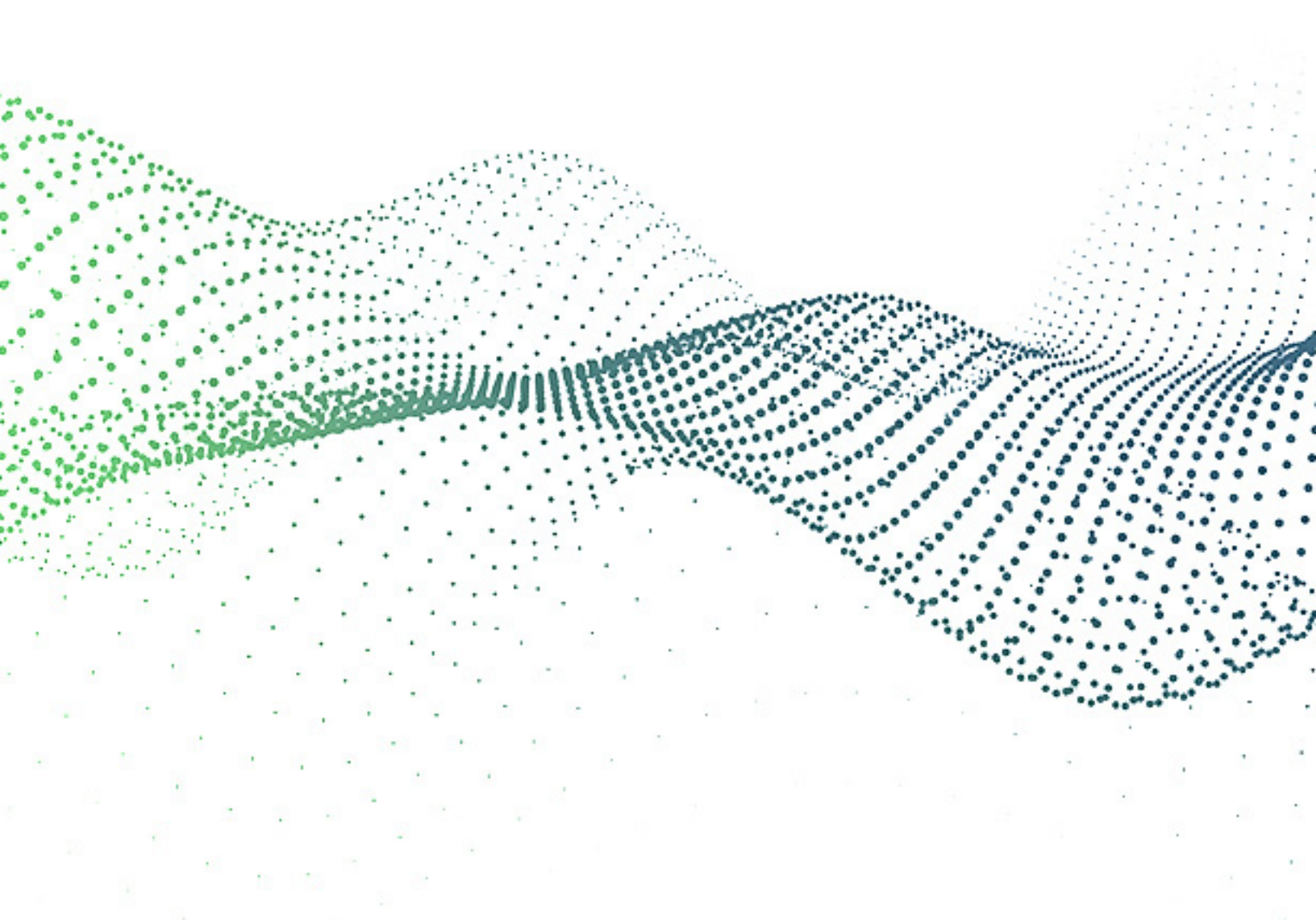


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SPECIAL
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STUDIES
PROJECT

American AI Sentiment in 2026





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Executive Summary

Twelve months after Gallup and the Special Competitive Studies Project (SCSP) conducted their first survey on artificial intelligence (AI), Americans' use of and familiarity with AI have grown, but their trust has not. Optimism about AI's economic impact has fallen, particularly among younger adults, even as Americans become more familiar with using the technology. On policy, the public expresses a clear preference for expanding AI education and workplace training and strengthening safety and independent oversight over speed of development.

This report is based on a nationally representative survey of more than 3,000 U.S. adults conducted online in June 2026 using Gallup's U.S. panel. It examines trends in use and knowledge, trust, and economic sentiment, before discussing the policy and regulatory measures Americans most want to see implemented.

Part 1. Use, Trust, and Economic Sentiment

Use and knowledge are rising, but trust is not

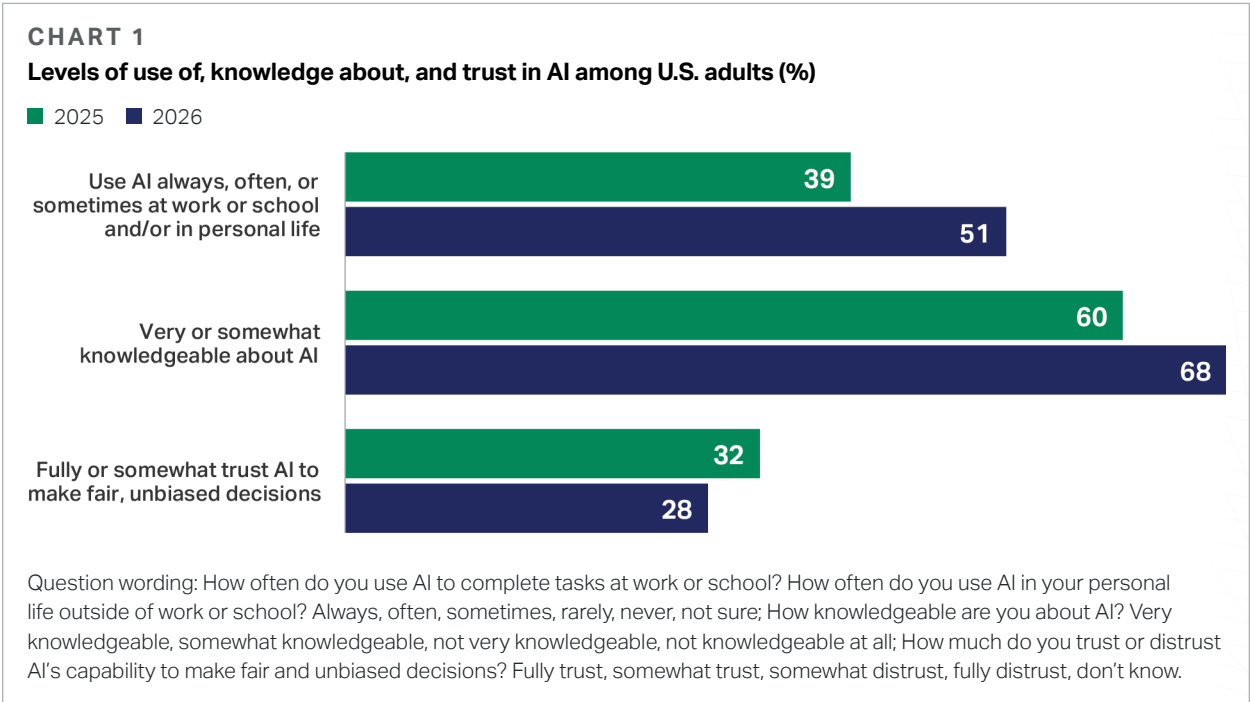
Reported AI use has risen substantially over the past year. In 2025, 39% of adults said they used AI sometimes, often, or always at work, at school, or in their personal lives. In 2026, that figure climbed 12 percentage points to 51%. This self-reported measure of AI use corresponds with other studies showing increasing adoption of AI in the U.S.¹

The growth in reported use has been driven disproportionately by adults aged 30 and older. Among those aged 30-39 (+16 points), 40-64 (+13 points), and 65+ (+16 points), use rose by double digits year over year, compared with an increase of five points among the youngest adults (aged 18-29), who were already the earliest and heaviest adopters.

Self-reported knowledge about AI has grown alongside use, with 68% of all adults now describing themselves as very or somewhat knowledgeable about AI, up from 60% in 2025. Similar to use, self-reported knowledge about AI has increased more among older Americans this year, though younger adults continue to report higher knowledge levels overall.²

Despite these upticks in self-reported AI use and knowledge, trust in AI has not increased.

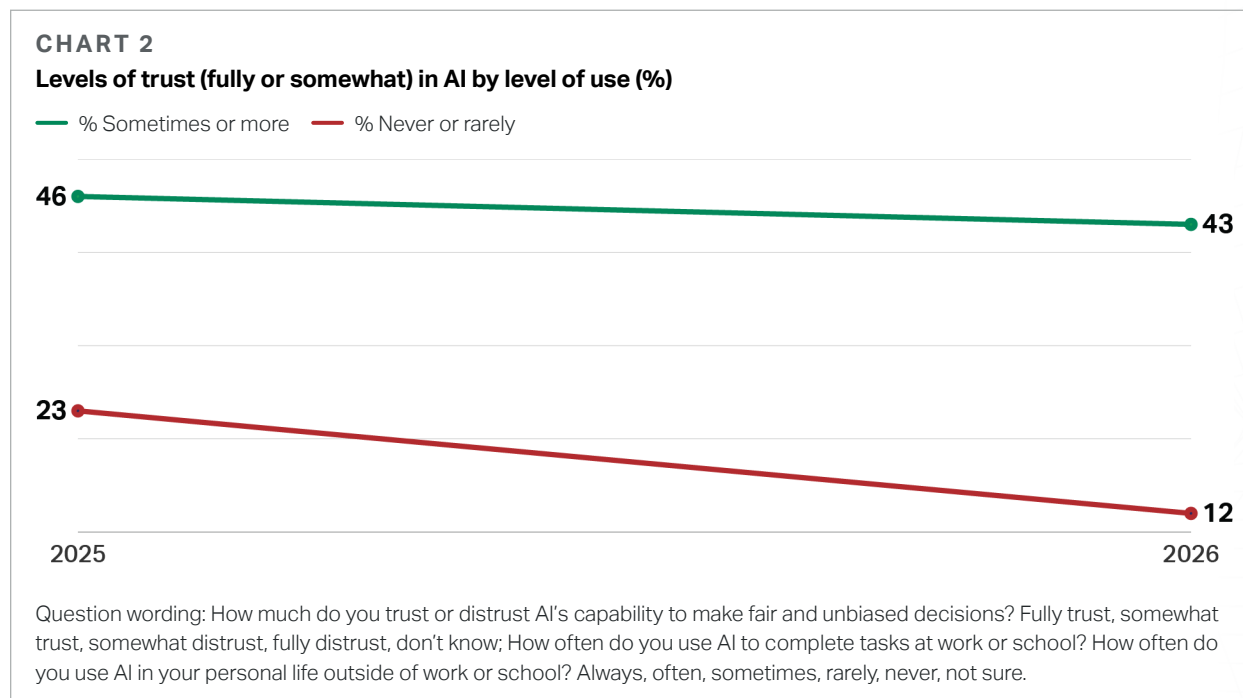
Fewer than three in 10 Americans (28%) either fully or somewhat trust AI to make fair and unbiased decisions in 2026, broadly in line with the 32% who said the same in 2025. More than twice as many people distrust AI (65%) as trust it, and the share who *fully* trust AI has remained at just 2%.



1 In Gallup's quarterly workforce study, half (50%) of employed American adults said they use AI in their role at least a few times a year in Q1 2026, up by 10 points compared to Q2 2025. While the workforce study measures AI adoption among employees only, the gradient and directionality of the increase are similar to this SCSP-Gallup study.

2 Since 2025, the percentage of Americans aged 65 and over who say they are somewhat or very knowledgeable about AI has risen by 14 points to 52%. Younger adults between ages 18 and 29 have seen a smaller increase in self-reported knowledge (7 points) but remain more knowledgeable overall (80%).

AI use is the clearest differentiator of trust: 43% of Americans who use AI sometimes or more trust it, more than three times the rate among those who use it rarely or never (12%). Trust overall has remained flat, as the growing share of regular users, who tend to trust it more, has been offset by declining trust among those who don't use it regularly. Trust among Americans who use AI rarely or never roughly halved over the past year, from 23% to 12%, while trust among those who use AI sometimes or more held steady.



When asked what would increase people's trust in AI, no single intervention generates widespread consensus, but three garner equally strong support: greater transparency from companies about how AI makes decisions (49%), testing of AI by independent experts (48%), and testing AI systems for fairness before they are deployed to the public (46%).

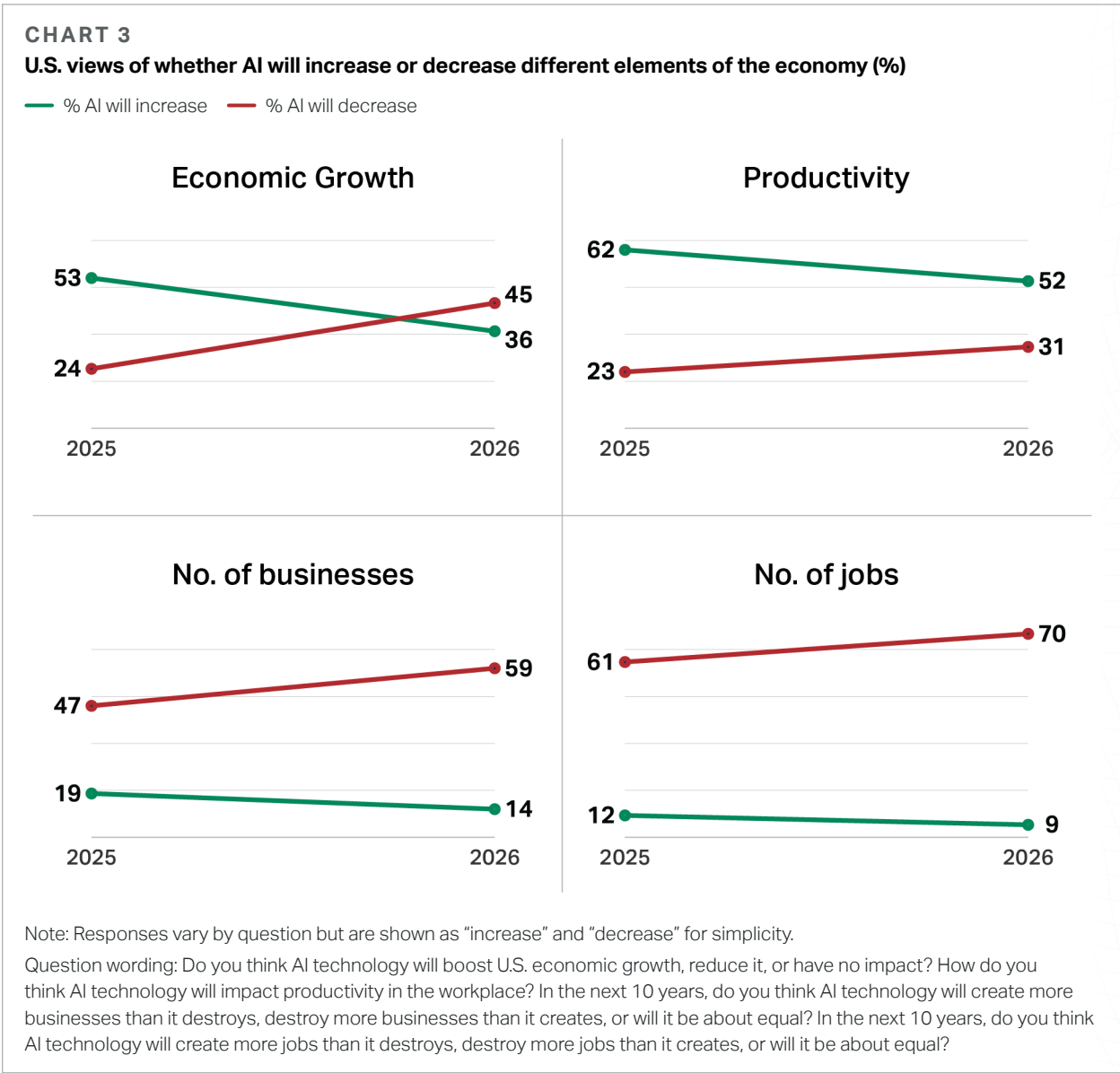
Americans, especially the young, have soured on AI's economic effects

Americans are considerably more pessimistic than they were last year about what AI means for the U.S. economy.

More people now believe AI will reduce economic growth (45%) than boost it (36%), a reversal from 2025, when more than twice as many held a positive view (53%) as a negative one (24%).

Concern has also intensified regarding businesses and jobs: 59% now expect AI to destroy more businesses than it creates over the next decade (versus 14% who expect it to create more), and 70% expect it to destroy more jobs than it creates (versus 9% who expect it to create more), both figures up by roughly 10 points since 2025. There is also widespread concern about what happens after potential job losses, with only one in five (20%) Americans expecting that most or all workers whose jobs are replaced will be able to learn new skills in a different type of work.

Workplace productivity is the one area of economic sentiment where a slim majority of Americans remain optimistic, with 52% expecting AI to have a positive impact. This is significantly higher than the percentage who expect productivity to decrease (31%), though the gap between the two has narrowed over the past year.



Young adults are most pessimistic about what AI will mean for future economic growth. Twice as many 18- to 29-year-olds think AI will reduce (57%) rather than boost (26%) growth. Those aged 65 and older are the only age group in which more see AI boosting (46%) than reducing (33%) growth in the future.

Overall, higher use of and knowledge about AI tools are not associated with more positive sentiment toward it. Trust is still low, and expectations for AI's economic impact on growth, productivity, jobs, and businesses have soured, particularly among younger adults.

Part 2. The Policy and Regulation

Americans Support

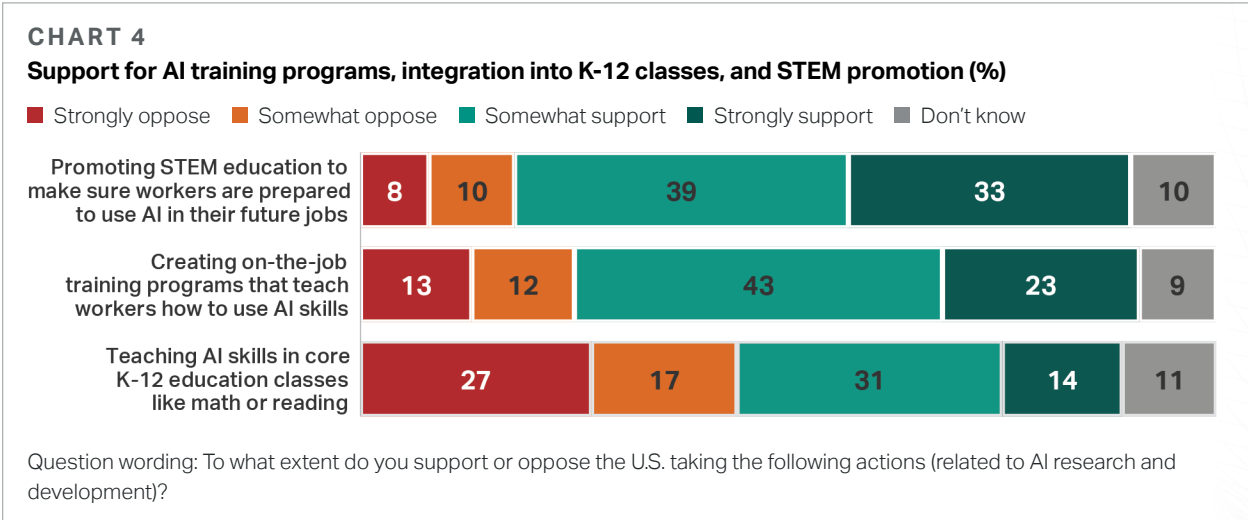
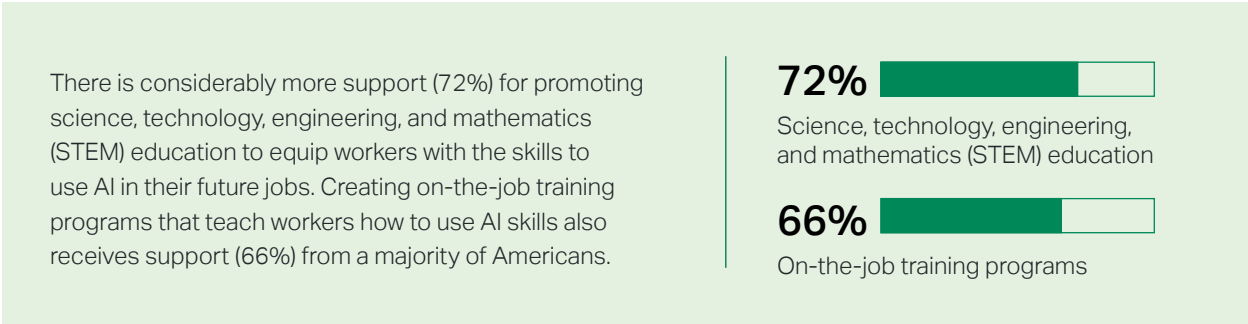
Americans hold strong opinions about how they would like to see AI regulated and developed. Support centers on broad, bipartisan backing for AI education and workforce training, as well as prioritizing safety and independent oversight over speed of development. However, partisan splits remain on several other policy measures.

Americans teach themselves informally, but want formal training too

More than twice as many Americans have asked an AI for help with using it as have asked another human (57% vs. 23%), representing a strong feedback loop in how Americans are turning to AI to learn about it.

One in four (26%) Americans have used AI training videos or articles online, such as YouTube explainers or blogs. Another 16% have completed employer-provided training. By comparison, other courses or certification programs (9%) and vocational or technical school programs (5%) are less common.

Americans are largely split on whether teaching AI skills should be included in core K-12 classes like math or reading, with 45% supporting the idea at least somewhat and 44% opposing it. However, more strongly oppose the idea than strongly support it (27% vs. 14%, respectively).



Notably, these three education and training options generate similar levels of support across party lines, making this one of the few areas of bipartisan AI policy consensus in the survey.

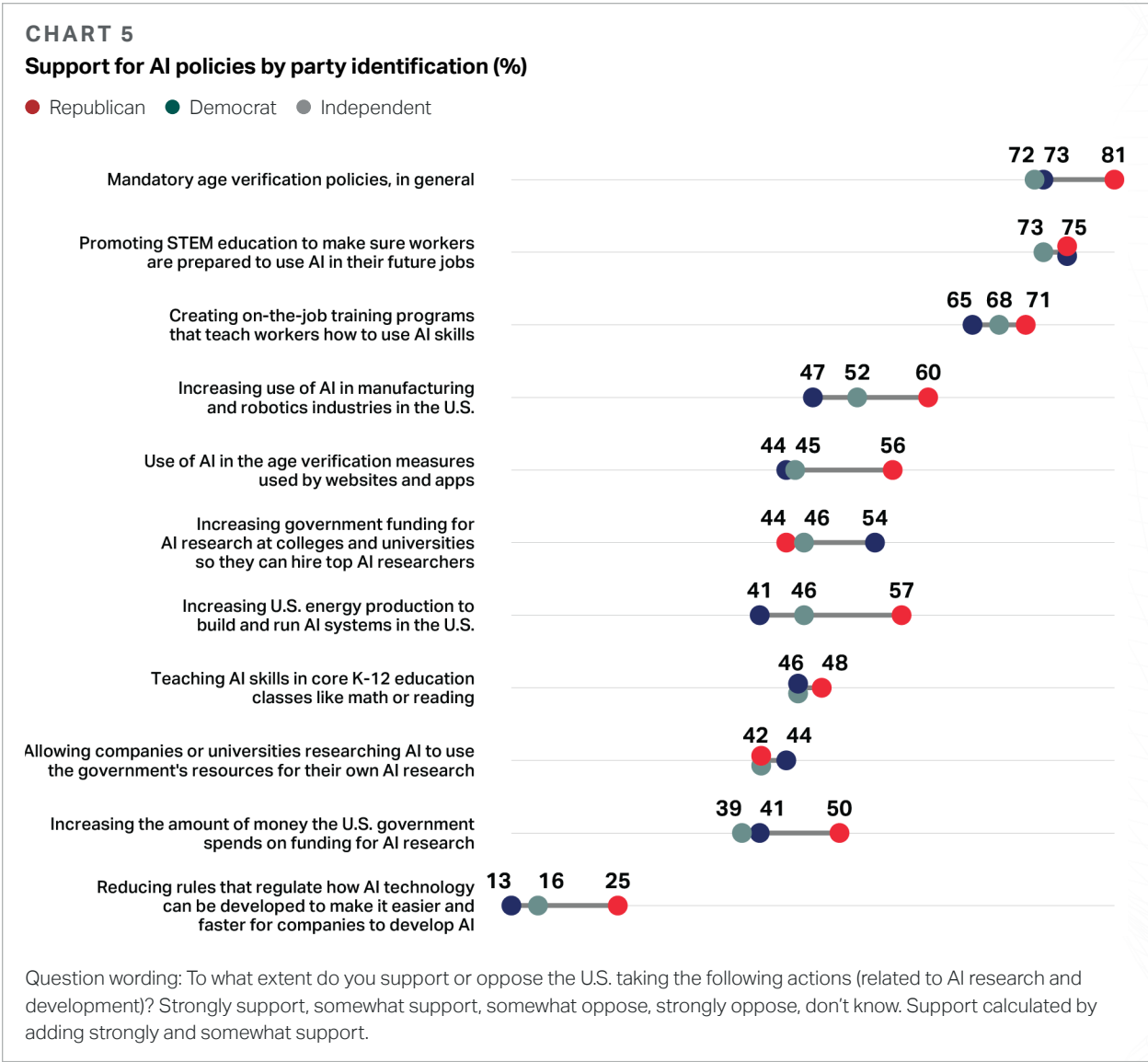
Support for other policies split along partisan lines

Other AI policies show wider partisan gaps. For example, Republicans are more supportive than Democrats of mandatory age verification requirements in general (a gap of 8 points), age verification using AI in websites and apps (12 points), expanding AI in manufacturing (12 points), increasing energy production for AI systems (16 points), and reducing AI-related regulation (11 points). This pattern echoes the partisan divide in views on AI's economic impact, where Republicans tend to hold more positive views than Democrats and independents.

However, on the question of increasing government funding for AI research at colleges and universities, Democrats are a more supportive group (54%), ahead of independents (46%) and Republicans (44%).

Partisan differences in AI policy support depend on the specific proposal in question rather than follow a single consistent ideological line.

Support for allowing companies or universities to use the government's resources for their own research is also similar across party groups.



Safety, government regulation, and independent oversight are top priorities

Despite partisan differences on specific policy proposals, Americans are more aligned on the broader question of how AI should be regulated. Nearly four in five (79%) say the government should prioritize maintaining safety and data security rules even if that slows AI development, versus 7% who prioritize speed of development over safety rules. This is unchanged from 2025 and holds across partisan lines.

Nearly four in five (79%)



say the government should prioritize maintaining safety and data security rules even if that slows AI development

More Americans think the U.S. government should create regulations (60%) than think groups of companies should work together to create them (50%). Fewer believe companies should be allowed to create their own rules and regulations (17%). Only 2% of Americans say there should be no rules or regulations governing AI development.

A majority of Americans also believe safety testing should be conducted by independent experts (75%). About half say government agencies (52%) should conduct the testing, while 35% say companies should be responsible for their own testing.



A majority of Americans

also believe safety testing should be conducted by independent experts (75%)

CHART 6
Views on AI regulation and safety testing (%)



Question wording: In your opinion, who should create rules or regulations about AI safety and security for private companies developing new AI technology? You may select more than one option; In your opinion, who should test and evaluate the safety and security of new AI technologies before they are widely used in the U.S.? You may select more than one option.

Americans do see a role for business in partnering with the government to develop AI.

Just over two in five (42%) say that the U.S. government and businesses should have equal influence in developing AI technology, significantly more than the percentage who say the U.S. government should have more influence than businesses (24%) or vice versa (18%).

Conclusion

AI now occupies a more prominent place in American life than it did a year ago. More people are using it and more say they know a lot about it. But greater familiarity has not generated greater trust. Trust remains stable and low, with declines among people who don't use AI regularly offsetting the increase in regular users who tend to trust AI more. Economic pessimism is rising as well, with growing concern about AI's effect on growth, businesses, and jobs, concentrated especially among younger adults — the group that adopted AI earliest.

Americans are informally teaching themselves to use AI, turning to AI tools and free online content far more than to other people, while looking to policymakers to formalize that learning through education and workplace training. These measures, along with a shared preference for safety-first regulation and oversight by independent experts, represent the clearest points of common ground across the political spectrum.

Methodology

The 2026 SCSP-Gallup study is based on a Gallup Panel™ web survey completed by 3,152 adults in the U.S., aged 18 and older, conducted June 2-23, 2026. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Gallup also uses address-based sampling methods to recruit panel members. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel.

The sample for this study was weighted to be demographically representative of the U.S. adult population using the most recent Current Population Survey figures. For results based on this sample, the margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is ± 1.9 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is ± 1.2 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%, design effect included. Margins of error are larger for subsamples. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

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