KIRA

How do Germans think about AI?

KIRA Report | April 2023

KIRA
Center for AI Risks & Impacts

1. INTRODUCTION

What do Germans think about artificial intelligence (AI) in the spring of 2023? Since OpenAI released their chatbot ChatGPT to the public in November 2022, AI has gained widespread attention. Boasting 100 million monthly active users shortly after launch, ChatGPT is regarded as the fastest-growing consumer app in history.[1] This development has sparked a race for market share among major AI companies, with new apps being launched daily and intensive research into innovative models happening behind the scenes.

As developments continue at a rapid pace, many experts are expressing concerns. AI undeniably offers new possibilities across various fields, such as scientific research and medicine. However, the technology also presents a range of challenges, including data protection issues, biased algorithms, labor market disruptions, manipulation of public discourse, advancements in weapon technologies, and the potential for uncontrolled AI. In recent weeks, both the risks and opportunities associated with AI have become increasingly prominent in public discourse. In March, an open letter signed by numerous AI researchers and tech leaders, including Elon Musk, Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, and Turing Award winner Yoshua Bengio, called for a six-month moratorium on the development of certain AI technologies. In a recent US poll, 69% of respondents agreed with this demand.[2]

But what do people in Germany think about such demands and AI in general? What opportunities and risks do they see? A broad public debate about AI is only just beginning. While the topic has received increased media attention since the end of the previous year, little is known about public opinion since ChatGPT's release.

Past surveys indicate a degree of skepticism towards AI. For example, in 2021, only 26% of respondents expressed trust in AI in general.[3] However, that was before ChatGPT – a time that now seems distant. In a recent YouGov poll in the US, nearly half of the respondents fear that advanced AI could lead to the end of human life on Earth.[4]

Such results would have been difficult to imagine not long ago. Public perceptions of AI are undergoing major changes.

At the beginning of April 2023, we therefore asked people in Germany about their attitudes toward AI. With this representative survey, we want to help map the current public perception of AI in Germany. Our results are particularly relevant for

- policy makers responsible for the democratic control of AI technology in Germany
- journalists who want their AI coverage to address the issues that most concern their audience
- AI researchers who are interested in better understanding public perceptions of AI technology.

In this report:

- What do Germans think about AI in the spring of 2023?
- What risks and opportunities do they see, and what do they want?
- How much trust do they have in government regulation?

Information on data collection: Civey surveyed 2,500 German citizens aged 18 and over online for KIRA from April 6 to 7, 2023. The results are representative due to quotations and weightings, taking into account the statistical error of approx. 3.5%.

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[1] Hu, K. (2023). ChatGPT sets record for fastest-growing user base - analyst note. Reuters, 1 February.

[2] YouGov (2023). Daily Question: "Would you support or oppose a six-month pause on some kinds of AI development?", 3 April 2023, URL: https://today.yougov.com/topics/technology/survey-results/daily/2023/04/03/ad825/2

[3] Gillespie, N., Lockey, S., & Curtis, C. (2021). Trust in Artificial Intelligence: A Five Country Study. The University of Queensland and KPMG Australia. doi: 10.14264/e34bfa3

[4] YouGov (2023). Daily Question: "How concerned, if at all, are you about the possibility that AI will cause the end of the human race on Earth?", 3 April 2023, URL: https://today.yougov.com/topics/technology/survey-results/daily/2023/04/03/ad825/3.

2. RESULTS

Diverse General Attitudes, Limited Trust in Successful Regulation

Respondents do not exhibit a uniform general attitude toward AI. Support, rejection, and neutral stances are roughly balanced (Fig. 1). This is not surprising, as AI is a relatively new and complex technology that has only recently been widely discussed. However, more people strongly oppose the development of AI technology (17.6%) than strongly support it (9.6%).

This is also apparent in the question of AI's impact on the world in the next ten years. 22.1% of respondents anticipate a very negative impact, while only 2.9% expect a very positive impact (Fig. 2). The extremely low level of trust in government regulation of AI is also striking. More than half of the respondents have very little onfidence that the government will regulate AI effectively. Only 6.3% have very high or fairly high confidence (Fig. 3).

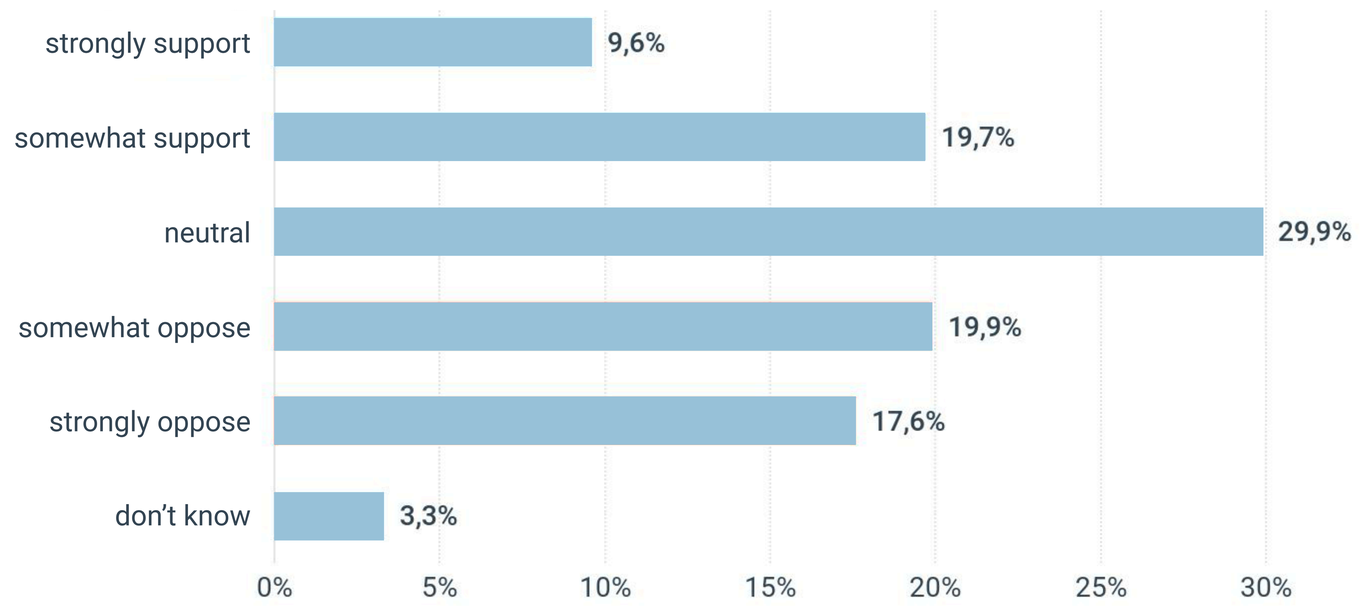

Figure 1

What is your general attitude towards the development of new technologies based on artificial intelligence (AI)?

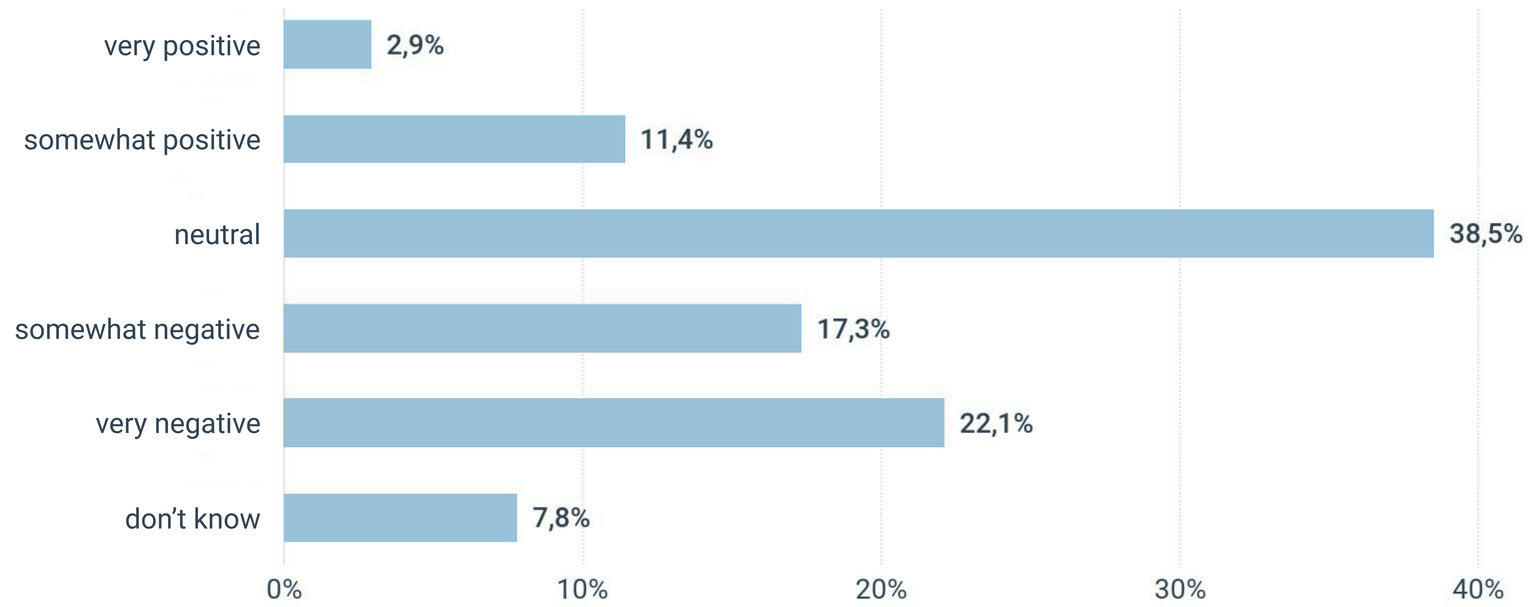

Figure 2

What impact do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will have on the world in the next 10 years?

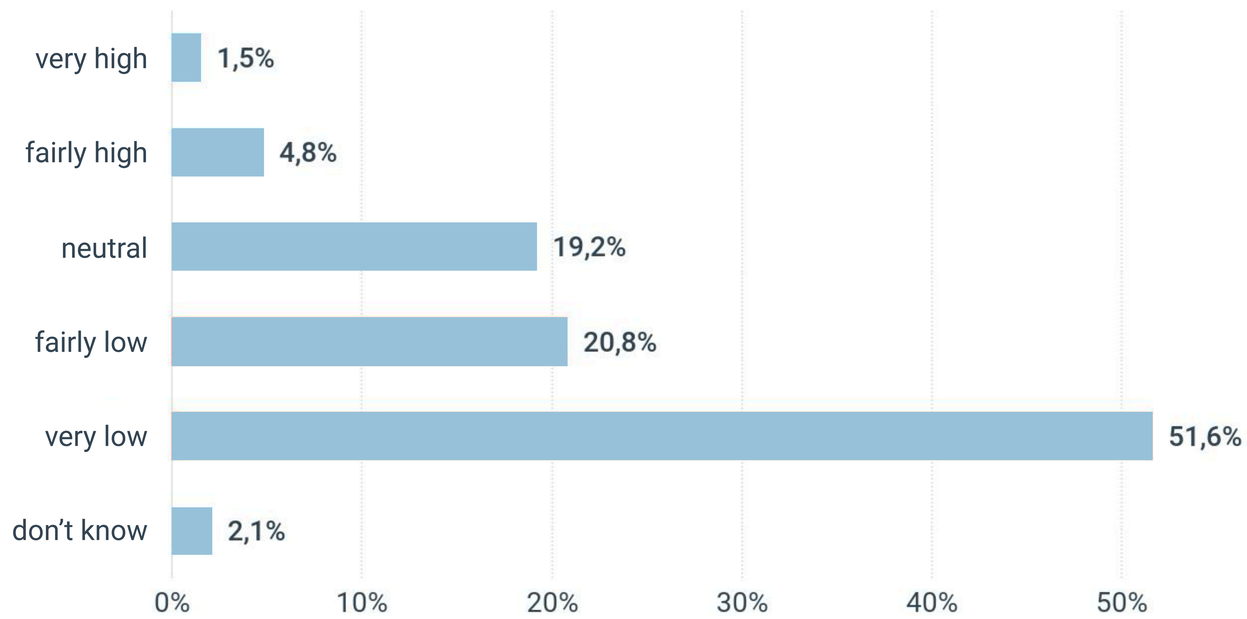

Figure 3

How much confidence do you have that the government will adequately regulate technologies that involve artificial intelligence (AI)?

Concern About AI risks: a Non-Partisan Issue

What concerns do Germans have regarding AI? Many respondents share the growing expert concerns about AI risks, such as AI becoming a threat to humans (58.4%), influencing public discourse (56.7%), and enabling mass surveillance (54%). Slightly less common, but still prevalent, are worries about AI-driven discrimination, job losses, and economic inequality (Fig. 4).

Notably, concerns about AI risks are shared across party and age groups. Whether respondents are grouped by age or party preference, each demographic subgroup has at least 45% of its respondents sharing the three most common concerns (threat to humans, influence on discourse, surveillance) (Figs. 5 & 6).

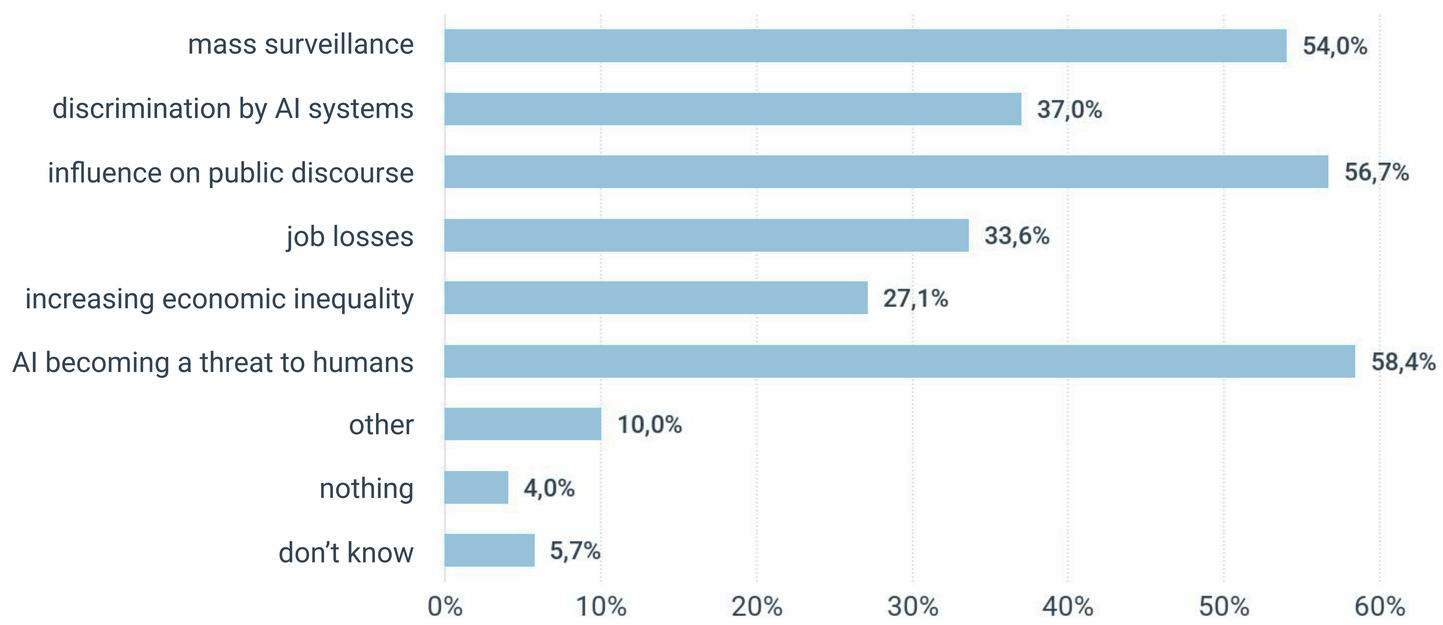

Figure 4

What possible consequences are you concerned about regarding developments in the field of artificial intelligence (AI)?

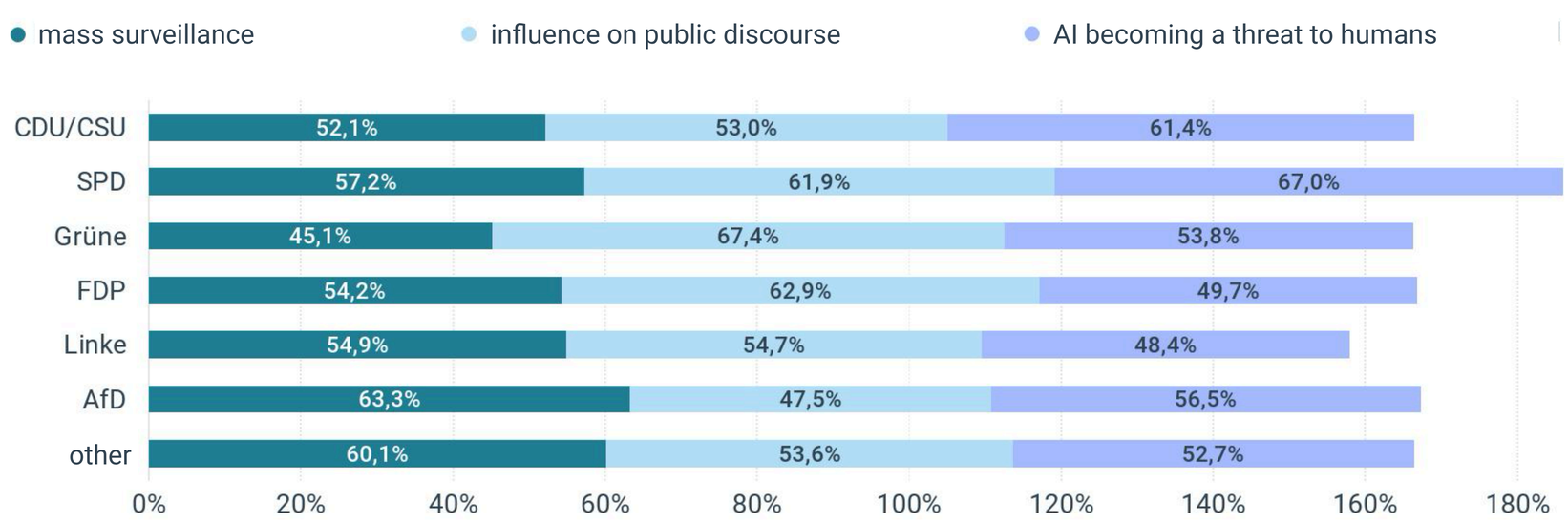

Figure 5

As in Figure 4, by party preference.

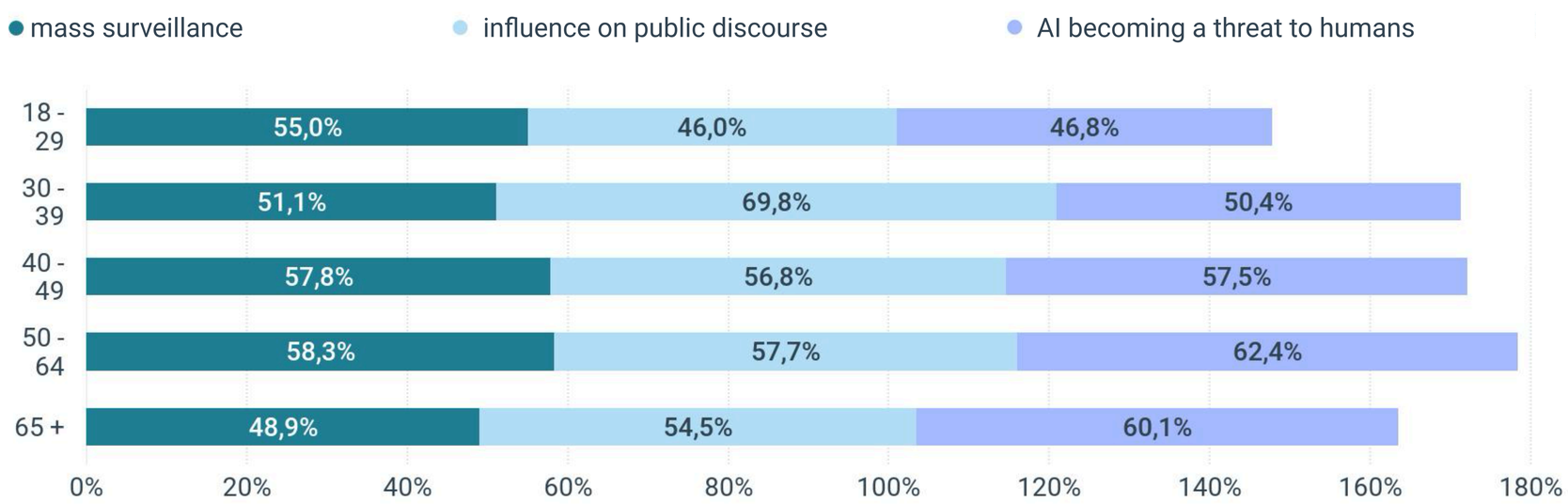

Figure 6

As in Figure 4, by age group.

Safety, Privacy, Regulation: Germans' Questions and Desires

AI is a relatively new topic in public discourse. Many respondents would like to know more about the risks of AI (55.8%). Significantly less respondents would like to know more about its opportunities (37%). Additionally, many wish to know more about AI's effects on their own lives and potential government regulation (over 40% in each case, Fig. 7).

Regarding AI's further development, most Germans prioritize ensuring that AI does not endanger people (64.5%). Many also want compliance with data protection requirements (42.7%), equitable distribution of AI benefits (39.5%), and prevention of AI-driven discrimination (34.4%, Fig. 8).

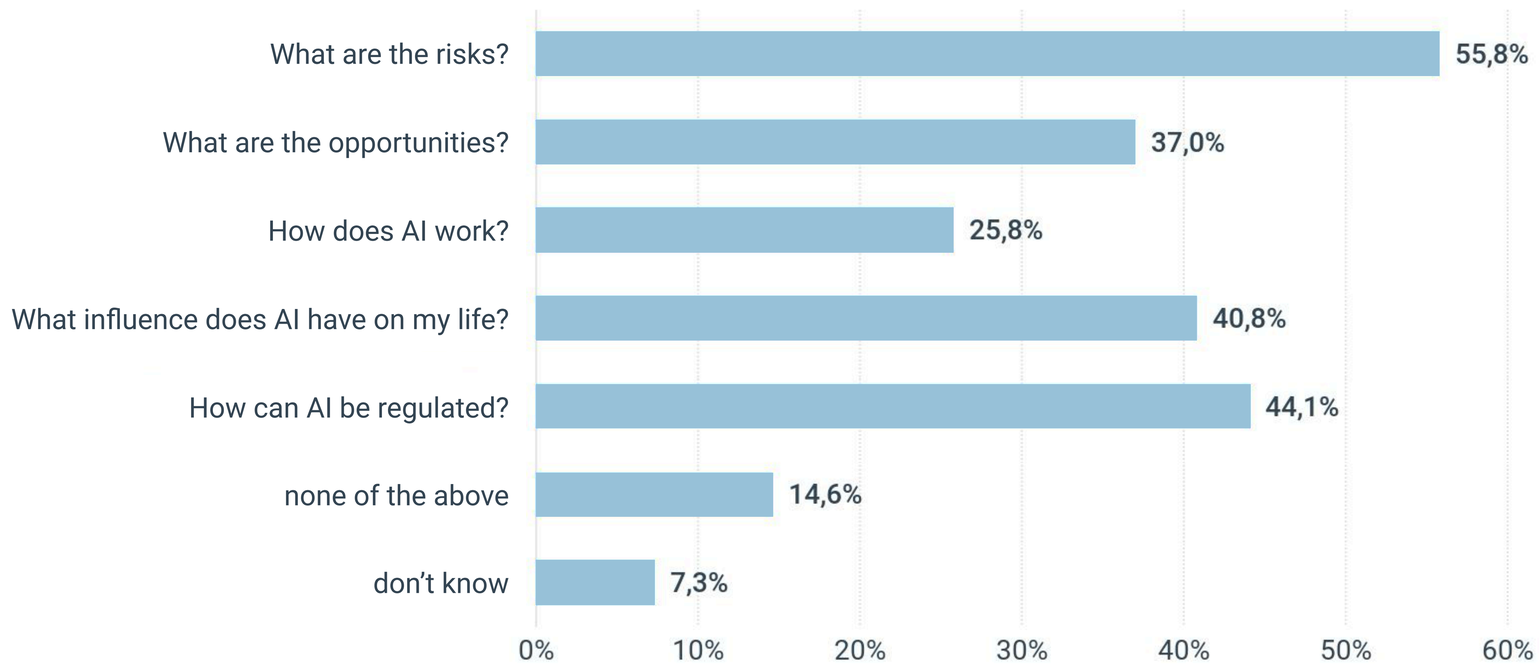

Figure 7

Which of these questions related to artificial intelligence (AI) would you like to learn more about?

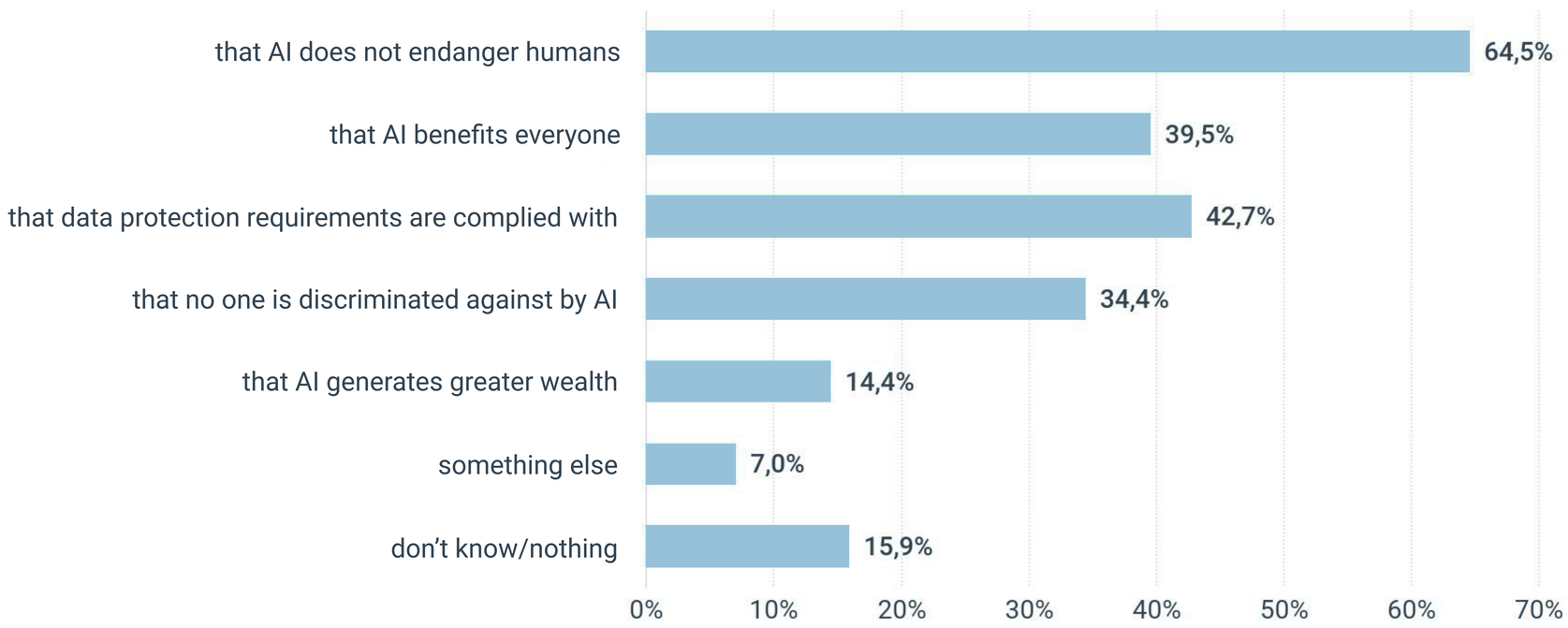

Figure 8

What is most important to you regarding the future development of AI?

Dissatisfaction With the Government's Management of Risks – Support for Moratorium

In late March, an open letter from the Future of Life Institute started a discussion about risks from AI. In it, numerous AI experts and tech industry representatives warned of potential risks that AI might pose to humanity. In light of this, they called for a six-month pause in the development of certain AI technologies.

Our results suggest that most Germans share these concerns. More than 70% think that the state is not doing enough to address the risks to humanity posed by AI (Fig. 9). This dissatisfaction spans all parties (Fig. 10) and age groups (Fig. 11).

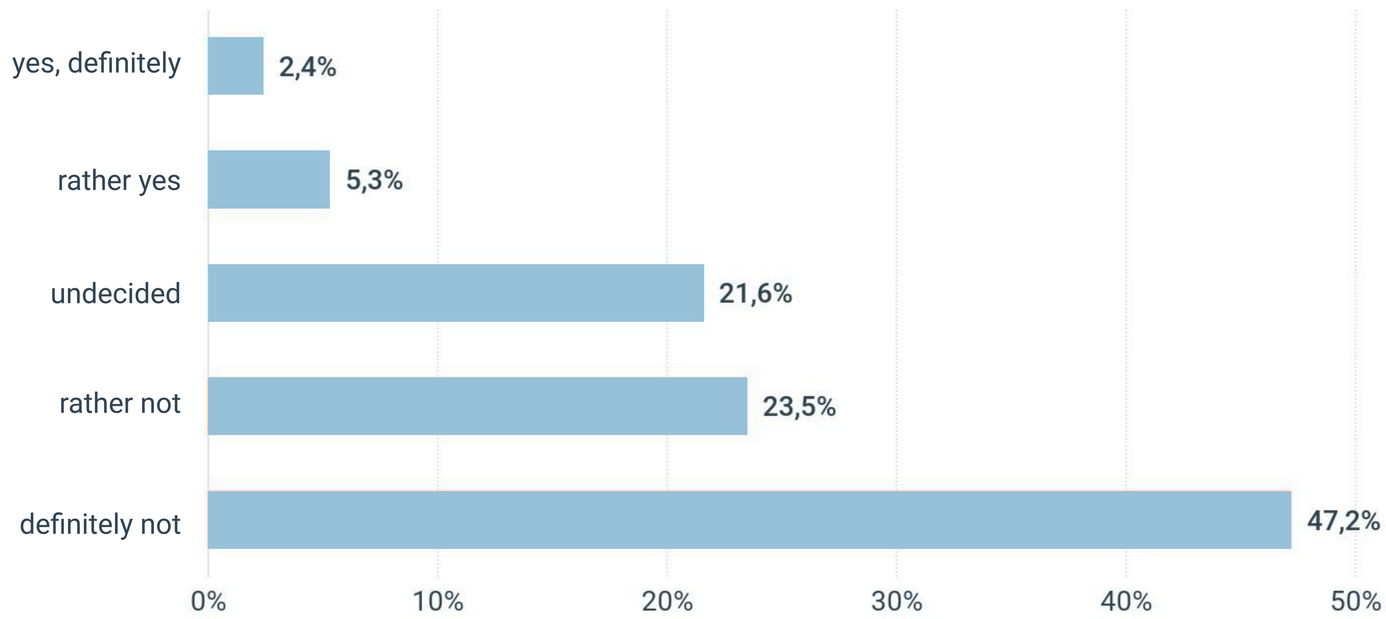

Figure 9

In your opinion, are policymakers doing enough to address potential risks to humanity in the development of technologies involving artificial intelligence (AI)?

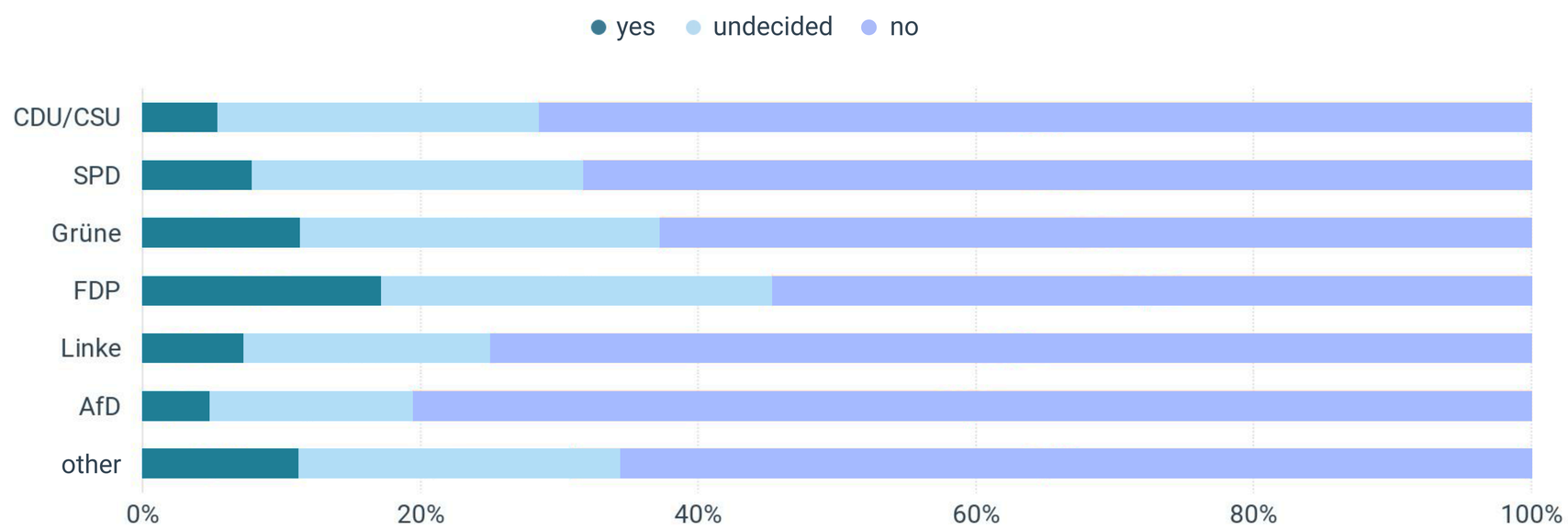

Figure 10

As in Figure 9, by party preference.

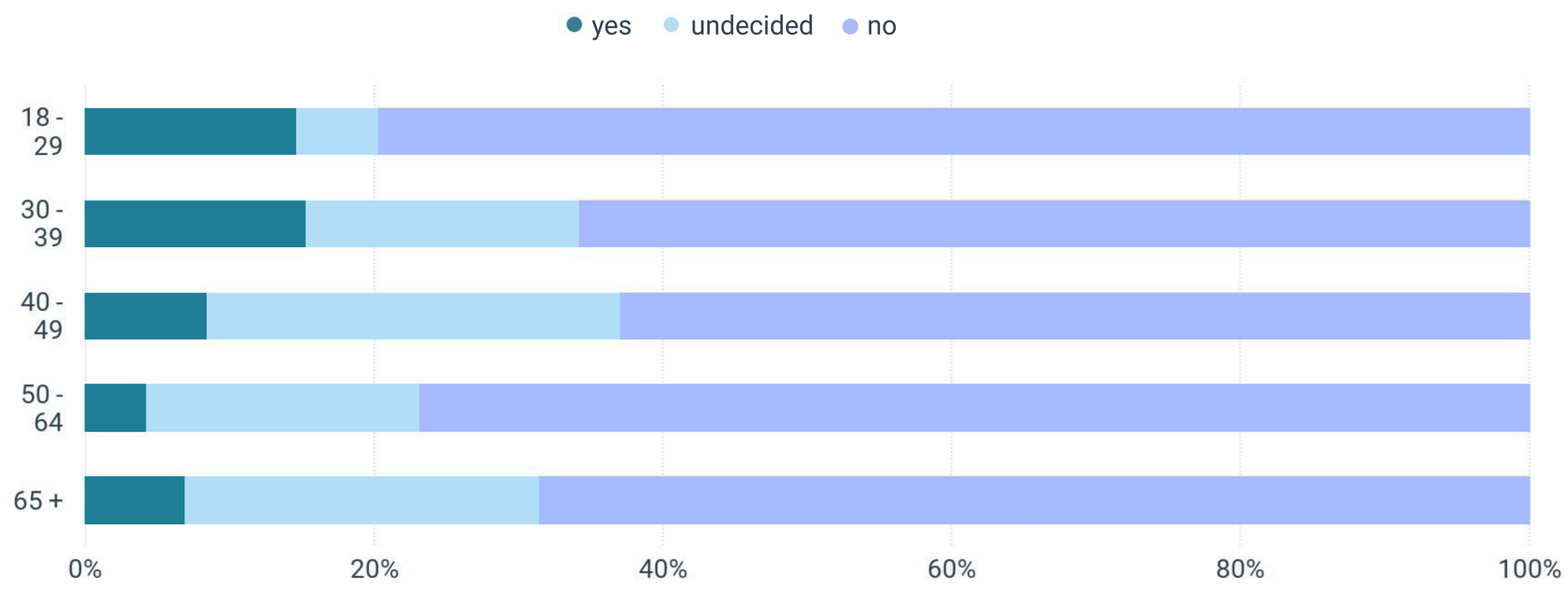

Figure 11

As in Figure 9, by age group.

What do Germans think about the demand to pause the development of certain AI systems for 6 months? Here, too, our data show strong agreement (Fig. 12). More than half (50.8%) of the respondents consider the demand to be "definitely correct"; a further 14.3% consider it to be "rather correct". Again, there is strikingly little variation across party lines on this question.

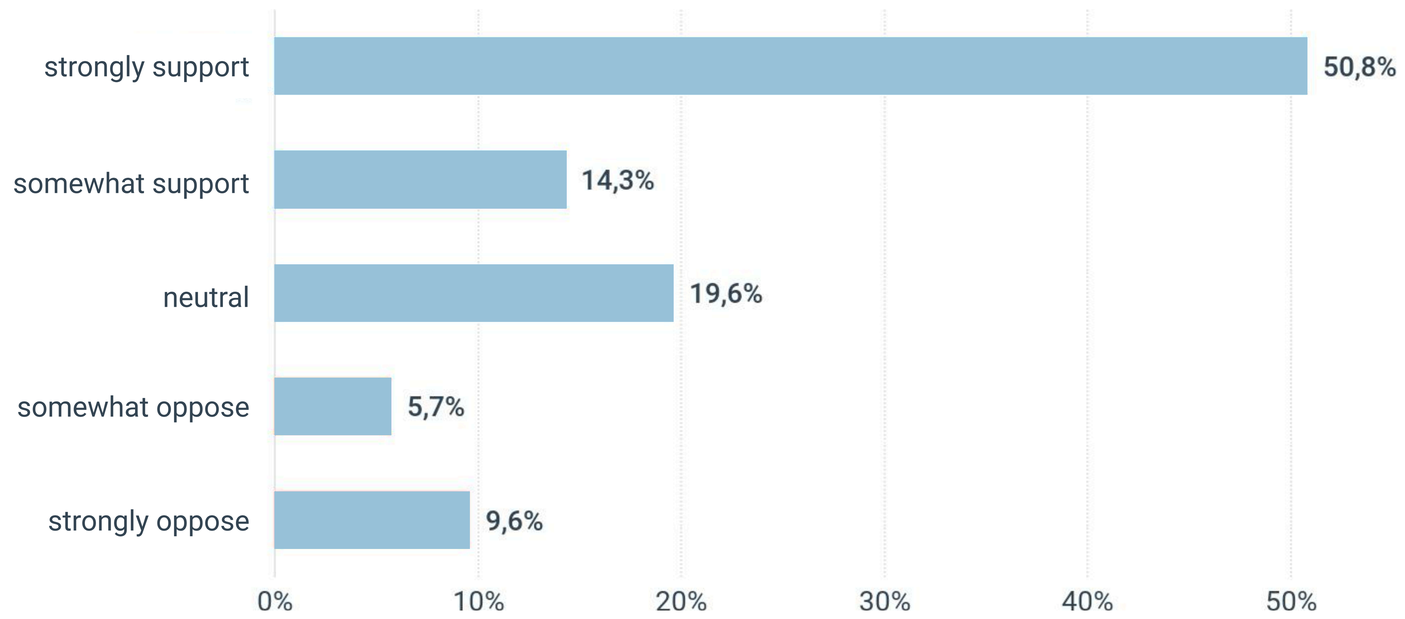

Figure 12

What do you think about the call by tech industry representatives to pause the development of certain artificial intelligence (AI) systems for 6 months in order to assess potential risks?

3. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS & OUTLOOK

AI is a relatively recent subject in the broader public discourse. This is reflected in both the diverse general attitudes toward AI and a large group of people who presently maintain a neutral stance. However, this doesn't imply that people are indifferent to the topic; many are concerned about AI's effects on society and its personal implications.

The widespread concern about AI risks is striking. Around two-thirds of respondents support the call for a six-month pause in research on specific AI models, a figure comparable to that of a recent YouGov poll in the US. Importantly, Germans are not focused on a single risk but are concerned about multiple issues. This is noteworthy, as past AI debates often centered around determining the most important risk. Recently, this either/or framing has become less prevalent, with AI being discussed as a technology that presents various risks, all of which are relevant. Our findings reveal that this perspective aligns more closely with the diverse concerns and desires of people in Germany.

Germans believe the government is not adequately addressing AI risks. Across party and age groups, people feel insufficiently protected and have little trust in government regulation. The fact that such concerns span demographic groups is significant and suggests a new cross-cutting issue without clear ideological divides. This observation is consistent with similar findings from the US, where concern about AI risks also appears to be widespread.

The nonpartisan nature of these concerns offer hope for the emerging discussion on the appropriate regulatory approach to AI. The next few years will be crucial in determining whether we can safely and fairly navigate the transition to an increasingly AI-driven future. This will require constructive, solution-oriented conversations and an awareness of the complexity of the challenges. Science, industry, politics, and civil society should join forces to tackle this collective task now.

Key Take-aways:

1. The general attitude toward AI is neither clearly negative nor clearly positive.
2. Germans are concerned about multiple risks posed by AI technology and do not believe the government will adequately regulate AI.
3. Concerns about AI risks transcend political groups, suggesting a new cross-cutting issue without clear ideological divisions.

About this study

The Center for AI Risks & Impacts (KIRA) is responsible for this study. KIRA is a new, independent think tank. We work towards making the transition to advanced AI safe and fair. To this end, we work with research, industry and the public sector to achieve our vision: a future where advanced AI poses no risk to humans. We conduct risk analyses, examine safeguards, and foster collaboration among all stakeholders.

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