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Rising AI Use, Rising Calls for Action

Insights from Fathom's National Polling
and Statewide Focus Groups

An Editorial Note from Fathom

Fathom's second annual report on Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage and sentiment comes at a crucial juncture for American technology governance and innovation. AI still brings a sense of awe and wonder about the pace and depth of human progress: Americans are increasingly integrating this technology into their daily lives, and positive sentiment about AI has ticked up modestly over the past year.

However, Americans remain largely ambivalent about the technology and its societal impact and, according to a [recent publication](#) by Pew Research Center, lag behind the rest of the world in AI optimism. They are concerned about the future of work, the education of their children, and their interpersonal relationships.

Within this ambivalence emerges a navigable moment. Americans want a voice in how AI develops, not simply to have decisions made for them. While trust in government and industry to regulate AI has flatlined, Americans across party lines express trust in independent experts to create guardrails on AI. This bipartisan consensus points to a clear path forward: innovative governance frameworks that bring together diverse stakeholders to build responsive oversight — maximizing AI's transformative potential while establishing effective guardrails. A window of opportunity exists to establish governance that allows technology to evolve while keeping people at the table. Policymakers who act decisively now will have a strong public mandate to establish governance that sustains both American AI leadership and public trust.

Executive Summary

Fathom's latest report, *Rising AI Use, Rising Calls for Action*, explores American public opinion on AI three years after ChatGPT brought generative AI into public discourse. This report follows our inaugural report, [AI at the Crossroads: Public Sentiment and Policy Solutions](#), and reveals how Americans use AI, what excites and concerns them most, and who they trust to shape the future of this technology. The report draws on national polling including more than 2,036 interviews, as well as focus groups across the political spectrum in California and Ohio.

The public's message is clear: AI use has surged, yet Americans remain ambivalent about its trajectory. While positive sentiment has ticked up, concern has also increased — particularly around jobs and education. Most significantly, Americans express strong demand for oversight but trust independent experts far more than government or industry to deliver it.

This report reveals both the challenge and the opportunity: establishing governance frameworks that can address public concerns while preserving the innovation that makes AI transformative.

FOUR KEY FINDINGS

1. The public is using AI more than ever, and adoption continues to accelerate.

- Awareness of AI has increased: 82% of the public have seen, read, or heard about AI in the last year, up from 77% in 2024 — topping public awareness of other topics such as Social Security, Medicare, and healthcare cost issues.
- Usage has also surged, and AI has achieved remarkable mainstream adoption. Nearly 7 in 10 people have used AI, with nearly half using it daily or weekly: a major increase from the year before.
- In their personal lives, Americans primarily use AI for asking questions and getting general information. Basic search is used more than twice as much as more sophisticated use cases such as generating or editing photos, summarizing articles or web content, or translating or learning languages. This suggests significant room for growth as users discover AI's expanding capabilities.
- Americans interact with AI primarily through search engines and social media rather than AI-specific apps, signaling that AI is still mostly seen and experienced as an add-on benefit of existing technology, rather than a standalone tool.

2. Public excitement around AI continues to tick up — but Americans have concerns about the technology's impact on education and jobs.

- Americans remain more excited than concerned about AI, though the margin is narrow. Positive sentiment has ticked up modestly over the past year (from 32% to 36%), while concern has also increased (from 30% to 33%).
- Ambivalence — the percentage of those who are equally excited and concerned about AI — remains significant at 27%, down from 34% the previous year, as the public forms clearer opinions about the technology.
- Workforce disruption is the leading area of concern: nearly half of respondents believe AI will cause significant unemployment, while 37% believe it will create new opportunities.
- Education is another top area of concern: 30% of the public thinks that AI will have a negative impact on K-12 education and the well-being of our children, reflecting parents' and educators' desire for thoughtful implementation.

3. The public wants guardrails on AI.

- Americans across party lines want AI guardrails: more than 75% support guardrails around children's safety, disinformation, cyber-attacks, privacy, education, transparency, and human oversight of AI.
- Strong majorities also support protecting jobs or providing economic support for workers navigating transitions.

4. The public's strong demand for AI oversight creates a unique opportunity for innovative governance approaches.

- 56% of Americans trust independent subject matter experts to govern AI, with consistent support across party lines — presenting a clear pathway forward.
- Only 35% of the public trusts the federal government to provide effective and appropriate AI governance. Trust in tech companies is slightly higher at 50%.
- Only 43% are confident in the ability of government and tech companies to collaborate effectively to regulate AI.

Methodology

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- 4 virtual focus groups among Ohio and California voters, conducted August 6th and 7th, 2025. The focus groups were divided into Ohio Republican voters, Ohio Independent voters, California Democratic voters, and California Republican voters.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

- National survey including 2,036 interviews conducted August 28-September 4, 2025. Margin of error is +/-2.17% at a 95% confidence interval.
- Additional trend data from a national online survey conducted September 9-13 2024 among 2,558 voters. Margin of error is +/-1.94% at a 95% confidence interval.

01 The public is using AI more than ever, and adoption continues to accelerate.

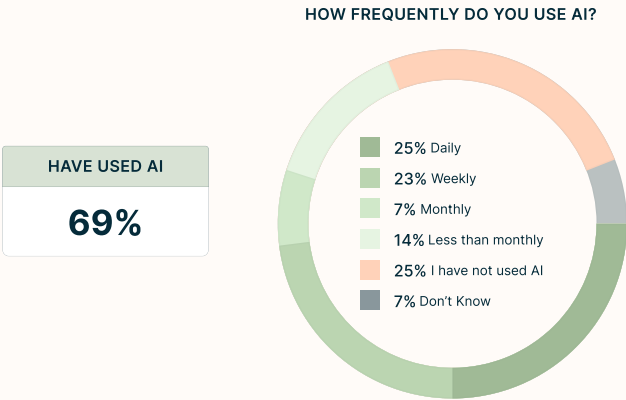
AI is becoming more integrated into the bloodstream of American society. The public is seeing, reading, or hearing about AI more than other major hot-button issues such as the cost of healthcare or Social Security or Medicare benefits. This represents a remarkable shift in public consciousness: information about AI has surged alongside issues with direct, immediate impacts on Americans’ daily lives — and this change happened in just one year. This rapid ascent in awareness signals a critical momentum in AI public engagement, suggesting that AI has moved from a niche, complex technology topic to a central concern in the American social and political conversations.

Information flow about AI has increased over the last year.

RANKED BY SEEN, READ, HEARD A LOT	S/R/H A LOT		S/R/H SOME		A LOT/SOME	
	2025		2024		2025	2024
The cost of living and inflation	58%		31%		89%	92%
Immigration	57%		28%		86%	84%
Tariffs	53%		31%		84%	—
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	44%		38%		82%	77%
The cost of healthcare	41%		37%		79%	80%
Social Security and Medicare benefits	38%		41%		79%	74%

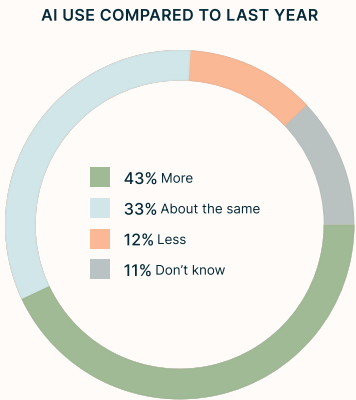
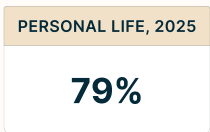
The public is also using AI more than ever: nearly half of all Americans use this technology daily or weekly. Among users, adoption is remarkably sticky: 70% of those who’ve used AI engage with it daily or weekly, while only 14% use it less than monthly.

Nearly 7 in 10 voters have used AI, with a quarter using it daily.



Americans are integrating AI across multiple dimensions of their lives, with personal use leading the way.

IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS
HAVE YOU USED AI TOOLS?
[AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE USED AI]



When using AI in their personal lives, the top use case — by far — is asking questions for general information. People reported using AI for general questions nearly twice as much as the next most common use cases, such as voice assistance for smart devices (32%), finding deals while shopping online (30%), personal health or medical research (30%), or creative expression (29%). The public is still using AI as “super-charged search”, but this foundation provides a pathway to more sophisticated applications.

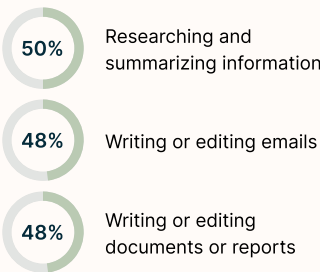
When using AI in their personal life, the top use cases are enhanced search.

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU USED AI FOR PERSONAL USE?	
Asking questions for general information	62%
Voice assistants for smart devices	32%
Finding the best deals while shopping online	30%
Personal health or medical research	30%
Creative expression	29%
Generating or editing photos, videos, etc.	29%
Summarizing articles, books, or web content	26%
Translating or learning languages	25%
Fitness planning or tracking	20%
Managing personal finances or budgeting	17%
Planning travel itineraries	17%
Therapy services, mental health counseling, or personal advice	16%
Personal companionship	15%

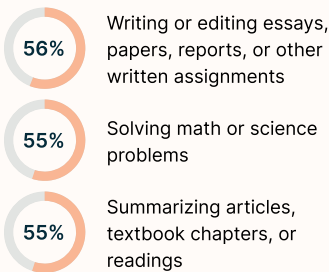
Outside of personal life, Americans are finding AI valuable in professional and educational settings.

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU USED AI FOR PERSONAL USE?

At Work:



At School:

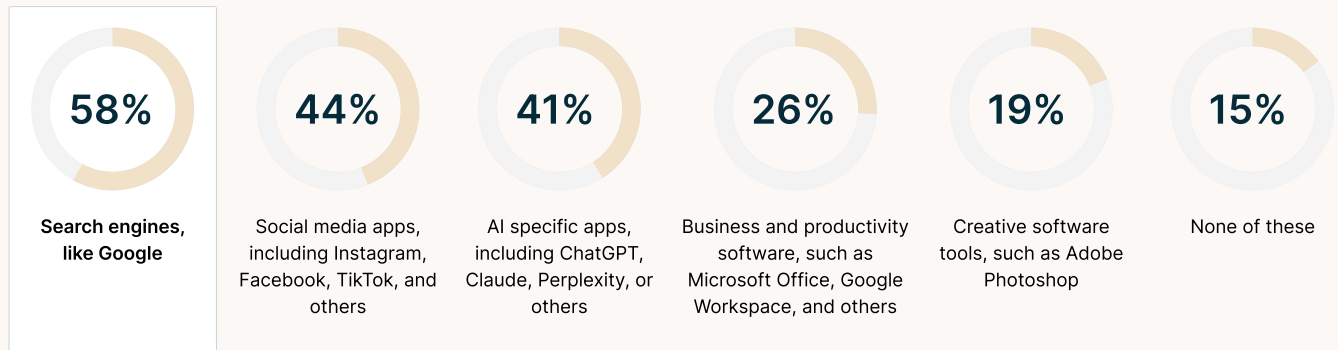


CASE STUDY

How are people interacting with AI?

Since Fathom's focus groups in 2024, when AI felt like a new phenomenon with which participants had minimal interaction, adoption has accelerated. Last year, some were experimenting with ChatGPT and most had heard or read about how it could be used — but many fewer felt directly connected to it. While experimentation with AI through AI-specific apps continues, the public primarily interacts with AI through search engines, social media apps, and other software applications. The integration of AI into the public's life is still nascent, with most seeing AI in terms of its benefits as an add-on to existing technology they already use.

IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING APPLICATIONS OR PROGRAMS ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO INTERACT WITH AI PRODUCTS?
PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.



"I like how Google does the AI version where they just give you...a complete overview synopsis. It could be something really trivial if I'm asking a question about something I want to make and how can I make it easier...or it could be a really serious question."

– Ohio Republican Voter

"I'm a public-school teacher, and I use AI frequently to streamline some of the administrative parts of my job...it helps me be more productive and streamline all those tasks that I have to do, all those writing, kind of menial tasks that don't require a lot of thought, but do suck up a lot of time."

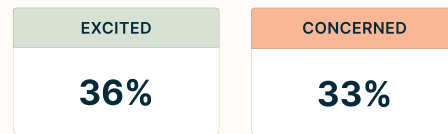
– Ohio Independent Voter

These real-world applications help explain why 70% of AI users engage with it daily or weekly — they're finding concrete value as it increases productivity in their specific contexts.

02 Public excitement around AI continues to tick up — but Americans have concerns about the technology’s impact on education and jobs.

Excitement about AI has grown: the public remains slightly more optimistic than worried about the technology, with positive sentiment rising over the past year from 32% to 36%. However, concern has also increased (from 30% to 33%), meaning excitement only marginally outpaces concern.

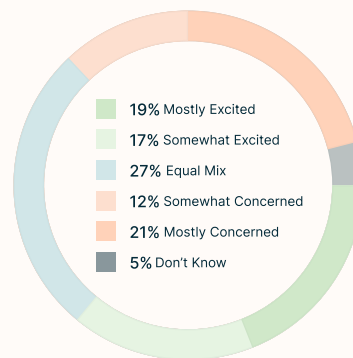
GENERALLY SPEAKING, WHEN IT COMES TO AI BEING DEVELOPED AND INCORPORATED INTO PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, DO YOU FEEL...



This modest uptick in positive sentiment about AI should be understood in a broader context: Americans lag significantly behind other countries in optimism. According to Pew Research Center’s survey, [How People Around the World View AI](#), Americans ranked among the countries with the highest concern rates out of 25 nations surveyed.

Notably, a quarter of respondents (27%) feel equally excited and concerned about AI — down from 34% the year before. While this ambivalence is still significant, the decrease signals that Americans are developing more defined views about AI’s impact on their lives, views that trend more toward caution than enthusiasm when compared globally.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, WHEN IT COMES TO AI BEING DEVELOPED AND INCORPORATED INTO PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, DO YOU FEEL...



2024 Survey Results: 32% Excited, 30% Concerned, 34% Equal Mix.

Public Excitement

Those excited about AI cited its ability to speed up tasks and improve productivity (33%), as well as its potential to advance scientific breakthroughs, particularly in fields like healthcare (24%). Notably, these top reasons span both immediate, everyday benefits and transformative, long-term potential. Overall, the impact of AI on technology, medical research, and healthcare were viewed optimistically, with positive assessments outweighing concerns.

Poll participants shared:

“It makes things easier, it’s a tool that can be very useful and reduce the amount of time it takes to do something. I love technology that makes life easier.”

“[I’m excited about] The potential for medical breakthroughs, science innovation and other important discoveries that it can take people years to figure out.”

“AI’s potential to revolutionize industries and daily life excites me.”

Top Concerns

However, a third of the public has pressing concerns about AI’s impact in certain sectors. This represents an increase from the year before, signaling deeper public engagement with the technology. As part of their concerns, participants mentioned:

“I am concerned that AI will become too advanced and overtake human jobs.”	“I’m concerned about the possibility of data breaches and whether any personal information I share will be secure.”	“I’m most concerned about AI being misused or spreading misinformation.”	“Eventually people will start to get so dependent upon this technology that they won’t be able to think for themselves.”
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Americans have identified where governance is needed to ensure AI serves, rather than harms, the public interest. Workforce transitions emerged as a top priority. In open-ended responses, one-third of people expressed concerns focused on how to manage labor market changes in areas where the technology could eliminate jobs. Other priorities include data security and misuse of personal information, fake content and misinformation, and ensuring critical thinking skills develop alongside AI capabilities.

These concerns are most pressing in two specific areas: jobs and education. When evaluating AI’s effect across different areas of society, Americans are split on impact, with twice as many anticipating negative effects on the job market and K-12 education as those anticipating positive ones.

The workplace transformation is top of mind. One academic captured the forward-looking nature of these concerns: “I would be concerned about job loss for my specific job more 5 to 10 years out...at some point I’m expecting in 5 to 10 years that AI might be publishing well done peer-reviewed type research, and I think that’s when I start to get nervous.” Importantly, this timeline points to a meaningful opportunity for proactive adaptation.

The education conversation is centered on maintaining academic integrity and dependency. Parents and educators want schools to have clear frameworks for AI use. Others voiced long-term consequences: “What happens when our kids get older and suddenly, they’ve gone to school and they really don’t know anything or don’t know any life skills. Then you’re just constantly dependent on AI.”

CASE STUDY

Jobs

Job market concerns have intensified since last year, particularly among those newer to AI adoption. When presented with competing statements, nearly half (49%) agreed that AI will cause significant job loss and disrupt the labor market more than previous technologies. However, 37% believed AI would create new job opportunities while transforming existing ones.

This represents a significant shift from 2024, when opinion was nearly evenly split at 44% versus 43%, pointing to a critical moment for developing proactive workforce preparation and transition support policies.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS COMES CLOSER TO YOUR VIEW?

Voters are even more worried about job loss than they were last year.

49%

2024: 44%

AI will cause significant job loss and disrupt the labor market more than previous technologies, leaving too many without work

37%

2024: 43%

AI is similar to other technologies in history and will create new job opportunities while transforming existing ones

People are most concerned about job displacement in customer service, manufacturing, and technology, followed by jobs in education and creative fields.

JOBS RANKED BY MOST CONCERN ABOUT BEING REPLACED OR DISPLACED BY AI	RANKED 1ST OR 2ND MOST CONCERNED
Customer service	28%
Manufacturing and factory	28%
Technology and software	25%
Education	21%
Artistic and creative	20%
Health care	19%
Administrative	16%
Retail	13%
Legal and financial	12%
Food service	11%
Transportation and delivery	11%

CASE STUDY

Education

The impact of AI on education emerged as a focal point in focus groups. Respondents spoke confidently and with direct knowledge or experience:

“I’m super curious about schools. How would they even know if you just ChatGPT the whole essay? We used to have to think of these things with our brain and write them out and I don’t want to say society will become dumber now but how do they even know?”

– California Republican Voter

“My best friend is a teacher. One of the debates at his school was do we let the kids use AI or not to write papers? He’s teaching eighth graders. He’s trying to tell them hey, look, you’re going to use this tool for the rest of your life probably, but you have to understand why you’re using it and how to use it.”

– California Democratic Voter

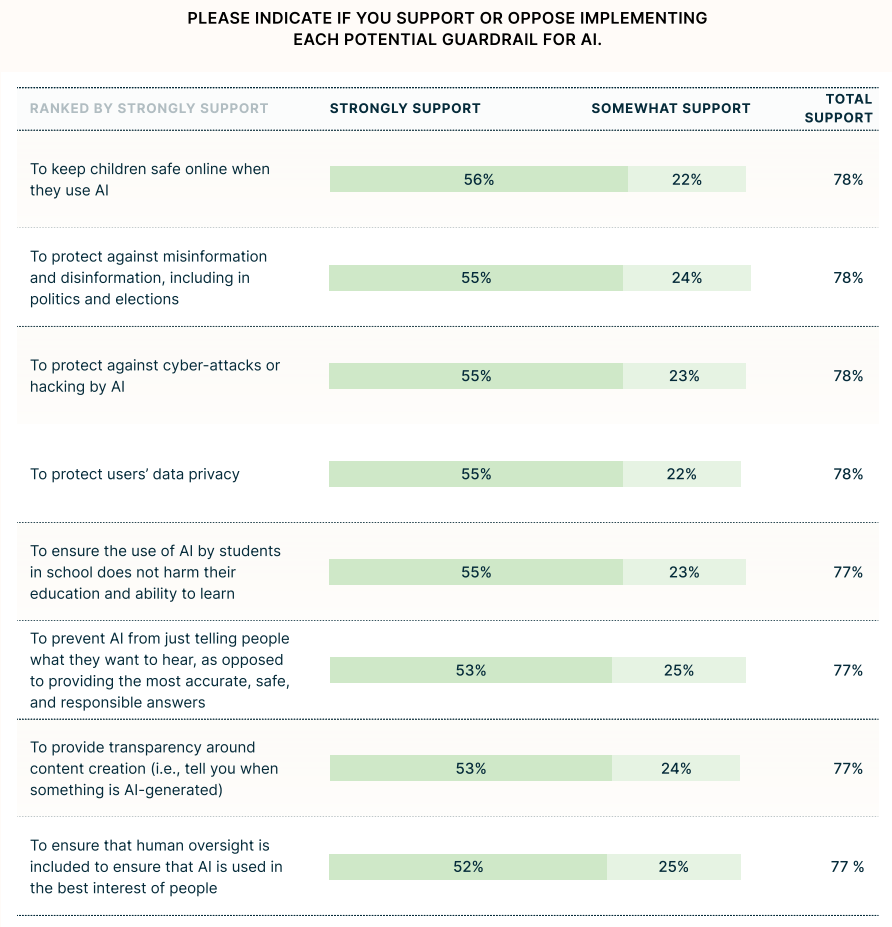
These considerations underscore growing momentum for clear guidelines that help students develop critical thinking alongside AI literacy.

03 The public wants guardrails on AI.

As Americans use AI more — and increasingly engage in questions about its impact — they’re calling for governance measures.

More than 75% of Americans support guardrails around priorities such as children’s safety, disinformation, cyber-attacks, privacy, education, transparency, and human oversight of AI.

Majorities of voters strongly support guardrails centered on safety, misinformation, education, and privacy.



This strong support for guardrails — even as AI adoption accelerates — reflects Americans’ desire for innovation with accountability, and suggests that robust governance could help shift Americans from ambivalence toward greater confidence in AI. The demand for guardrails reflects a broader desire: Americans want to participate in shaping AI’s trajectory, not simply be subject to it.

The majority of people also support the implementation of specific guardrails to address workforce transitions, including protecting jobs and providing economic support for navigating career changes due to AI.

Notably, more than 70% support protecting jobs that could be affected or eliminated by AI and providing economic support for displaced workers. The strong support for employment safeguards underscores just how seriously Americans take the question of AI-driven job displacement. Americans want both prevention and support, signaling a clear appetite for comprehensive policy responses to workforce transformation.

PLEASE INDICATE IF YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE IMPLEMENTING
EACH POTENTIAL GUARDRAIL FOR AI.

RANKED BY STRONGLY SUPPORT	STRONGLY SUPPORT	SOMEWHAT SUPPORT	TOTAL SUPPORT
To prevent users from developing an unhealthy emotional bond with the AI tool	47%	29%	76%
To protect jobs that could be affected or eliminated by AI	47%	27%	74%
To prevent copyright infringement	46%	27%	74%
To provide economic support for those who lose their jobs as a result of AI	45%	27%	72%
To ensure that the power of AI isn't concentrated in large tech companies	41%	30%	71%
To implement national security measures	41%	26%	67%
To prevent AI from making individuals feel alone and disconnected from "the real world"	39%	28%	67%
To provide a universal basic income for those who lose their jobs as result of AI	38%	26%	64%
To ensure the benefits of AI are broadly shared	37%	31%	68%

There is majority support for every guardrail we tested.

In addition to workforce concerns, the public also expressed support for guardrails to ensure AI's power isn't concentrated in large tech companies.

Focus group participants also voiced similar questions, worrying that the drive to outdo competitors could lead industry players to prioritize speed over public trust.

"I think the companies are designing themselves in a way to not be held accountable for what I think if an individual did would probably be in jail for... money is a huge driving force. These are some of the richest people in the world, they still are extremely fueled by money, ego, and staying the richest people in the world is the bottom line."

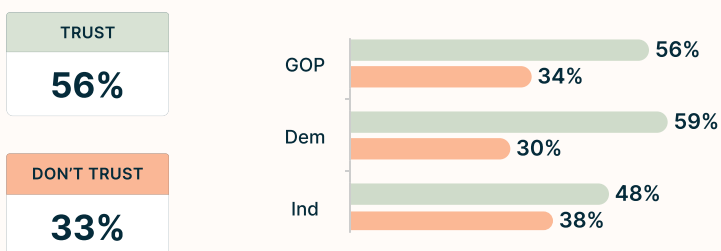
- Ohio Independent Voter

The public's support for guardrails reveals an opening for balanced governance frameworks. The public isn't anti-innovation — they're asking for accountability structures that allow AI to develop while preventing monopolistic, unchecked control. Policymakers who respond to this demand can build both public trust and sustainable innovation pathways.

04 The public's strong demand for AI oversight creates a unique opportunity for innovative governance approaches.

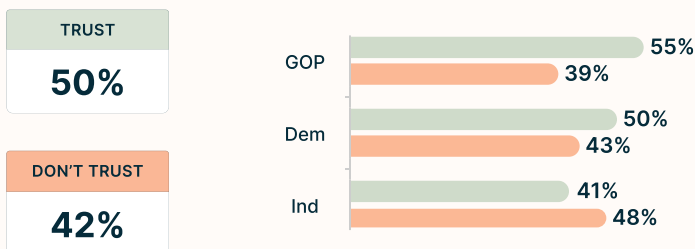
More than half of Americans (56%) have confidence in independent subject matter experts and public interest groups to regulate AI. This trust cuts across the political spectrum, with 59% of Democrats, 56% of Republicans, and 48% of Independents expressing confidence in independent experts. Such bipartisan consensus is rare and significant, revealing a promising path forward for AI governance.

INDEPENDENT SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS, INCLUDING THOSE FROM GROUPS REPRESENTING THE PUBLIC INTEREST

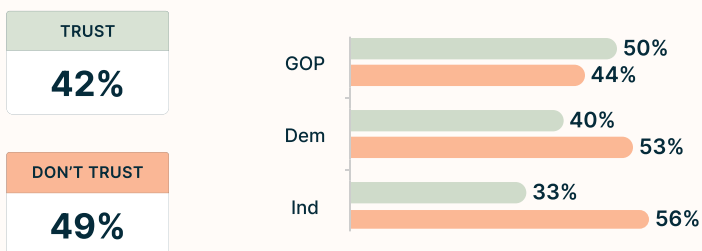


Voters across party trust independent experts and organizations, but tech companies fare relatively well.

TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES THAT ARE DEVELOPING AI



FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES



This trust in independent experts stands in sharp contrast to views of traditional institutions. Trust in the government's ability to regulate AI remains low: only 42% of Americans think that government regulators can develop appropriate AI guardrails, essentially unchanged from the year before. When asked specifically about trusting elected officials in Washington, only 35% say yes, while 54% say no — also unchanged from 2024. Notably, state government agencies (44% trust) perform only marginally better than federal agencies (42% trust).

Voters do not trust government agencies to regulate AI properly, but have more confidence in independent subject matter experts and organizations.

HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TO ENSURE THAT AI IS DEVELOPED WITH PROPER GUARDRAILS?

RANKED BY TRUST A LOT	A LOT	SOME	NOT TOO MUCH	NOT AT ALL	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL TRUST
Independent subject matter experts, including those from groups representing the public interest	22%	34%	21%	11%	12%	56%
Technology companies that are developing AI	20%	30%	22%	20%	8%	50%
Independent organizations	18%	37%	25%	11%	10%	54%
Non-profit organizations	16%	35%	23%	13%	13%	51%
State government agencies	14%	30%	26%	21%	8%	44%
Federal government agencies	14%	29%	25%	24%	8%	42%

As participants voiced in focus groups, their top concerns around the government’s ability to regulate AI include the challenge of keeping pace with rapid innovation and government regulators’ lack of subject matter expertise.

“The government first needs to educate themselves, like our legislators aren’t AI experts.”

– California Democratic Voter

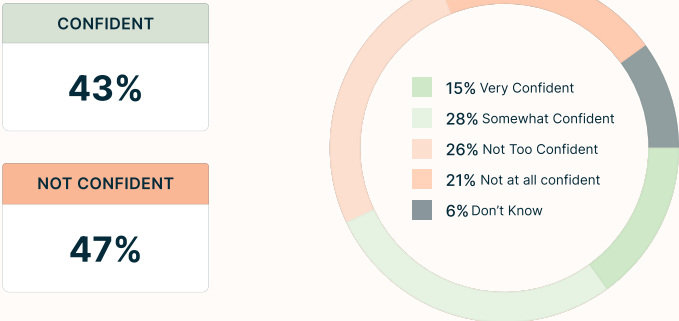
“There’s a lack of ability to get things done, it seems like, in the federal government. They’re very slow.”

– Ohio Independent Voter

Technology companies fare only slightly better, with 50% of the public saying they would trust AI developers to govern AI. As with trust in government, this level is essentially the same as the year before. Republicans tend to trust industry (55% trust) more than Democrats and Independents (50% and 41%, respectively).

Traditional collaboration models are also viewed with skepticism: only 43% are confident in government and tech’s ability to work together to implement AI guardrails, in line with last year’s findings.

CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT & TECH COMPANIES TO WORK TOGETHER



2024 Survey Results: 41% Confident vs. 52% Not Confident

However, Americans' trust in alternative forms of governance is high: this is a clear directive about the kind of approaches Americans want: oversight delivered by institutions they actually trust.

The public strongly supports this approach. Focus group participants spoke approvingly of a system involving multiple stakeholders, including AI experts, independent organizations, and affected groups:

"I was thinking a higher level of government...or if there's some administration or independent company that is looking out for our best interest, something like that."

– Ohio Independent Voter

"Bipartisan committee. They should be implementing the rules and regulations, but I also like that really it should be developers creating the AI, but with rules and regulations created by the government."

– California Democratic Voter

"Governments, regulators, tech companies, researchers. The tech companies have to build the systems, follow ethical practices. I guess being transparent, how they are trained, but then we have the government to set the rules and make sure people are following them."

– Ohio Republican Voter

Americans want AI oversight but reject the false choice between government regulation and industry self-regulation. Their trust in independent experts reveals a path forward: governance that can address the concerns driving public ambivalence while allowing beneficial innovation to continue.

At A Crossroads

American public opinion on AI reveals a critical moment for action: Americans are using AI more than ever, yet remain largely ambivalent about its trajectory. While optimism has ticked up modestly, concerns have also increased, and Americans lag behind other nations in AI enthusiasm. This ambivalence creates a timely opportunity for governance innovation that increases public trust in AI.

Americans recognize AI's transformative capabilities, yet they've identified specific areas where proactive governance is essential to ensure AI continues to develop in a trustworthy manner, particularly around workforce transitions and employment. Most significantly, while they lack confidence in traditional institutions, they trust independent subject matter experts to create the guardrails they're calling for.

This presents a clear opportunity: Americans are signaling openness to innovative governance approaches. The question facing American society is not whether AI systems should have guardrails, but rather how those guardrails can be structured to give Americans meaningful input, move at the speed of innovation, and maintain the public trust essential for AI's long-term success. The window for establishing effective, legitimate oversight mechanisms that preserve American leadership remains open, and action now can capitalize on strong public support.

Next Steps

Congress and state legislatures have an opportunity to complement traditional oversight with innovative approaches to solve the AI governance challenge. An opportunity lies in the public's openness to innovative governance approaches that elevate independent subject matter experts — a critical piece of the broader AI governance puzzle. These approaches range from independent verification and certification mechanisms (explored in detail in Fathom's companion report *Independent Verification Organizations (IVOs): Public Support for an Innovative Approach to AI Governance*) to other governance approaches that can provide accountability while accelerating responsible innovation.

AI companies can build on growing AI adoption while supporting approaches that will increase public confidence in their products. AI companies should recognize that 50% trust in self-regulation is insufficient as AI integrates seemingly into every aspect of our society, economy, and daily lives. Industry can proactively champion credible, independent accountability mechanisms — positioning American companies to lead globally while building the trust necessary to sustain AI's remarkable adoption trajectory.

Non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and professional associations have both opportunity and responsibility to engage. As the entities Americans trust most to govern AI, these institutions should begin building the capacity needed to play a central role in AI oversight. The public is calling for their leadership.

Next Steps

The data points to a clear opening for action: Americans across party lines are aligned on the need for independent expertise in AI governance. How policymakers, industry, and civil society respond to this demand for an innovative policy solutions portfolio will determine whether AI develops with the credible oversight that sustains innovation and American leadership.



Interested in diving deeper into our polling and insights, including a look at our crosstabs?

Email us at press@fathom.org to request a briefing.