

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

Eva Michelaraki, George Yannis

National Technical University of Athens, Department of Transportation Planning and Engineering, Athens, Greece

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.

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. Although the advantages of lower speed limits are well established in international research, 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**.

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).

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.

Descriptive Statistics

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).

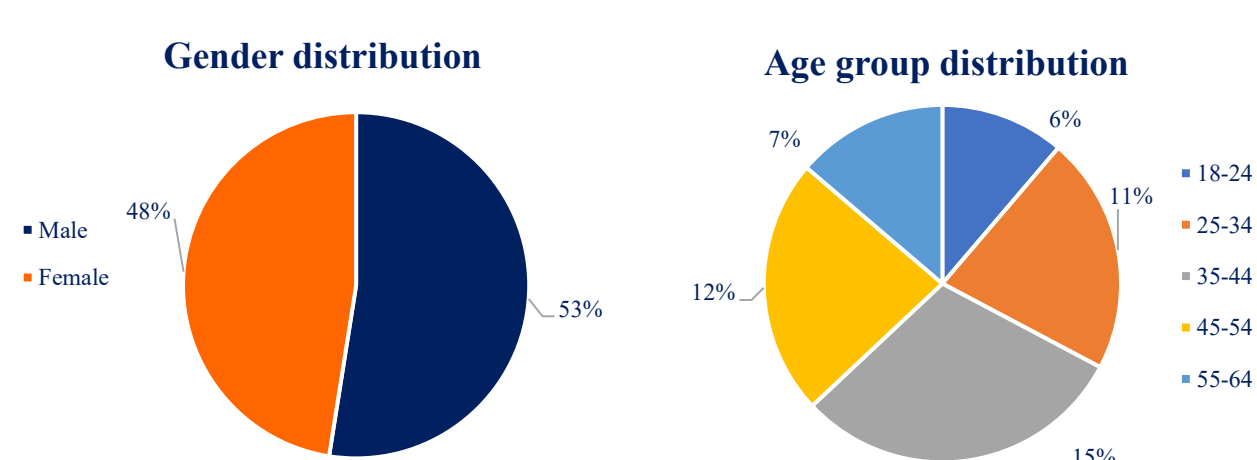


Figure 1: Sample distribution per (a) gender; (b) age group

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.

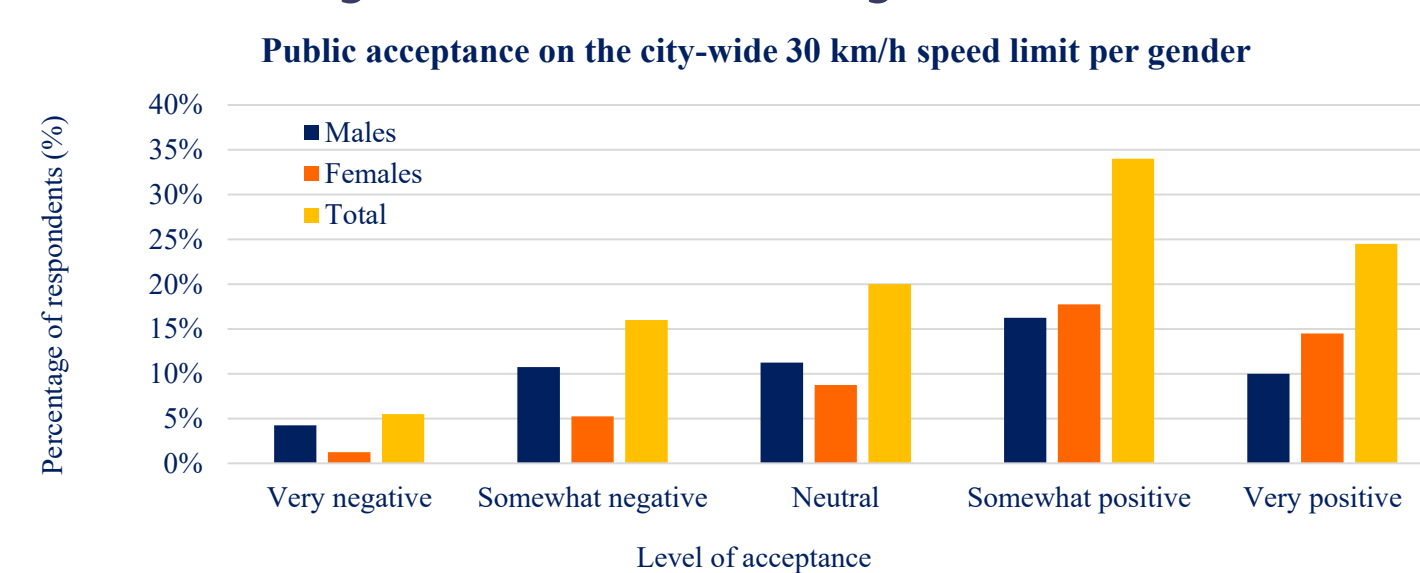


Figure 2: Public acceptance on the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit per gender

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, as shown in Figure 3.

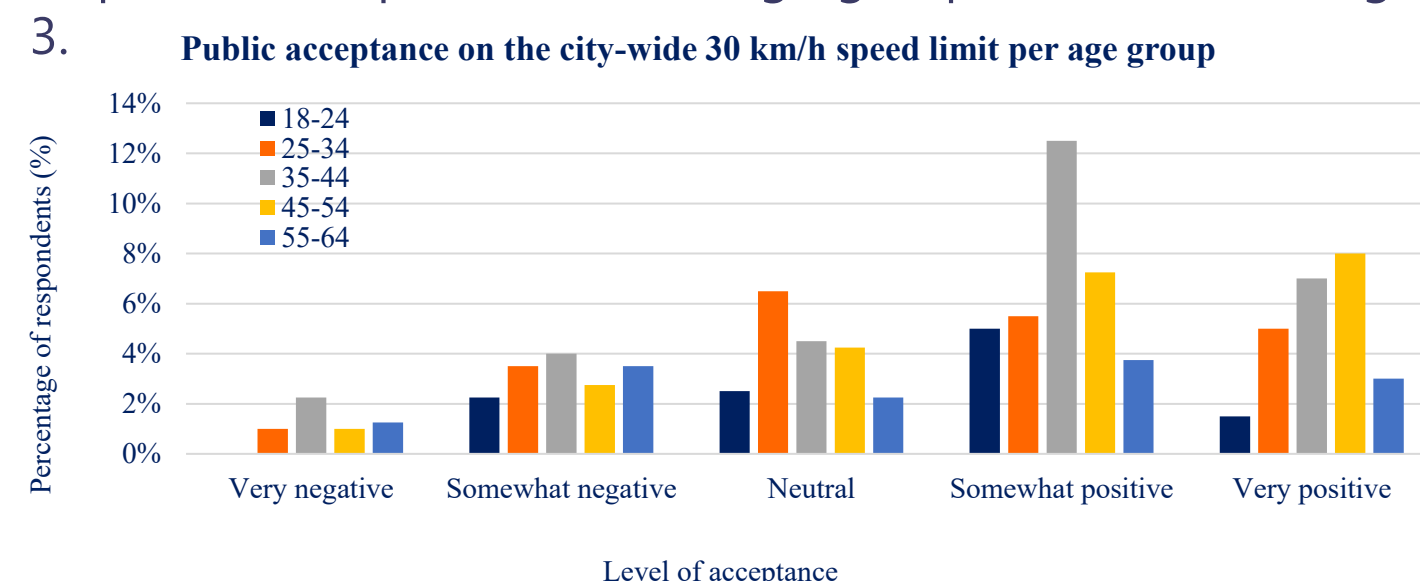


Figure 3: Public acceptance on the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit per age group

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, 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, as indicated in Figure 4.

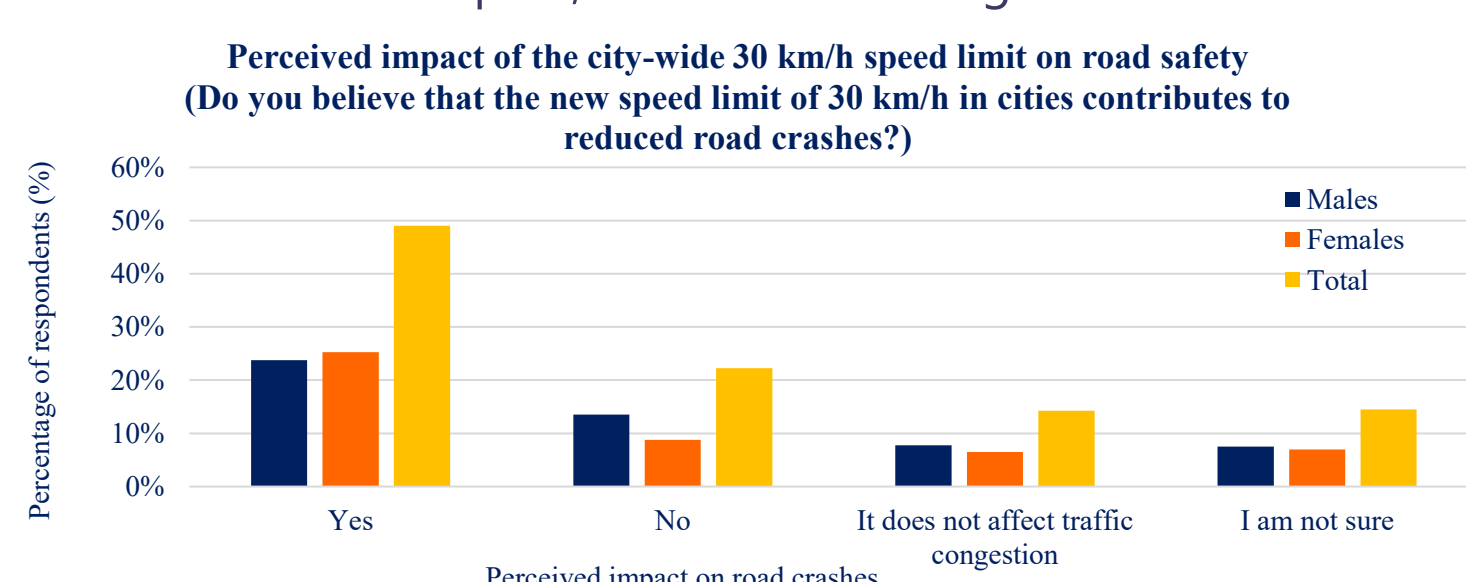


Figure 4: Perceived impact of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit on road crashes per gender

Discussion

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 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.

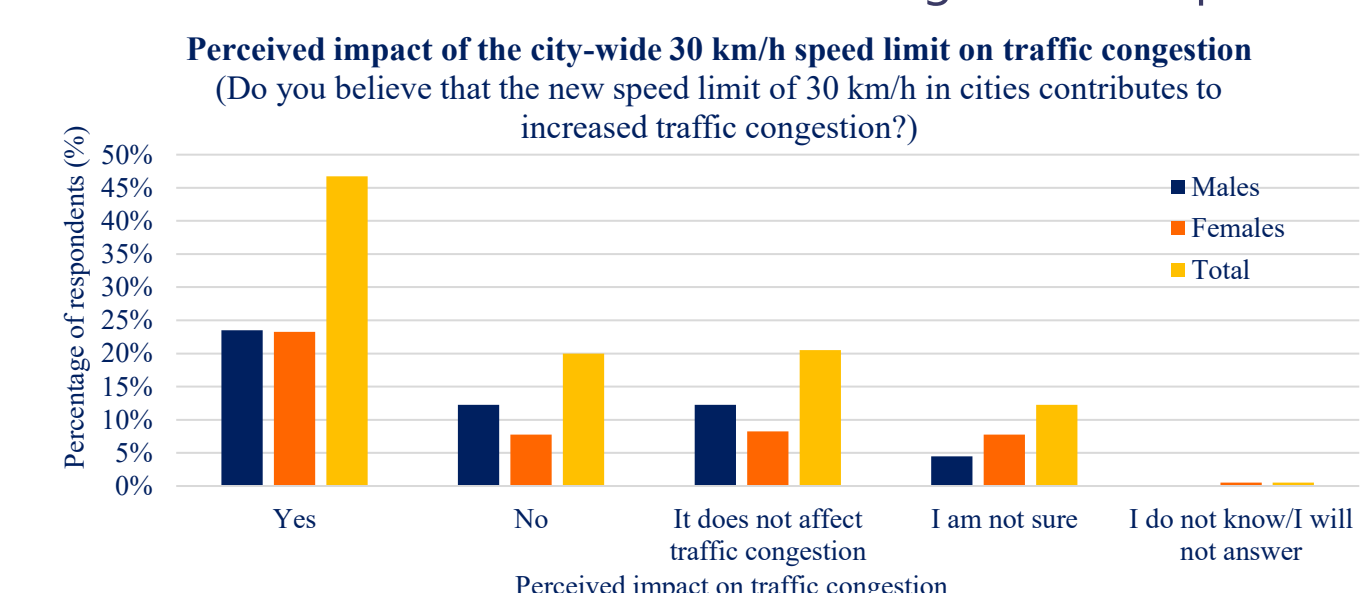


Figure 5: Perceived impact of the city-wide 30 km/h speed limit on traffic congestion per gender

Conclusions

- Results highlighted a **broad recognition of the potential safety and environmental benefits** associated with lower urban speed limits.
- Female respondents tended to **show slightly higher support than males**, while middle-aged groups (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.
- 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.
- 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.