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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Public acceptability of policy instruments for reducing fossil fuel consumption in East Africa

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, there has been increasing research interest in individuals' support of and resistance to climate and environmental policy instruments. However, there is an empirical bias in the literature, as few studies have been conducted in low-income countries. Based on a survey with 4,766 respondents we identify the level of public acceptability for climate policy instruments and their determinants in East Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda). While our sample is not fully representative of the East-African population, we capture highly educated individuals in urban areas, who are likely to have a large influence on policy processes. In line with previous studies in other contexts, we find that higher education and climate change concern are linked to the acceptability of policies aimed at reducing fossil fuel consumption. Specifying how the revenue from a climate tax or subsidy removal would be used, almost doubled the support for these policy instruments. In contrast to earlier studies, we find that investments in social programmes, not environmental programmes, was the revenue specification that increased the acceptability the most. One possible explanation would be that in a context where poverty is more prevalent, social issues are more salient to people. We also find weak associations between trust in government and the acceptability of climate policy instruments in East Africa and large heterogeneity across the five focal East African countries. Besides establishing an empirical foundation for future research on climate policy support in East Africa, the study provides essential policy insights: Investing in education and improved information, contributing to increased awareness and understanding of climate concerns, can potentially increase support for climate policy proposals also in the East African context. Earmarking revenues from climate policy instruments for social programmes may also significantly boost support. However, as our study is not fully representative of the population in the five countries and relies on stated preferences, which may be subject to different biases, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Key policy insights:

- In a sample skewed towards more urban and educated East-Africans, specifying how the tax revenue would be used more than doubled the acceptability for climate taxes.
- Investments in social programmes was the revenue specification that increased the acceptability for climate taxes the most.
- Earmarking revenue use may be a way to increase carbon tax acceptability in East Africa.

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- Investing in education and improved information contributing to increased awareness and understanding of climate concerns, can potentially increase support for climate policy proposals.
- The acceptability of a climate tax on fuel is lower than the acceptability of a quantity-based regulation on fossil fuel across the urban, well-educated and potentially politically influential population in East Africa.

1. Introduction

Public opinions and people's attitudes toward climate policy instruments have generated substantial research in various disciplines, such as economics, sociology, political science and psychology. Researchers have investigated, for example, what factors are linked to policy attitudes and how people's positions on climate policy (instruments) can be altered. Review papers (Carattini et al., 2018; Drews & van den Bergh, 2016; Ejelöv & Nilsson, 2020; Klenert et al., 2018) and meta-studies (Bergquist et al., 2022) have illustrated a clear picture of the important individual-level determinants. However, there is a major caveat and geographic bias in the literature; almost all studies and conclusions are based on studies conducted on populations in the Global North (Fairbrother, 2022; Kallbekken, 2023). Hence, '... we still do not know whether, or to what extent, the results are valid for the Global South' (Bergquist et al., 2022, p. 239). Even though there is a burgeoning literature with a global perspective, like for example Dechezleprêtre et al. (2022), including large-emitters such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa, there is still a lack of studies from low-income countries, in particular East Africa – the focus of this article.

It is crucial to conduct studies in this context, both from a scientific perspective – to further understand policy attitudes in these culturally, institutionally and economically unique settings – and from a policy perspective; to obtain 'feasible' policy solutions, we need to better understand policy acceptability in this context, and not simply focus on the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of introduced policy measures (e.g. Carattini, 2022; Jagers et al., 2021).

With data collected in 2022 from populations in five East African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda), in this study we extend the literature on attitudes toward climate policy instruments by targeting individual fossil fuel consumption in general and both price-based and quantity-based measures within the transport sector in particular. While our sample is not fully representative of the East-African population, we capture highly educated individuals in urban areas between 30–50 years old, who are likely to be to have a large influence on policy processes. The focus on a powerful stratum of the population makes our findings particularly noteworthy as they provide insights into the perspectives and opinions of a segment of the population that holds significant sway in shaping policy decisions in East Africa.

2. Determinants of climate policy instrument attitudes and their relevance for the East African context

Individual-level climate policy support can be defined in terms of behaviours, behavioural intents, or attitudes, generally defined as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour' (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). In this study, we are interested in attitudes; following Kyselá et al. (2019), we are specifically interested in 'policy acceptability', i.e. people's attitudes (with no specific behavioural intent, e.g. voting) toward a policy that has not yet been introduced.

Research on attitudes toward environmental and climate policy now comprises a broad field involving several disciplines and theoretical perspectives (Bergquist et al., 2022; Drews & van den Bergh, 2016; Fairbrother, 2022; Kallbekken, 2023) that explores the role of both individual level qualities (e.g. value position or educational background) and contextual factors (e.g. the quality of political institutions or degree of climate vulnerability) in climate policy attitudes. Below, we describe the individual level factors and how they are linked to the specific East African context.

2.1. Self-interest motives and material factors

A general perspective for understanding attitudes toward (climate) policy instruments suggests that attitudes are formed based on whether people believe these instruments have a negative or positive effect on them personally. For example, people who own a fossil fuel vehicle are less positive toward the introduction of carbon taxes than people who primarily transport themselves with other means. Similarly, certain sociodemographic or material factors, such as place of residence (rural–urban divide) (Ewald et al., 2022) or level of income (cf. Jakobsson et al., 2000), have been linked to the attitudes to certain policies, for example, a carbon tax on fossil fuels. Such a tax implies higher costs for impoverished people living in the countryside who have to commute longer distances to work than for higher-income people living in urban areas with shorter commutes or access to public transportation. In any case, while studies on contextual factors have shown that country-level economic inequality impacts environmental policy preference (Harring, 2014), few researchers have explored their role in contexts where a larger part of the population is impoverished or living in more insecure economic conditions, as for some of the countries in our sample.

Another socio-demographic factor that we include in our analyses is education, as education can provide humans with skills that help them understand complex problems such as climate change (Monroe et al., 2019). A better understanding can make you more aware and concerned which in turn makes you more positive towards environmental action. Another mechanism can be that education and going to the university is a process in which you are socialized into certain norms and values, where protecting the environment could be one such norm (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), which leads us to the next set of determinants; internal factors.

2.2. Internal factors

In the literature on public attitudes to climate and environmental policy instruments, pure self-interest motives, or material interests, have been shown to be insufficient for explaining people's policy positions. There are other *internal* factors (e.g. ideological position or climate concern) that form people's attitudes. Following environmental psychology, people's value position, via their beliefs and norms, is linked to their environmental policy attitudes (Matti, 2015; Steg et al., 2005). Self-transcendent values are linked to positive attitudes towards climate or environmental policy, while self-enhancing values are linked to negative attitudes to climate or environmental policy. Values are argued to be linked to attitudes, via beliefs and norms. In their meta-analysis, Bergquist et al. (2022) find that while climate concern has a large – to medium-sized effect on climate policy attitudes and this effect is rather stable across regions and policy instruments, other internal factors, such as ideology, are less stable.

2.3. Inter-relational determinants

Regarding the determination of inter-relational factors, a substantial amount of work has evaluated the role of trust in climate policy attitude formation. The main argument is quite simple: people are more likely to accept interventions from (political) institutions that they trust. In their meta-analysis, Bergquist et al. (2022) find the effects of trust to be medium-sized, i.e. to some extent influencing policy attitudes. However, several of the most important studies exploring the effect of (political) trust use samples from countries where political institutions are (comparatively) well-functioning, democratic and noncorrupt (Bergquist et al., 2022). Nevertheless, how important is (political) trust in contexts where people are justifiably rather skeptical toward their political institutions due to their lack of democratic rights and/or corrupt institutions (see Table 2)? Studies have shown that, not only does the level of acceptability or support for climate policy instruments vary by context, the effects of individual-level factors also vary, for example between countries with higher levels of corruption compared to those with lower levels of corruption or well-functioning institutions (Davidovic et al., 2020).

Hence, context matters for climate policy attitude formation. In our focal context – East Africa – we find some of the most corrupt countries in the world and examples of extreme poverty. Therefore, our aim is to study people's attitudes toward various climate policy instruments in East African contexts. Specifically, in this

Table 1. Current policy instruments on fossil fuel consumption in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania.

Policy instruments		Ethiopia	Kenya	Rwanda	Uganda	Tanzania
Tax	Excise Duty, applicable to imported fossil fuels, such as gasoline, diesel, and petrol	X	X	X	X	X
	Road Maintenance Levy, applicable per litre of gasoline, diesel, and petrol to expand and improve road networks	X	X	X		
	Other Petroleum and/or Fuel Levies, applicable to petroleum products (e.g. gasoline and diesel) and other fuel oils (e.g. kerosene)		X	X		X
Subsidy	Targeted Fuel Subsidy, removal of or reduction in government's fuel subsidies applicable to all vehicles except public transportation (e.g. taxis and buses)	X				
	Fuel Pump Price Stabilization, government stabilizes fuel pump prices for gasoline and diesel by foregoing import taxes			X		
Regulatory	Biofuel Blending Regulation, mandatory obligation to add biofuels (e.g. ethanol and biodiesel) in gasoline and diesel	X			X	

Source: See Appendix 1.

article, we focus on the transport sector and fossil fuel consumption to determine people's attitudes toward both price- and quantity-based measures.

Our main research question is therefore as follows: *To what extent are previously identified material, internal and interrelational factors linked to the attitudes toward climate policy instruments targeting individual fossil fuel consumption among citizens in East Africa?*

By deeply scrutinizing these factors, we also contribute to the vibrant discussion on how the specified revenue use of (Pigouvian) carbon taxes can alter people's attitudes and preferences. In general, research indicates that while specifying revenue use leads to the increased support or acceptance of carbon taxes (e.g. Amdur et al., 2014; Baranzini & Carattini, 2017; Carattini et al., 2019) and fossil fuel subsidy removal (Harring et al., 2023). Moreover, some of them (e.g. Amdur et al., 2014; Baranzini & Carattini, 2017; and Kotchen et al., 2017) show that revenues geared toward environmental restoration or climate adaptation were preferred among respondents, or had the strongest altering effect, i.e. by making respondents more positive toward the relevant policy. Hence, we also seek to answer the following question:

Does explicit and specified revenue use alter people's position on carbon taxes in the East African context, and if so, how?

3. Policy instruments on fossil fuel consumption for transport in East Africa

Table 1 provides an overview of the current use of taxes, subsidies and regulations on fossil fuels for transport in the East African countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania. A more detailed description is included in Appendix 1 in Supplementary Material (SM). All five countries adopt excise duties on imported fossil fuels. These import taxes typically constitute an important source of fiscal revenue and are not earmarked (Slunge & Sterner, 2009). In addition, several countries use road maintenance levies (earmarked for road maintenance) or other levies. Ethiopia and Rwanda use subsidies to stabilize fuel prices. In 2022, Ethiopia reduced subsidies on gasoline from 75% to 50% and on diesel from 75% to 67%. No country has a regulation on the quantity of fossil fuels that households are allowed to use, but in Uganda and Ethiopia, biofuels must be blended with gasoline and diesel. In addition, there are numerous other regulations, subsidies and taxes on vehicles that are not included in Table 1 – these do not directly target fossil fuel consumption.

The implementation of some of these policies have sparked public protest. For example, in 2022, Ethiopians expressed their frustration with a cut in fuel subsidies that led to a hike in fuel prices (Africanews, 2022). In Kenya, people took to the streets in 2011 to protest the rising cost of fuels (IRIN, 2011); in 2018, oil distributors went on strike to protest the introduction of 16% taxes on fuel (CGTN Africa, 2018); and in 2021, motorists blocked highways while protesting hiked fuel prices (The East African, 2021). In Rwanda, LPG gas dealers closed shops in February 2022 once a new high tariff on LPG gas was established, stating that this high tariff would subject them to massive losses (Rwanda Today, 2022). In Tanzania during 2017, LPG gas exporters protested Kenya's protectionist gas import ban (Tralac, 2017). In Uganda, there were large protests against high fuel prices in 2011 (The Guardian, 2011); in July 2022, Ugandan police deployed teargas and arrested more than

Table 2. Country profile information.

Indicator	Year	Units	Ethiopia	Kenya	Rwanda	Uganda	Tanzania
Population	2020	Millions	114.9	53.7	12.9	41.5	59.7
GDP per capita	2021	USD/capita	944	2,007	834	858	1,135
Energy-related CO ₂ emissions ¹	2019	tCO ₂ /capita	0.16	0.42	0.11	0.13	0.21
Degree of urbanization ²	2020	Percentage	21.7	28	17.4	24.9	35.2
Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International) ³	2021	Score ⁴	37	30	53	27	39
		Ranking ⁵	87	128	52	144	87

¹Includes CO₂ emissions from burning fossil fuels and cement manufacturing but excludes land use emissions.

²Percentage of total population living in urban areas.

³<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>

⁴Score: 100 (very clean), 0 (highly corrupt). Sample 88 had the highest score, and sample 11 had the lowest score.

⁵Ranking among 180 countries.

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank and Transparency International.

40 people during a large protest of increased fuel prices and the refusal of the government to cut taxes on cooking oil and fuel (Reuters, 2022). These examples illustrate the need to take public acceptability into account when designing and implementing fossil fuel related policies.

The country indicators listed in Table 2 show that the mean energy-related carbon emissions per capita in the region are very low – from 0.11 tCO₂ per capita in Rwanda to 0.42 tCO₂ per capita in Kenya – reflecting the differences in per capita income among the focal countries. However, these countries are dedicated to decoupling climate gas emissions from economic growth, and several policy instruments are being considered to achieve this.¹ Furthermore, corruption is severe in some of these countries, with Uganda ranking 144th among 180 countries according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (Table 2). Clearly, then, the East African context is distinct in several aspects from a policy perspective compared to the high-income and high climate gas emitting countries, where most studies on public climate policy attitudes have been conducted thus far.

4. Methodology and data

We collected data in five East African countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Rwanda) using a questionnaire with 26 questions (Appendix 2 in SM).² A survey company based in Kenya was recruited to collect the data. The questionnaire was composed in English and then translated into the following languages: Kenya – Swahili and Somali; Tanzania – Swahili; Uganda – Luganda and Runyanoke; Rwanda – Kinyarwanda and French; and Ethiopia – Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo and Somali. These translations were performed by native-speaking translators recruited by the company. The interviews were conducted by 26 experienced enumerators and 5 supervisors using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI), and all responses were recorded with Kobo Toolbox software. Before conducting the interviews, the enumerators completed a two-day training session on the topics in the questionnaire and various techniques for collecting data using the CATI method.

A pilot study was conducted in January 2022 with 200 respondents in each of the five focal countries to test the reliability and content validity of the questionnaire. Additionally, the pilot study enabled refining the questionnaire with feedback from both the enumerators and respondents.

The company used its existing national databases of respondents involved in earlier investigations to recruit survey respondents in each of the five countries. Screening questions were used to recruit samples that were representative of the adult population in terms of age, gender and area of residence in the five countries. In total, 7,622 respondents were contacted. Following three reminders, a total of 4,766 responses with complete

¹Several of these East African countries have explicit inclusive green economy strategies at the national level: Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy (CRGE), adopted in 2011; Kenya's Green Economy Strategy and Implementation Plan, adopted in 2016; Rwanda's Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy, adopted in 2011 and revised in 2021; and Uganda's Green Growth Development Strategy, adopted in 2017.

²Research approval was received from the The National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya, and the survey company possess national research permits for each of the five focal countries.

answers³ (63% response rate) were collected during March 17–28, 2022, in the five countries as follows: Ethiopia, 950; Kenya, 959; Rwanda, 991; Tanzania, 981; and Uganda, 885. Respondents took between 10 and 23 min to complete the survey, with a mean completion time of 16 min.

The final sample is representative of the population in terms of gender but contains a lower share of young (<30 years) and elderly (>50 years) respondents.⁴ The sample also contains a larger share of respondents with higher education and of residents in urban areas than the total population data⁵ (see Appendix 3 in SM for a comparison between the sample and population). Hence, as our sample is not fully representative, caution should be exercised when generalizing our results to the broader population.

To measure the level of public acceptability of policy instruments that reduce fossil fuel consumption, we asked respondents to provide their opinion on a scale of 1–5 where 1 is strongly against and 5 is strongly in favour.⁶ The order in which respondents were presented with the different policy instrument options was randomized to avoid order effects. To determine the factors associated with the public acceptability of policy instruments that reduce fossil fuel consumption in East Africa, we utilize variables capturing ‘vehicle use’, ‘level of education’, ‘concern’, ‘social trust’ and ‘political trust’. These variables are defined in Table 3, and the descriptive statistics are included in Table 4. Age, income, gender and area of residence are used as control variables, which are defined in Appendix 4. Descriptive statistics for all variables are listed in Appendix 5 (in SM).

Regarding the descriptive statistics presented in Table 4, there are a few noteworthy findings. Notably, some of our variables exhibit substantial variation across the countries, such as trust in government (28.2% in Kenya and 94.5% in Rwanda). It is essential to note that the very high score for Rwanda, nearly reaching the maximum value, could potentially impact our results. As our sample is skewed towards highly educated individuals residing in urban areas, belonging to a potentially influential stratum of the East African population, these extreme results for trust in government could be attributed to two factors. Firstly, individuals who are closer to the policy-making process may be more inclined to trust institutions. Secondly, in more authoritarian states, individuals may be constrained in revealing their true level of trust (Tannenber, 2022).⁷

To test our research question regarding determinants for acceptability of policy instruments for reducing fossil fuel consumption, we estimate multinomial logit⁸ regression models and present the marginal effects in figures for East Africa as a whole as well as for each country separately. Despite the ordinal nature of the outcome variable (measured on a Likert scale), the assumption of parallel lines in ordinal logistic regression was not met as indicated by both the likelihood-ratio test and Brant test. As a result, we are resorting to the use of multinomial logistic regression. The estimated multinomial logistic models are presented in Appendix 6 (SM). As a robustness check, we treat the dependent variables (the acceptability variables) as dummy variables and use probit regression models to estimate the coefficients (see Appendix 7 in SM). All models are estimated using Stata software, version 17.

³Since questions regarding trust in institutions can be sensitive, we allowed respondents to opt out by answering ‘don’t know’. In the data, these responses are treated as missing values. As a result, we currently have 312 missing values for the question regarding trust in the government.

⁴87–91% of the respondents were 25–54 years old, compared to 51–55% in the same age interval among the population across all five countries.

⁵46–92% of the respondents in the five countries had a higher education than secondary, compared to 3–23% across the total population. 36–58% of the respondents lived in urban or peri-urban areas, compared to 23–37% across the total population living in urban areas in all five countries.

⁶The questions asked were as follows: ‘What is your opinion on decreasing the quantity of fossil fuels by putting in place a limit on how much households can buy?’; ‘What is your opinion on increasing the prices on fossil fuels by introducing a tax?’; and ‘What is your opinion on increasing the prices on fossil fuels by reducing subsidies (reducing government discounts)?’. The respondents were also provided the following information with each question: ‘By fossil fuels, we mean petrol, regular, diesel and kerosene’.

⁷A comparison with results from the Afrobarometer and World Value Surveys indicate that there is a larger share of respondents in our survey with high trust in others and in government. However, we cannot tell if these differences are due to variations in how questions on trust are posed, how the variables are measured, the time when the surveys were implemented or some other factors. See Appendix 5 in SM for an extended discussion.

⁸Brant tests of our ordered logit models provided evidence that the parallel regression assumption is violated, hence we use multinomial logit models allowing for different slopes for each level of the five-level Likert scale.

The empirical model to be estimated is:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P[\text{Accept}_{ji} = 1]}{P[\text{Accept}_{0i} = 1]}\right) = \alpha_{ji} + \beta_{j1}\text{Concern}_i + \beta_{j2}\text{TrustPeo}_i + \beta_{j3}\text{TrustGov}_i + \beta_{j4}\text{VehicleUse}_i + \beta_{j5}\text{HigherEducation}_i \\ + \beta x'_{ji} + \delta C'_{ji} + \varepsilon_{ji}$$

where Accept_{ji} is the dependent variable that measures acceptability of carbon tax, fossil fuels subsidy reduction⁹ or regulation of quantity to be used at the household level at category j for individual i . The category $j = 0$ stands for the reference category (strongly against). *Concern* captures the internal factor of climate concern, a dummy variable capturing whether the individual is concerned about climate change. In the survey, we measured environmental concern with several environmental-related issues, such as climate change, water and air pollution, drought and flooding and reduced crop production. All these different measures are very similar and highly correlated; hence, we decided to include only climate concern in the model. *TrustPeo* and *TrustGov* are intended to capture the importance of inter-relational factors in the acceptability of different policies for decreasing fossil fuel consumption. The factor of self-interest is captured by the individual's frequency of use of a fossil fuel vehicle (*VehicleUse*). Finally, x' is a vector of socioeconomic variables, including age, gender, area of residence and income, and C_i is a vector of country dummies.

Table 3. Main variable descriptions and measurements.

Variable	Description of Measurement	Measurement
AcceptTax ¹⁰	Acceptance of increasing the prices of fossil fuels by introducing a tax	1 = Strongly against 2 = Somewhat against 3 = Neither in favour nor against 4 = Somewhat in favour 5 = Strongly in favour
AcceptSub	Acceptance for increasing the prices of fossil fuels by reducing subsidies	1 = Strongly against 2 = Somewhat against 3 = Neither in favour nor against 4 = Somewhat in favour 5 = Strongly in favour
AcceptReg	Acceptance of decreasing the quantity of fossil fuels with a limit on how much households can buy	1 = Strongly against 2 = Somewhat against 3 = Neither in favour nor against 4 = Somewhat in favour 5 = Strongly in favour
Concern	Concerned about climate change	1 = Very concerned 0 = Not at all concerned/Slightly concerned/Somewhat concerned
TrustPeo	Level of trust in other people	1 = 8/9/10 0 = 1/2/3/4/5/6/7 where 10 is <i>Most people can be trusted</i> and 1 <i>Most people cannot be trusted</i>
TrustGov	Level of trust in the national/central government	1 = A great deal/Quite a lot 0 = No or very little/Little/Neither a lot nor little
Vehicle-use	Frequency of use of a private fossil fuel car, motorcycle or other vehicle	1 = Every day/Several times a week 0 = Once a week/Once a month/Once every 6 months/Never
Higher education	Educational level at university.	1 = Studies at a university/university college/Completed university/university college/Completed post-graduate studies 0 = Not completed primary/lower-secondary school/Primary or lower-secondary school/Upper-secondary school/Post-secondary education, but not university or university colleges

⁹Regression results for reduced fossil fuel subsidies are not included because these results are similar to those for the tax.

¹⁰In the probit regression in Appendix 8 AcceptTax and AcceptReg are coded as binary variables where 1 = Somewhat in favour/Strongly in favour and 0 = Strongly against/Somewhat against/Neither in favour nor against.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	East Africa (5 countries)					Ethiopia		Kenya		Rwanda		Tanzania		Uganda	
	Mean	SD	Min	Max		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
AcceptTax	2.428	1.545	1	5		2.538	1.334	1.620	1.313	2.589	1.406	2.573	1.738	2.842	1.609
AcceptReg	2.731	1.628	1	5		2.542	1.330	2.217	1.688	3.236	1.539	2.652	1.753	3.01	1.596
AcceptSub	2.512	1.560	1	5		2.539	1.290	1.653	1.343	2.666	1.456	2.775	1.765	2.951	1.568
Concern	67.5%	0.468	0	1		59.7%	0.491	80.9%	0.393	84.3%	0.364	51.2%	0.5	60.9%	0.488
TrustPeo	23.8%	0.426	0	1		20.4%	0.403	4.1%	0.198	18.4%	0.387	46.7%	0.499	29.4%	0.456
TrustGov	62.5%	0.484	0	1		62.2%	0.485	28.2%	0.45	94.5%	0.229	59.0%	0.492	68.1%	0.466
Vehicle Use	53.4%	0.499	0	1		39.7%	0.49	59.7%	0.491	81.4%	0.389	41.3%	0.493	43.1%	0.495
Higher education	47.8%	0.5	0	1		29.1%	0.454	72.2%	0.448	65.4%	0.476	33.4%	0.472	37.6%	0.485
Observations		4,766				950		959		991		981		885	

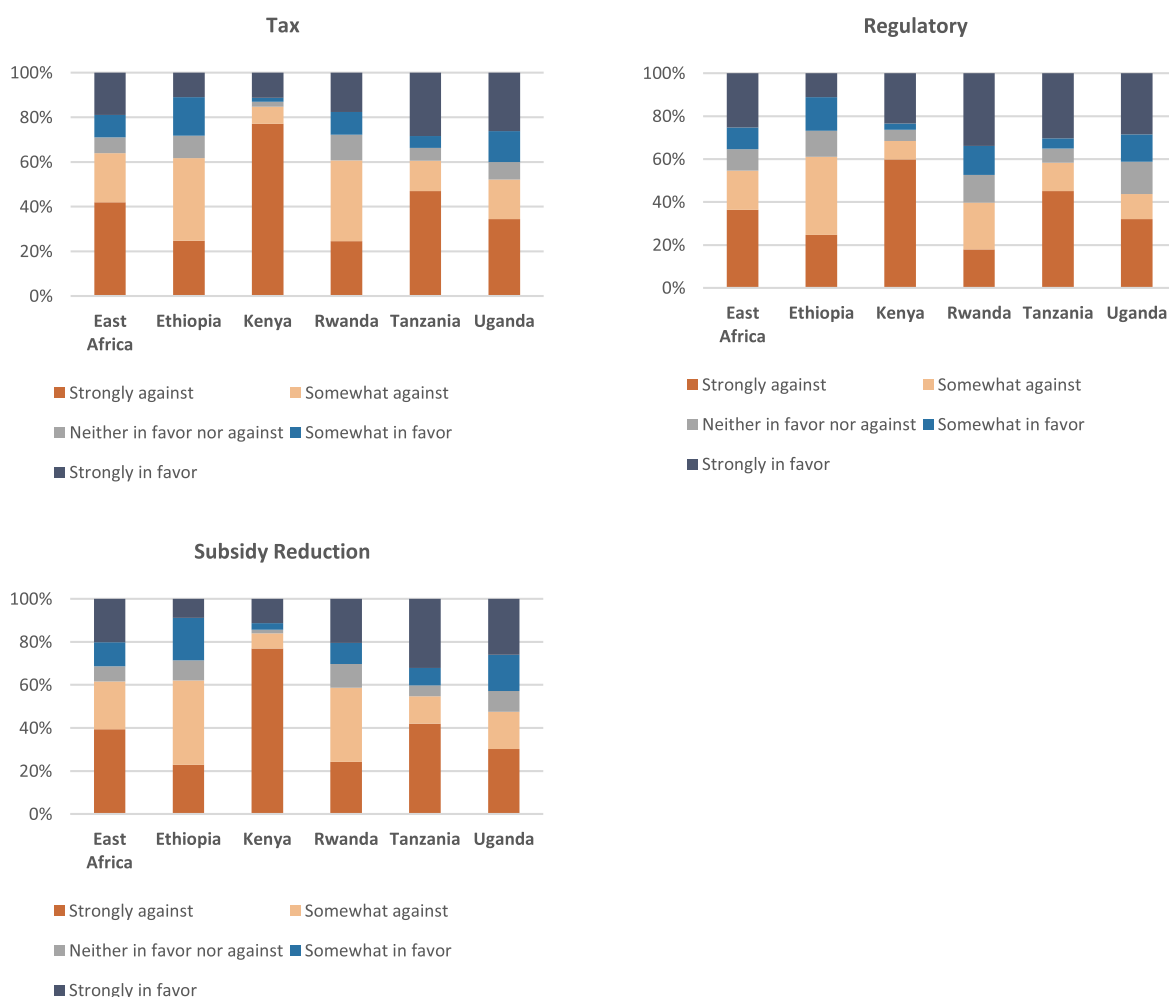


Figure 1. Public acceptability of three relevant policies to reduce fossil fuel use across five countries in East Africa.

5. Results

5.1. The level of public acceptability of a tax, reduced subsidy and regulation for decreasing fossil fuel consumption

In our sample, that is more educated and urban than the population in general in these countries, there is no majority acceptability of any of the proposed policy instruments in the East African context; however, there is some variation concerning the various proposals (Figure 1). Approximately 29% of the respondents accept (are 'strongly' or 'somewhat in favour of') the introduction of a fuel tax, while 31% accept a reduction in subsidies and 35% accept a regulation limiting the quantity of fossil fuels that households can purchase. Comparing the samples in the different countries, we find that Kenyan respondents show a lower acceptability of the introduction of fuel tax (13%) and reduction in subsidies (14%) than those in the other four countries. Similarly, 26% and 27% of the respondents in Ethiopia and Kenya, respectively, accept regulations, compared to 47% in Rwanda.

The acceptability of a tax or reduced subsidy is substantially greater after respondents are informed that the revenue will be used for a specific purpose (education, infrastructure, environment or social programmes) (Figure 2). Across the whole sample, this acceptability increased from 29% (without specified revenue use) to 71% when revenue use was specified for education, infrastructure or environmental programmes and to

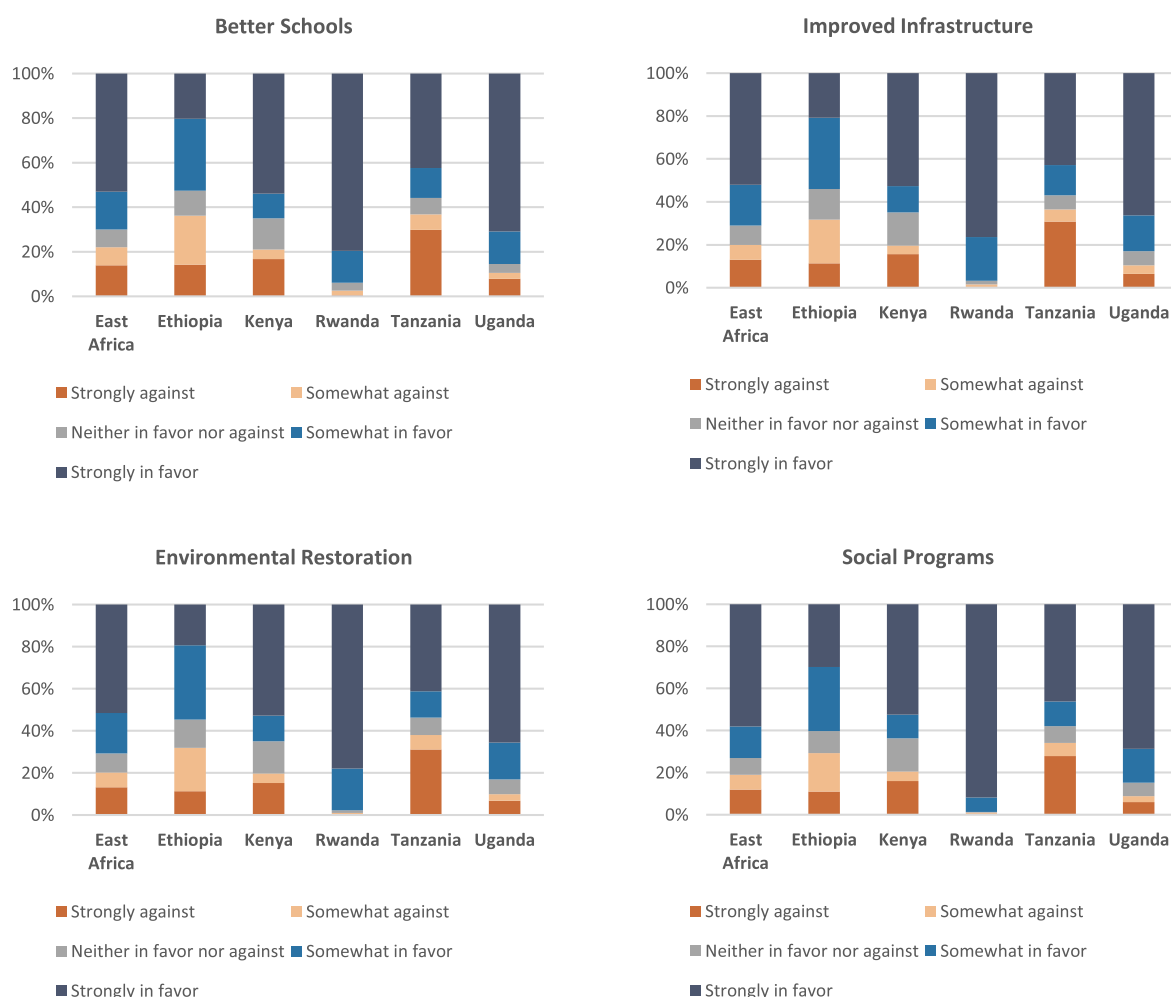


Figure 2. Public acceptability of a carbon tax with explicit tax revenue use in five East African countries.

73% for social programmes. The Kruskal – Wallis test shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the distribution of tax acceptability with and without a statement on the use of its revenue. These differences are evident when comparing countries' distinct distribution and that of the overall East African sample. Hence, investments in social programmes generate the highest increase in acceptability. In the previously discussed questions regarding respondents' attitudes toward a tax or subsidy reduction, revenue use is not specified. Hence, here, increased acceptability could be driven both by respondents being reminded that these policies entail increased revenues and by the actual intended use of these revenues.

5.2. Factors associated with the public acceptability of a carbon tax and a regulation for reducing fossil fuel consumption

Figure 3 shows the average marginal effect of factors associated with the acceptability of a carbon tax and a regulation, respectively, in the East African region based on the multinomial models that include controls for socioeconomic variables and country differences (see Appendix 6.1 in SM for the regression results of the full model for acceptability of a tax and Appendix 6.7 for regulation on the East African sample). We find that concern for climate change and trust in others increase the likelihood of strongly favouring of a tax and a regulation by around ten percentage points. Trust in people increases the likelihood of somewhat favouring

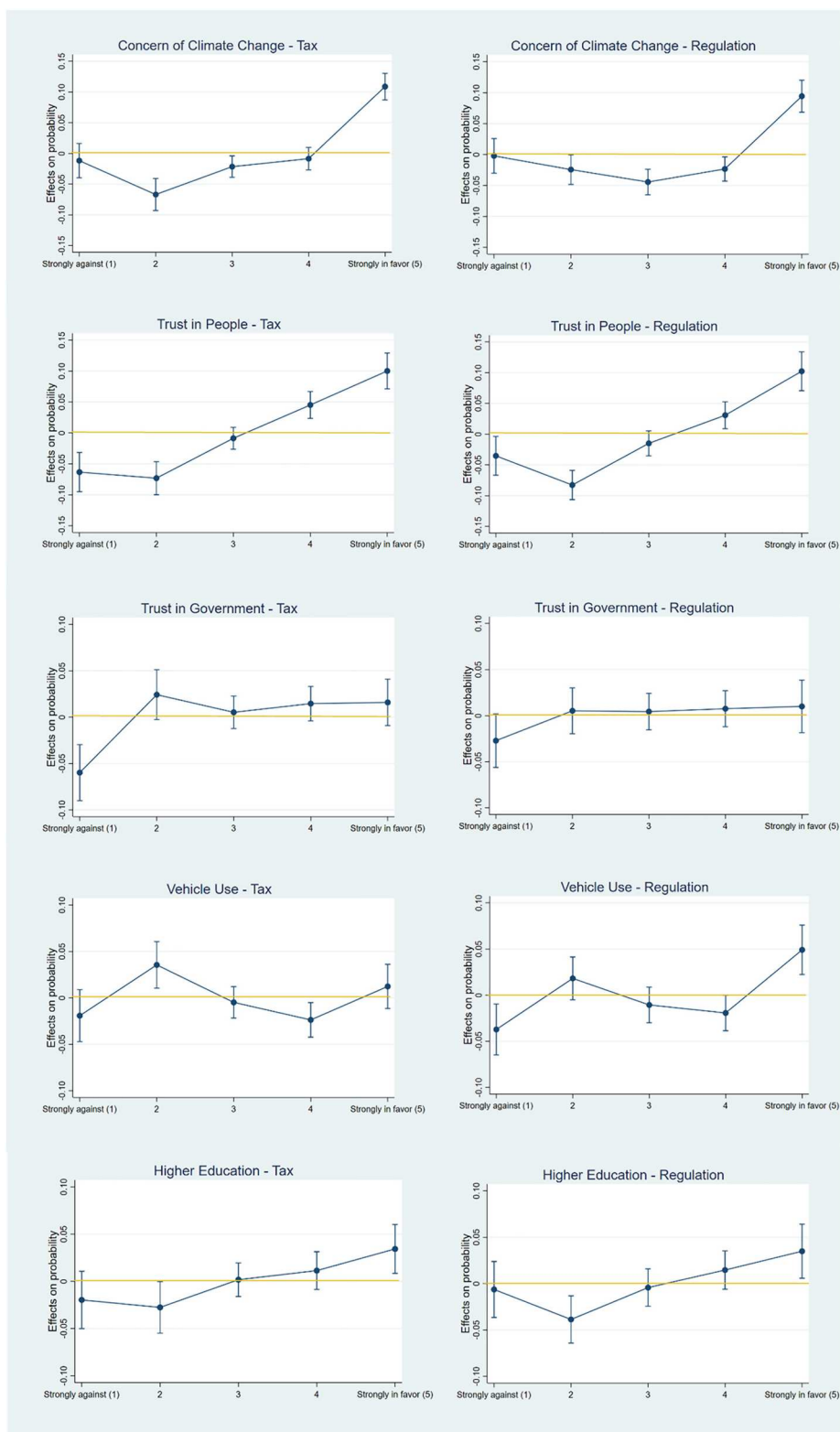


Figure 3. Impact of factors associated with acceptability of fossil fuel reduction policies in East Africa: Marginal effects of a tax and a regulation with 95% confidence intervals.

a tax and a regulation of 3–5 percentage points, while decreasing the likelihood of strongly or somewhat opposing them by around 5–8 percentage points. Consistent with other studies, we also find that individuals with higher education are more likely to strongly favour a tax compared to those without any higher education. However, the effects are small at around three percentage points.

Furthermore, in contrast to other studies, we find very weak associations between trust in government and the acceptability of climate policy instruments. Trust in government only significantly decreases the likelihood of being strongly against a tax on fossil fuel by six percentage points. We also find a weak association between using a fossil-fueled vehicle at least weekly and climate policy attitudes. Frequent use of fossil-fueled vehicles reduces the probability of opposing a regulation by approximately four percentage points, while it raises the likelihood of strongly favouring such regulation by about five percentage points. Conversely, we observed that frequent use of fossil-fueled vehicles marginally increases the likelihood of somewhat opposing a related tax by roughly three percentage points and slightly decreases the probability of somewhat favouring it.

These results are in line with the probit model regressions results (see Appendix 7, SM), where we also find that the effects become somewhat less substantial or significant when including country dummies, suggesting heterogeneity in public acceptability among the focal countries. We explore this heterogeneity, also seen in the descriptive statistics in Table 4, by estimating multinomial logit models by country. The results are presented in Appendix 6 and marginal effects are presented in Figure A8a–e in Appendix 8 (in SM).

Consistent with the overall findings for East Africa, our analysis demonstrates that, except for Kenya, climate change concern exhibits a significant and positive association with the acceptability of a carbon tax (SM, Figure A8a). Tanzania and Kenya display positive attitudes towards fossil fuel regulation in relation to climate change concern, whereas Rwanda shows a negative link, and no effect is observed in Ethiopia and Uganda. Similarly, trust in others is positively associated with the likelihood of supporting climate policies in Rwanda and Tanzania but has no significant impact in Ethiopia and Uganda (SM, Figure A8b). Moreover, higher education is positively associated with the acceptability of climate policies in Rwanda and Tanzania (SM Figure A8e). In Rwanda, the probability of strongly opposing climate policies decreases by nearly twenty percentage points in association with higher education, while the likelihood of strongly favouring them increases by around ten percentage points. Conversely, no significant or weak effects of higher education on acceptability are found in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.

However, the results regarding the association between trust in institutions and the acceptability of climate policies, as well as the relationship between weekly vehicle use and acceptability, yield ambiguous findings (SM, Figure A8c–d). While trust in institutions is positively linked to the acceptability of both a tax and a regulation in Uganda, it is negatively associated with a tax in Rwanda and Tanzania, and with a regulation in Kenya, with no significant effects observed in Ethiopia. Weekly vehicle use is negatively associated with the acceptability of a tax and a regulation in Ethiopia. In Tanzania and Uganda, vehicle use is negatively linked to a tax. Regarding a regulation, there is a positive association between vehicle use and acceptability in Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. However, in Kenya, vehicle use is not significantly associated with either tax or regulation acceptability.

5.3. Robustness of the results

To test the robustness of our findings, we conduct additional analyses using an ordered probit logit model, and find that our main results remain consistent (see Appendix 7 in SM for detailed results). This is not surprising given that our multinomial logit model indicates that the effects of most factors are more prominent at the extreme ends of the acceptability spectrum (i.e. strongly favouring or opposing), as we previously discussed.

Taking into account the great heterogeneity across the countries, especially the very high stated trust in government by the respondents in Rwanda, we run the multinomial model regressions while omitting the Rwandan respondents. Our results hold, with strong significant associations between climate change concern or trust in others and the acceptability of a tax or a regulation. The only large change is that the average marginal effect of higher education becomes insignificant when Rwanda is excluded (see Appendix 9 in SM).

6. Discussion

Nearly 30% of our 4,766 respondents stated that they are somewhat or strongly in favour of increasing fossil fuel prices by introducing a carbon tax. When we specified how the revenues of such a tax would be used, this level of acceptability more than doubled. Given the possible differences between our sample and the total population, we cannot estimate the level of acceptability overall, but our results indicate that earmarking revenue use may be a way to increase carbon tax acceptability in East Africa. Thus, these results indicate that context matters. In contrast to results from previous studies in other contexts (Amdur et al., 2014; Kallbekken & Sælen, 2011; Kotchen et al., 2017), in our East African sample, we find that social uses entail equal or greater acceptability than environmental uses of the revenue. One possible explanation would be that in a context where poverty is more prevalent, social issues are more salient to people.

In line with previous studies, we find that self-interest motives (operationalized as weekly use of fossil fuel driven vehicles) also impact policy acceptability in our more urban and educated sample of East Africans. However, the association is not clearly negative and quite weak. We find large variations across countries, not only in the strength of the associations between these factors and policy acceptability but also in their direction. While there is a negative association between vehicle use and quantitative regulation acceptability in Ethiopia, there is a positive association in Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. One mechanism explaining these counterintuitive results could be that most individuals who can afford to drive a fossil fuel vehicle weekly are also likely highly educated. Previous research has shown that a higher education is associated with climate policy acceptability (Bergquist et al., 2022). Education plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of climate change. Higher education equips individuals with systemic thinking skills, enabling them not only to comprehend the ramifications of climate change but also to recognize the correlation between climate policies and welfare provisions. Our findings reveal a substantial increase in the acceptability of climate policies when revenues from a climate tax is earmarked to specific environmental or social uses. Consistent with prior research, our study demonstrates a positive association between higher education and the acceptability of climate policies. Therefore, it is imperative to not only disseminate information regarding climate change and the utilization of revenue but also to emphasize investing in higher education for multiple reasons. By doing so, we can foster greater support for climate-related measures.

Regarding the internal factors, we find that a high level of climate change concern is positively associated with acceptability of various policy instruments. Even though we have observed some variation among the focal countries, this result is robust in the population sample studied here. Hence, even in countries which in comparison, emit and have emitted low quantities of GHGs per capita, where institutions are corrupt and poverty is rampant (in some contexts), people's concern is associated with their attitudes towards (national) government intervention. These results align with previous findings from other contexts (Bergquist et al., 2022). Hence, increased information on and awareness of climate change could enable and smooth the introduction of these policies. Meanwhile, we find that there is still a substantial gap between climate concern and climate policy acceptability, as acknowledged and shown in previous studies. Hence, people can be concerned about climate change without endorsing relevant policies (or policy instruments) because they fear the high personal costs linked to the introduction of, for example, carbon taxes.

In line with previous studies, concerning the inter-relational determinants, we find that general trust in other people is positively associated with acceptability of both taxes and regulations. Potentially this indicates that people who perceive others as trustworthy also think that compliance with laws and regulations is higher, and hence are more likely to support such tools. If you, on the other hand, think that others will evade taxes and not comply with regulations you are less likely to support those instruments. However, in contrast to other studies, we find weak associations between trust in government and the acceptability of climate policy instruments in East Africa and large heterogeneity across the five focal East African countries. Rwanda stands out due to its strong negative association between political trust and carbon tax policy acceptability. There are several ways to interpret these results. First, we acknowledge the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which indicates that there is substantial variation among our focal countries (see Table 2). For example, Rwanda is considered less corrupt than Uganda. Second, questions on trust and government support in hybrid or authoritarian states can be sensitive topics (Robinson & Tannenbergh, 2019; Tannenbergh,

2022). Second, we did not ask whether a respondent has voted for or is a supporter of the current government, as being a supporter of an incumbent is a strong indicator of trust in government (Holmberg, 1999). Third, certain time-specific factors can potentially explain some of the variation among the focal countries. For example, the low trust in Kenya could be because there were highly publicized corruption scandals involving governmental officials during our data collection period, which took place just before the 2022 Kenyan election. These may have negatively impacted how much Kenyan citizens trust their government. However, the weak associations between trust in government and climate policy acceptability are striking, and raise questions about previous findings. Hence, the role of trust, government support, and corruption perceptions need to be further explored in these contexts (see discussion Appendix 5 in SM). One venue would be to explore different dimensions of trust, where you trust actors because of their competence, integrity or value similarity (cf. Kitt et al., 2021), and whether these can explain some of the variation in our results.

Finally, we acknowledge the challenges of conducting survey based research in East Africa where poverty is widespread and there is a large variety in languages and ethnicities. This adds to the well-established limitations of stated preference studies, particularly related to potential biases such as social desirability and lack of information.

7. Conclusion

This study makes a unique empirical contribution to the literature on public acceptability of policy instruments for reducing fossil fuel consumption by its focus on East Africa. Several of our findings are also relevant from a policy making perspective as they highlight factors that can make people more positive towards climate policy instruments.

We find that higher education and climate change concern are linked to the acceptability of policies aimed at reducing fossil fuel consumption. Education and information, generating increased awareness, understanding and political attention to climate concerns, may hence have the potential to boost support for climate policy proposals also in the East African context.

Additionally, clearly specifying and transparently communicating the use of generated revenue can enhance public support. This finding, consistent with existing studies from other contexts, is crucial for policy makers aiming to introduce such policies (see also Carattini et al., 2019 on this point). Interestingly, contrary to previous studies mainly conducted in richer countries, we discovered that revenue recycling schemes addressing social issues and inequalities receive more support than those focusing solely on environmental or climate concerns. This finding could be particularly relevant for the removal of fossil fuel subsidies, which represent a significant portion of the national budget in many low- and middle income countries. We also find that higher levels of generalized social trust are linked to acceptability, potentially indicating that perceptions about compliance with laws and regulations can be of importance. At the same time, we find weak links between political trust and people's policy attitudes. The findings on trust are intriguing and deserve further exploration.

Our sample is comprised of more urban and educated East-Africans, who presumably are relatively more influential in the policy process than other parts of the population. Knowledge about the preferences of this part of the population may hence be particularly relevant from a policy making perspective. However, as our study is not fully representative of the population in the five countries and relies on stated preferences, which may be subject to different biases, the results should be interpreted with caution. For example, our study highlights that trust in government varies significantly across countries, and the associations between trust and climate policy acceptability are sometimes contrary to expectations. Consequently, further examination of this variable is necessary before drawing definitive conclusions.

Despite these considerations and caveats, we believe our study not only establishes an empirical foundation for future research, but also provides essential scientific and policy insights regarding climate policy acceptability for an influential segment of the population in East Africa.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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