expressed a negative opinion (somewhat negative and very negative). The remaining 20% of respondents reported a neutral stance. When examined by gender, both male and female respondents

displayed broadly similar patterns of acceptance. However, females tended to express slightly higher levels of support, with a greater share selecting somewhat positive or very positive responses (32%) compared to males (26%). Conversely, men showed marginally higher shares in the somewhat negative and neutral categories.

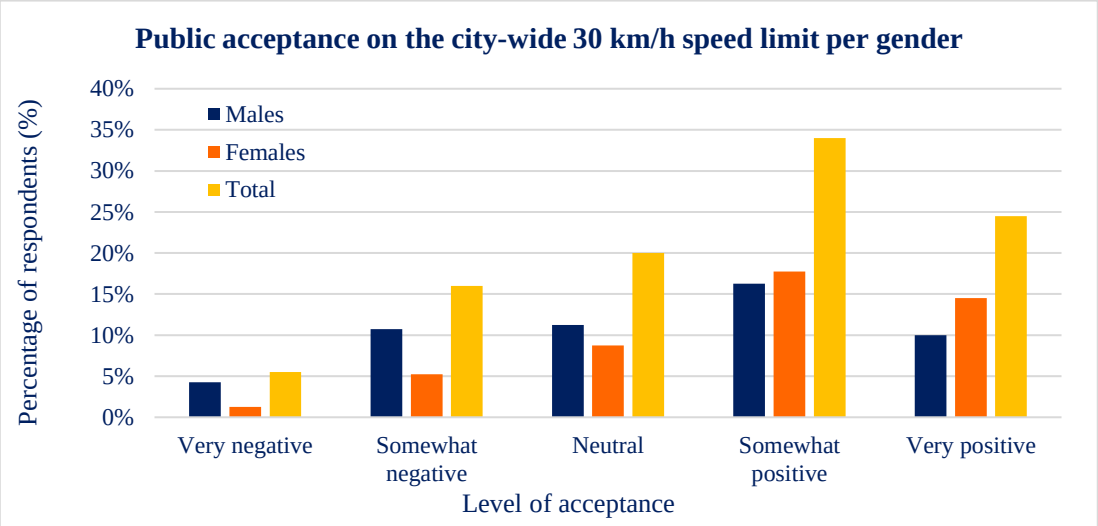


Fig. 2. Public acceptance on the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit per gender

As per age group distribution, respondents aged 35-44 years exhibited the highest level of acceptance, with this group showing the largest share of somewhat and very positive responses (around 20%). Similarly, respondents aged 45-54 years and 25-34 years also demonstrated relatively favourable attitudes, with noticeable shares in somewhat and very positive opinions, over 15% and 11%, respectively. In contrast, younger participants, particularly those aged 18-24 years expressed more mixed views. These groups showed higher proportions of neutral and somewhat negative responses compared to older age groups. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of public acceptance of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit by age group among Athens respondents.

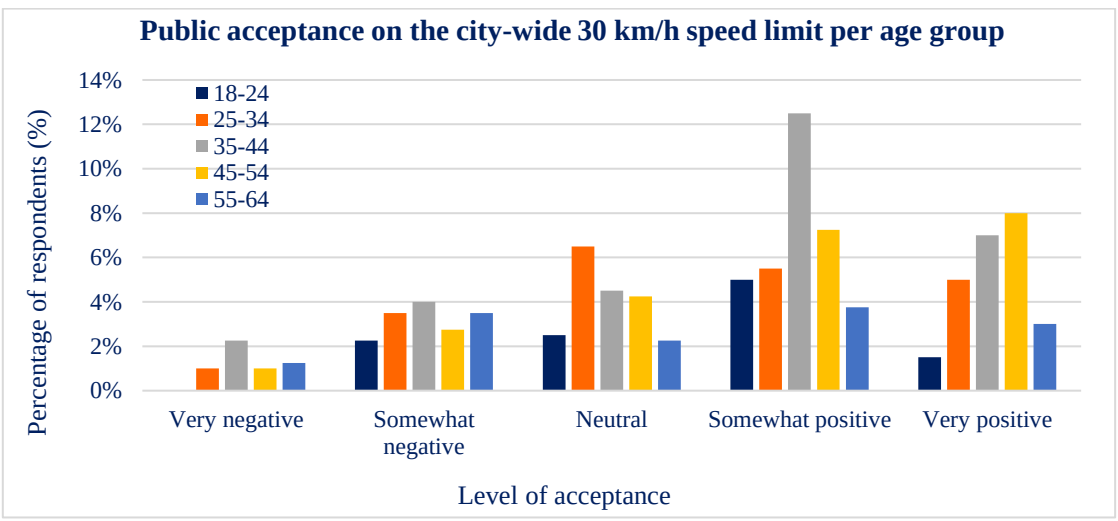


Fig. 3. Public acceptance on the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit per age group

Participants were also asked whether they believe that the new speed limit contributes to reducing road crashes. Nearly half of the respondents (around 50%) believed that the 30 km/h limit helps to reduce road crashes, suggesting a generally positive perception of the measure's potential safety benefits. In contrast, about one in five participants (approximately 22%) felt that the measure does not contribute to crash reduction, indicating some skepticism regarding its effectiveness. A smaller proportion (around 14%) believed that the new speed limit does not affect road crashes, while roughly 15% stated that they were unsure about its impact.

When examining responses by gender, both males and females demonstrated broadly similar patterns of opinion. However, female respondents showed a slightly higher level of agreement that the speed limit reduces crashes, while male respondents were marginally more likely to express disagreement. Overall, the results indicated that Athens residents tended to view the 30 km/h city-wide speed limit as a measure that can enhance road safety, although a notable share of the population remains unconvinced or uncertain about its actual effectiveness. Figure 4 presents the perceived impact of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit on road safety among respondents in Athens.

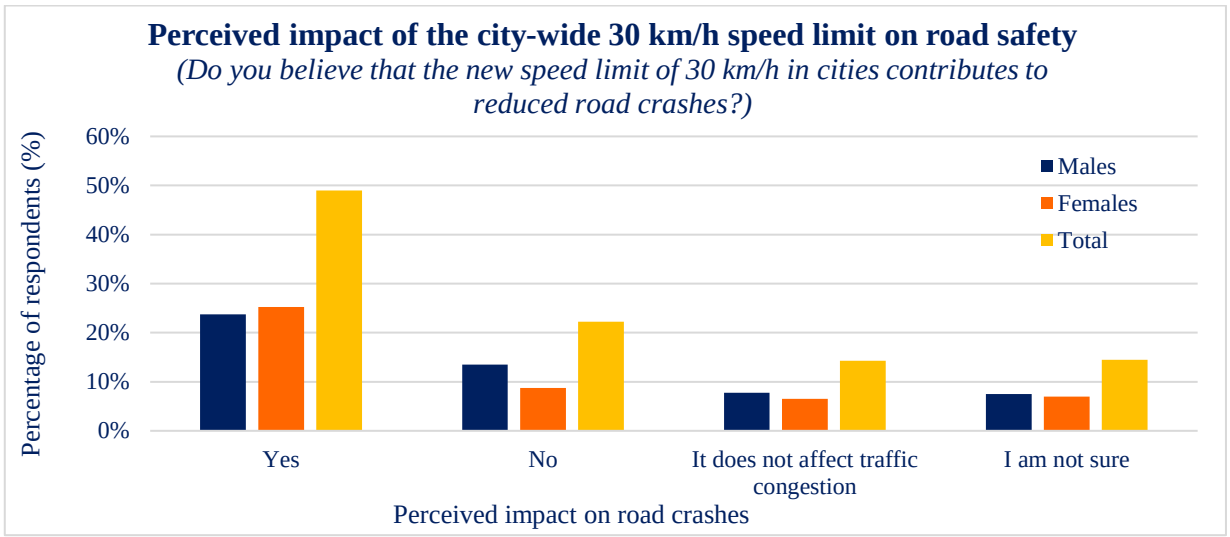


Fig. 4. Perceived impact of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit on road crashes per gender

Figure 5 presents respondents' perceptions of whether the implementation of a city-wide 30 km/h speed limit would contribute to increased traffic congestion among participants in Athens. Overall, nearly half of the respondents (around 47%) believed that the new speed limit would increase traffic congestion, indicating that concerns about potential negative effects on traffic flow were relatively widespread. Meanwhile, about one in five participants (approximately 20%) stated that the measure would not lead to increased congestion, while a similar proportion (around 21%) believed it would have no effect on traffic conditions. A smaller share of respondents (roughly 12%) reported uncertainty about the impact of the new measure, reflecting a degree of hesitation or lack of awareness regarding its potential effects. Only a negligible percentage chose not to provide an answer. As per gender, both males and females expressed similar opinions. However, female respondents were slightly more likely to believe that the measure would increase congestion, while male respondents were somewhat more inclined to think it would not have a significant impact.

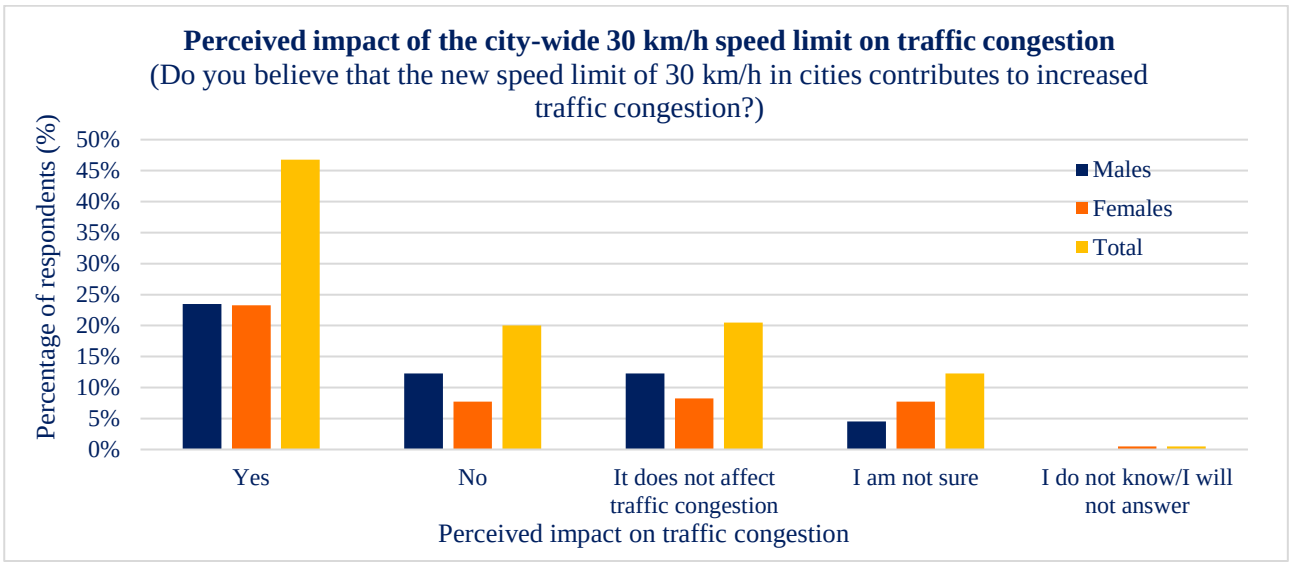


Fig. 5. Perceived impact of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit on traffic congestion per gender

5. Conclusions

This study assessed public opinions on the implementation of a city-wide 30 km/h speed limit in Athens, providing insights into how residents perceived and accepted this policy measure. Towards that end, an online questionnaire was designed and data from 400 participants in Athens were collected and analysed.

Results indicated a generally positive attitude among Athens residents toward the speed reduction initiative, with nearly six in ten respondents expressing supportive views. These results highlighted a broad recognition of the potential safety and environmental benefits associated with lower urban speed limits.

The analysis by socio-demographic characteristics demonstrated only minor variations in acceptance levels. Female respondents tended to show slightly higher support than males, while middle-aged groups (particularly 35-44 years) exhibited the most favourable attitudes. It was revealed that middle-aged and older respondents tended to be more supportive of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit policy, whereas younger adults displayed greater ambivalence or mild opposition. This pattern may reflect differences in driving behaviour, travel habits, or risk perception between age groups.

With respect to the perceived policy impact, approximately half of the respondents believed that the 30 km/h limit contributes to reducing road crashes, confirming the measure's association with improved road safety in public perception. However, concerns about potential increases in traffic congestion were also evident, with almost half of the participants indicating that lower speed limits might negatively affect traffic flow.

All in all, this study underlined the importance of public awareness and communication in the successful implementation of speed management measures. Efforts to strengthen information campaigns, clarify the safety and environmental benefits and address misconceptions about traffic congestion could enhance public acceptance and compliance. Future research should further explore behavioural and contextual factors influencing attitudes toward speed limit reduction, as well as assess the long-term impact of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit policy on mobility, safety and quality of urban life in Athens.

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