



PERCEPTIONS OF AI:

A power shift from productivity tool to strategic infrastructure

Parameters of the study



Objectives of the study

- Assess how artificial intelligence is framed in global media coverage
 - Deep dive on specific hot topics such as the use of AI for military and defence purposes, the Gen Z backlash or the role of CEOs in shaping perceptions around AI
 - Measure public sentiment and emotional responses toward AI
 - Identify gaps between media narratives and audience perceptions
 - Examine trust, risk, opportunity, and responsibility dynamics
 - Provide strategic insights for communicators, business leaders, and policymakers navigating AI discourse
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Media analysis

- 500 global tier-one media outlets
 - Coverage from January–June 2026
 - 45 markets analysed
 - 6,006 articles evaluated
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Parameters of the study



Public opinion analysis

- 19 markets
- 6,300 respondents

	ARGENTINA	300 respondents
	AUSTRALIA	300 respondents
	BRAZIL	300 respondents
	CANADA	300 respondents
	CHINA	400 respondents
	FRANCE	300 respondents
	GERMANY	300 respondents
	INDIA	400 respondents
	INDONESIA	300 respondents
	ITALY	300 respondents

	JAPAN	300 respondents
	MEXICO	300 respondents
	RUSSIA	300 respondents
	SAUDI ARABIA	300 respondents
	SOUTH AFRICA	300 respondents
	SOUTH KOREA	300 respondents
	TURKIYE	300 respondents
	UNITED KINGDOM	300 respondents
	UNITED STATES	400 respondents

The author



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Jennifer Sanchis is an insights and measurement specialist with a decade of experience in the space. Since 2016, she has worked on complex measurement and evaluation programmes for some of the world's most prominent brands and organisations.

Her expertise lies in transforming media data into strategic insights that inform brand reputation, communications performance, and business outcomes.

At CARMA, Jennifer leads insights programmes for global organisations to deliver integrated evaluation frameworks and strategic recommendations. Her work has been recognised with multiple AMEC Gold Awards for excellence in measurement, including Best Integrated Research and Most Impactful Client Recommendations.

In this report, Jennifer explores how artificial intelligence is being perceived across the world through the dual lens of media narratives and real audience sentiment. By combining large-scale media analysis with market research data, she examines the balance between risk and opportunity, the emotional drivers shaping public reaction, and the gaps between what the media signals and what audiences truly feel.

The findings go beyond surface-level sentiment to uncover how trust, responsibility, governance, and investment narratives are evolving and what this means for organisations communicating about AI.

Ultimately, this report provides a structured, evidence-based view of AI's global reputation landscape, offering practical insights for communicators, business leaders, and policymakers navigating one of the most consequential technological shifts of our time.



Executive summary

PERCEPTIONS OF AI:
A POWER SHIFT FROM PRODUCTIVITY
TOOL TO STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Key insights



Chapter 1: A new phase for the reputation of AI **How is AI portrayed in the media?**

The media narrative around AI entered a new phase in H1 2026. While productivity and business transformation remained the dominant themes, the conversation broadened significantly beyond technological innovation to encompass trust, governance and geopolitical competition. Compared with 2025, coverage became less focused on what AI could do and more concerned with how it should be deployed, who should control it, and what role it would play in national competitiveness and security.

Positive coverage reflected this maturation. Rather than celebrating model launches or technical breakthroughs, AI was increasingly portrayed as an economic enabler, strategic asset and practical business tool capable of improving productivity, driving investment and supporting innovation across sectors. At the same time, trust emerged as a more prominent narrative, with enterprise AI increasingly positioned as a reliable partner built on security, governance and human collaboration. This coincided with a rise in global public trust, from 26% in 2025 to 30% in 2026, suggesting that messages centred on responsible AI and practical value are beginning to resonate.

However, scrutiny intensified. Negative coverage shifted away from questioning AI's potential towards questioning its deployment, driven by concerns over cybercrime, misinformation, legal disputes, workforce disruption and the growing use of AI in defence and geopolitical competition. High-profile interventions, including Pope Leo XIV's warnings about AI's dehumanising effects, reinforced broader debates around ethics and societal impact.

Together, these developments show that AI has evolved from being viewed primarily as a technology story into one increasingly shaped by governance, accountability and strategic power.



Chapter 2: Leading voices

Who shapes AI narratives and drives trust?

AI's reputation continued to be shaped by a small group of highly influential leaders, but H1 2026 revealed an increasingly important distinction between visibility, influence and trust. OpenAI remained the most prominent AI company, while Sam Altman and Elon Musk continued to dominate media attention, reinforcing their positions as the industry's two defining public figures. However, the year's standout performer was Anthropic. Although the company had long championed AI safety and responsible development, it was only after its high-profile clashes with the US government over export controls and military AI that these messages truly resonated. Rather than changing its narrative, Anthropic demonstrated it. The result was a dramatic rise in visibility for both the company and CEO Dario Amodei, reinforcing a broader communications lesson: reputation is shaped less by what organisations say than by how consistently their actions reinforce their positioning.

The findings also revealed a growing disconnect between who shapes the conversation and who audiences trust. CEOs generated the most positive AI coverage and accounted for almost half of all commentator voices, yet they were also among the least trusted sources of information on AI. Academics, by contrast, were the most trusted despite adopting a more balanced and often critical tone, while journalists remained influential but frequently framed AI through the lens of scrutiny and accountability. At the same time, podcasts emerged as an increasingly important platform for executives to communicate more nuanced perspectives on AI beyond traditional news coverage.

The chapter also revealed that CEOs increasingly became the public face of AI's workforce implications. Media frequently linked executive announcements about AI adoption with layoffs, restructuring and productivity programmes, placing business leaders at the centre of debates around employment and corporate responsibility. As AI became increasingly instrumentalised to explain organisational change, leadership communications came under greater scrutiny, particularly where messaging appeared to prioritise efficiency over people.

In this environment, the messenger matters as much as the message, and credibility depends on demonstrating empathy, responsible leadership and consistency between words and actions.



Chapter 3: From workforce productivity to defence power

How AI became a geopolitical and strategic asset

H1 2026 marked a fundamental shift in how AI was discussed globally. While last year focused primarily on productivity and commercial innovation, AI increasingly became framed as a matter of national security, technological sovereignty and geopolitical influence. The outbreak of the US-Iran conflict accelerated media attention on AI's role in defence, but rather than creating a new narrative, it reinforced an existing trend already driven by intensifying US-China competition, export controls and the global race for semiconductor leadership.

Importantly, the findings challenge the assumption that AI's military narrative is primarily about autonomous weapons. Instead, media coverage focused overwhelmingly on AI as a strategic capability supporting intelligence, resilience, cybersecurity and national competitiveness. Governments emerged as central actors, with discussions increasingly centred on controlling access to AI infrastructure, advanced chips and frontier models rather than simply developing the most capable technology. Together, these findings suggest the geopolitical debate has evolved from asking who can build the best AI to who controls access to the world's intelligence infrastructure.

Despite the overwhelmingly negative tone of media coverage, public opinion painted a more nuanced picture of AI's role in defence. While autonomous weapons remained the most controversial application, audiences were considerably more accepting than media narratives suggested, with more than one-third expressing some level of comfort with their use despite overwhelmingly negative coverage. Acceptance increased further for defensive applications such as cyber defence, surveillance and decision support, indicating that people distinguish between AI making lethal decisions and AI supporting human operators. This suggests that public attitudes towards military AI are more pragmatic than media coverage implies.

For communicators, the challenge is not simply addressing concerns about AI in defence, but demonstrating where human oversight remains, how risks are managed, and how AI strengthens national resilience without removing human accountability.



Chapter 4: The governance dilemma

How are visions for regulating AI competing?

As AI became increasingly intertwined with national competitiveness, the governance debate shifted from whether AI should be regulated to how it should be governed. Media increasingly portrayed governments and regulators as the actors most responsible for AI's future, while audiences continued to place greater responsibility on AI developers and businesses deploying the technology, highlighting a disconnect in expectations around accountability. At the same time, governance discussions became more practical, with AI safety, testing and enterprise governance generating greater credibility than broad ethical commitments alone.

The chapter also revealed an emerging divide in how countries are approaching AI governance. Argentina's proposal to create an AI-friendly regulatory environment illustrated a broader shift from viewing regulation solely as a mechanism for managing risk to seeing it as a tool for attracting investment, talent and technological leadership. This suggests that AI governance is becoming a competitive differentiator rather than simply a compliance exercise.

For organisations, earning trust will increasingly depend on demonstrating robust governance, transparency and accountability, while recognising that responsible AI is now central to both reputation and long-term competitiveness.



Chapter 5: The risk-opportunity divide

What kind of change does AI represent?

In media, AI continued to be portrayed primarily as an opportunity in H1 2026, although the gap between opportunity and risk narrowed compared with 2025. Productivity and efficiency remained the dominant benefits associated with AI, but these narratives showed signs of reaching maturity, while economic growth and competitiveness continued to gain momentum. Regional differences persisted, with Asia and the Middle East framing AI as a transformational force, whereas Europe adopted a more measured and incremental perspective. At the same time, optimism became more nuanced as security and defence applications emerged as some of the most contested AI use cases.

The nature of perceived risks also evolved. While concerns around the loss of human oversight dominated in 2025, media attention shifted towards more immediate threats, including cybercrime, misinformation, surveillance and autonomous weapons. Europe remained the most cautious region, portraying AI risks as more severe than other markets, while Asia adopted a more pragmatic outlook.

Overall, AI is increasingly viewed as both an economic opportunity and a societal challenge, requiring organisations to communicate not only AI's potential but also how they are managing its risks responsibly.



Chapter 6: The human response

How AI makes people feel - media vs audiences

Public attitudes towards AI continued to mature in H1 2026. For the first time, trust overtook excitement as the dominant public emotion, signalling a shift from curiosity about AI's capabilities towards greater confidence in its practical value. Interestingly, this contrasted with media narratives, where trust signals declined despite public trust increasing. Rather than being shaped solely by headlines, perceptions of AI appear to be increasingly influenced by everyday experiences, as people interact with AI in their work and personal lives. At the same time, excitement moderated across most age groups, suggesting AI is becoming a normal part of everyday life rather than a novelty.

Emotional responses also varied significantly depending on how AI was perceived within different sectors. Industries where AI was framed as augmenting human expertise, such as manufacturing, healthcare, education and finance, generated greater trust and optimism. By contrast, sectors where AI was perceived as competing with people, including media, creative industries and parts of the public sector, attracted higher levels of concern. Younger and older audiences remained the most apprehensive, with worries centred on employment, authenticity and wellbeing rather than the technology itself.

Together, these findings suggest emotional responses are driven less by exposure to AI than by whether people believe it will empower them or replace them.



Chapter 7: Winning trust in the AI era

How can organisations earn the permission to lead AI?

As AI became increasingly mainstream, audiences also became more discerning about how organisations communicated its adoption. While AI remained an effective way to capture attention, generic AI messaging appeared to lose impact. Nearly six in ten respondents believed companies exaggerated their use of AI through buzzwords, while almost half admitted they paid less attention to messages simply because they mentioned AI. Instead, audiences responded most positively to communications that demonstrated tangible business outcomes, with productivity, efficiency and practical value proving far more compelling than AI claims alone.

The findings also revealed an important trust gap between media narratives and audience expectations. While media primarily associated trust with AI safety, reliability and accountability, audiences placed considerably greater emphasis on transparency around how AI works, creating a clear opportunity for organisations to differentiate their communications. At the same time, media and public opinion increasingly converged around three major drivers of distrust: cybercrime, misinformation and job displacement, suggesting these concerns are becoming firmly embedded in perceptions of AI.

The next phase of AI communications will be won not by organisations that simply announce AI adoption, but by those that explain it transparently, demonstrate measurable value and proactively address the risks audiences care about most.

Eight PR & communications implications

What PR & comms professionals can do right now to navigate the reputational opportunities and risks brought by AI more effectively:

01. Move beyond AI announcements and prove business impact

Generic AI messaging is losing its ability to differentiate organisations. Rather than announcing AI adoption, communicate measurable outcomes, customer benefits, productivity gains and evidence of business value.

02. Make transparency your competitive advantage

The biggest gap between media narratives and audience expectations lies in transparency. While media focuses on safety and reliability, audiences increasingly want to understand how AI works, how decisions are made and where human oversight remains. Explaining AI, and not just promoting it, will become a key driver of trust.

03. Prepare CEOs for AI's reputational challenges

As AI becomes a boardroom issue, executive leadership is becoming one of its strongest reputation drivers. As CEOs increasingly become the public face of workforce transformation, communications should balance discussions around productivity with empathy, reskilling and responsible leadership to avoid reinforcing fears around automation and job displacement.

04. Position governance as a strategic strength

Responsible AI is no longer simply about compliance. Organisations that communicate robust governance, testing, accountability and risk management will be better positioned to build credibility as regulation becomes a competitive differentiator.

05. Recognise that AI has become a geopolitical issue

AI communications increasingly operate within a broader context of national security, sovereignty and strategic competition. Organisations should understand how geopolitical developments, export controls and regulatory debates shape stakeholder perceptions, particularly when communicating about frontier AI or international expansion.

06. Speak to people's concerns and not just AI's capabilities

Media and public opinion are converging around three major concerns: cybercrime, misinformation and job displacement. Organisations should proactively address these issues through clear messaging around cybersecurity, responsible deployment, workforce transition and safeguards rather than treating them as secondary topics.

07. Build trust through behaviour, not positioning

Anthropic demonstrated that reputation is earned when organisations act consistently with the values they promote. Long-term positioning around responsible AI becomes credible when reinforced by decisions, partnerships and behaviour, not communications alone.

08. Shift from innovation stories to leadership stories

AI is no longer judged solely by the sophistication of the technology, but by the quality of leadership behind it. Organisations that demonstrate responsible decision-making, collaboration and long-term societal value will be better positioned to lead the next phase of the AI conversation.



Chapter 1: A new phase for the reputation of AI

How is AI portrayed in media?

The rise of the 'AI is a trusted partner' narrative aligns with an increase in public trust towards AI.

AI narratives over time

Top AI narratives in H1 2026:

#1 "AI as a productivity miracle"

- Automation and productivity dominated AI success stories
- AI framed as an engine of economic competitiveness
- Business adoption focused on measurable efficiency gains.

#2 "AI needs guardrails"

- Growing calls for stronger AI governance and regulation
- Concerns over misinformation, deepfakes and manipulated content intensified
- Cybersecurity and data privacy risks a key focus

#3 "AI as a trusted partner"

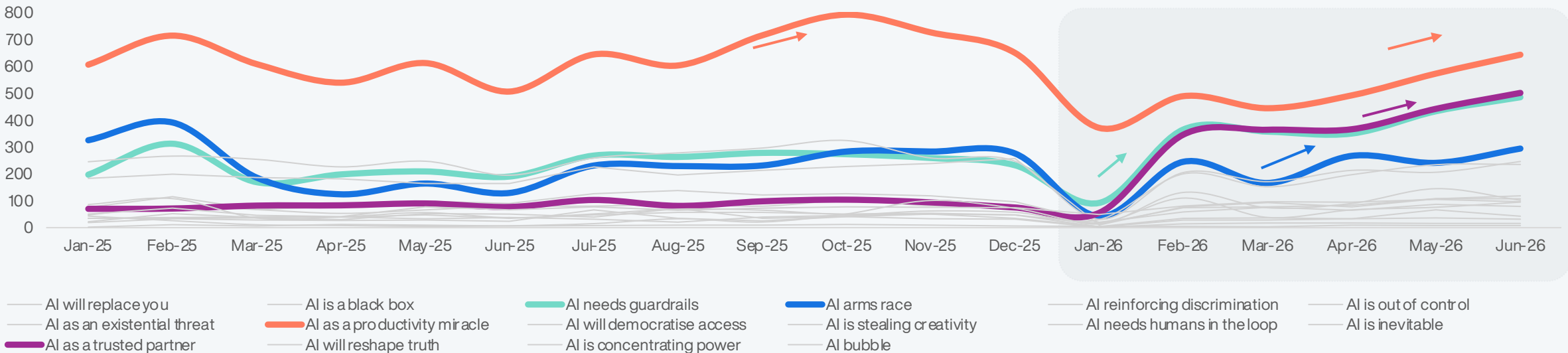
- AI positioned as a trusted collaborator rather than a replacement
- Enterprise-ready AI emphasising security, governance and reliability
- Growing focus on human-AI collaboration and augmentation
- Trust built through responsible AI, transparency and compliance

#4 "AI arms race"

- US-China rivalry driving global AI competition
- Race for AI infrastructure, chips and compute capacity
- Governments accelerating investment in sovereign AI capabilities
- Defence partnerships positioning AI as a strategic asset

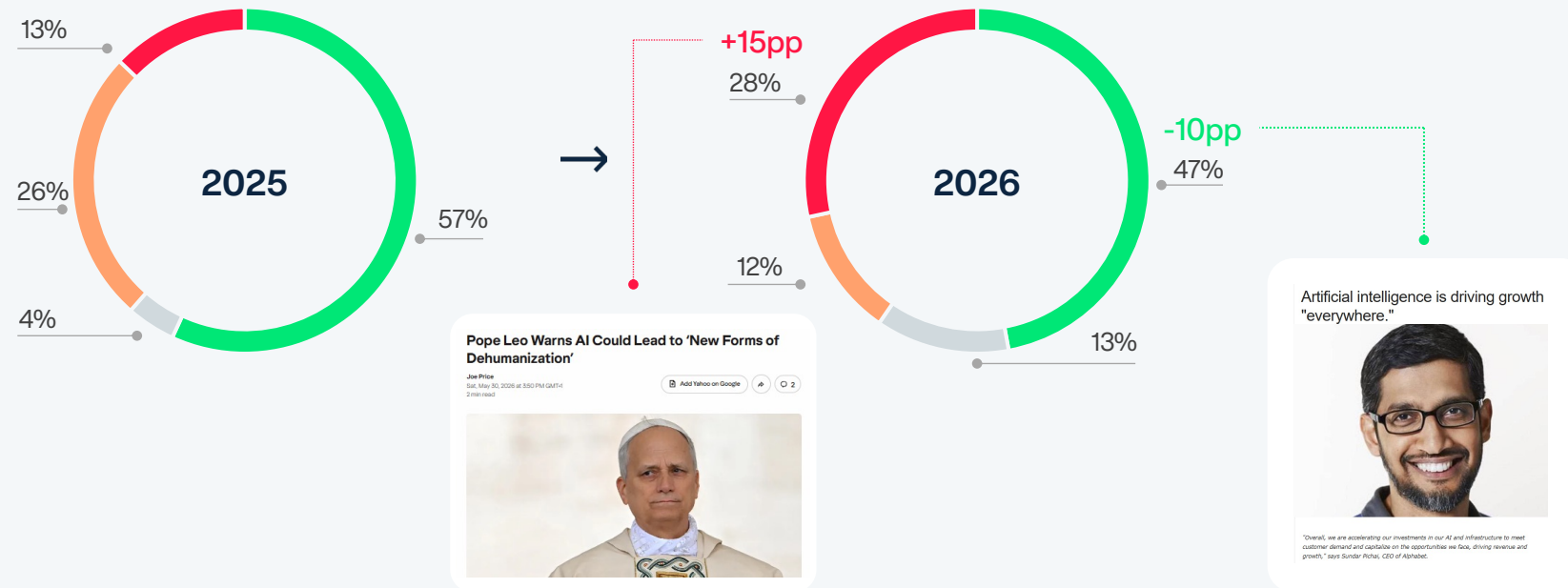


The rise of the "AI as a trusted partner" narrative aligned with an increase in public trust towards AI, suggesting that messaging focused on collaboration and reliability may be resonating with audiences.



Optimism continued to dominate coverage of AI (47% in total), yet scrutiny and caution intensified.

Sentiment of AI coverage



While optimism remains dominant, negative narratives towards AI increased significantly in 2026.

Trust, geopolitical and governance, security, and socio-economic themes drove scrutiny. AI making mistakes, generating misinformation or unsafe content; concerns about whether AI companies are acting responsibly; AI's role in warfare, cybercrime and geopolitical competition; and fears around jobs, privacy, and regulation influenced negative reporting.

Positive reporting was driven less by excitement about AI itself and more by evidence that AI creates tangible value. This reflected a shift from the "AI breakthrough" narrative towards a more mature "AI delivering impact" narrative.

Notable negative headlines:

Military use of AI: "What to know about the clash between the Pentagon and Anthropic over military's AI use"; "Pope decries rise of AI-directed warfare, saying it leads to spiral of annihilation"

Geopolitical and governance concerns: "Southeast Asia needs AI sovereignty - the Grok scandal proved it"

Legal and regulatory scrutiny: "Cybercrime: Understanding the European court's criticisms of Grok"

... and more stories of lawsuits, copyright disputes, fake images, AI-generated misinformation, and job losses.

Notable positive headlines:

AI as an economic enabler: "The World Government Summit explores the role of artificial intelligence in global growth."; "AI: Siemens Energy ramps up production in the U.S."

AI as an innovation engine: "Apple and Google officially announce Gemini AI customized for iPhone"; "Amazon Launches AI-Enhanced Alexa for Prime Subscribers in the US";

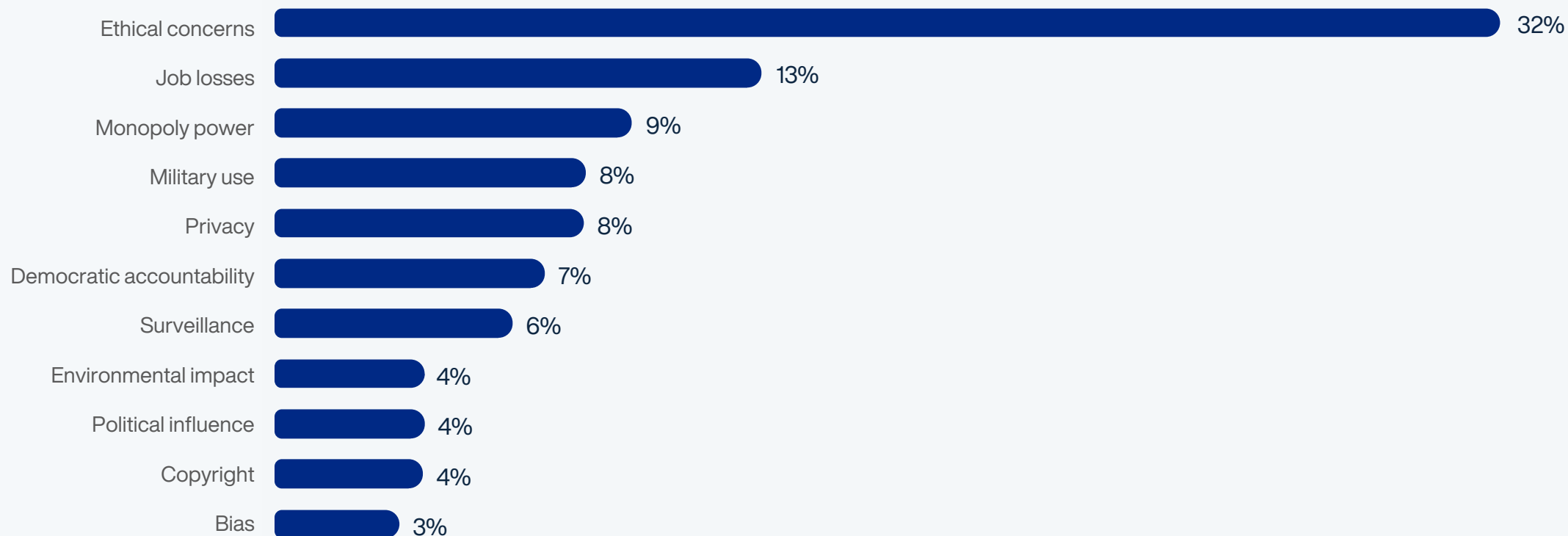
AI as a strategic asset: "The UAE Experts Program empowers national talent in the field of artificial intelligence"

AI as a societal tool: "Janil Puthucheary [Senior Minister of State of Sustainability and the Environment of Singapore] supports AI-related courses".

Debate around AI's responsible development, transparency and societal impact underpinned public scepticism towards AI.

Beyond ethics, no single issue dominated the conversation. Job losses, monopoly power, military use, privacy, democratic accountability and surveillance all received similar levels of attention, suggesting that public concern is spreading across multiple dimensions rather than concentrating on one headline issue.

Share of objections to AI

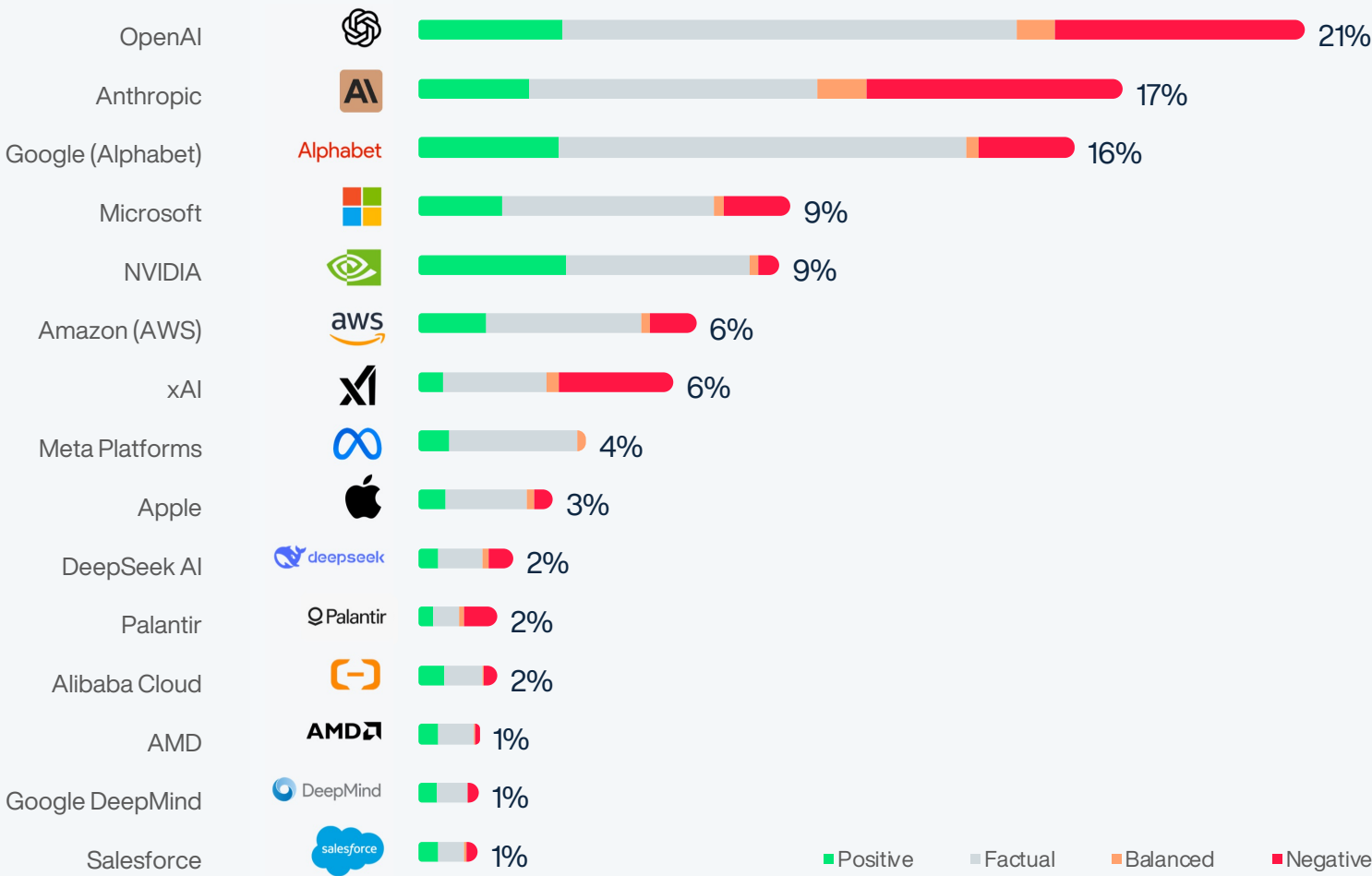




Chapter 2: Leading voices

Who shapes AI narratives and drives trust?

Anthropic's long-term 'good guy' positioning finally paid off, with the company climbing from eighth place to second following the company's high-profile clashes with the US government.

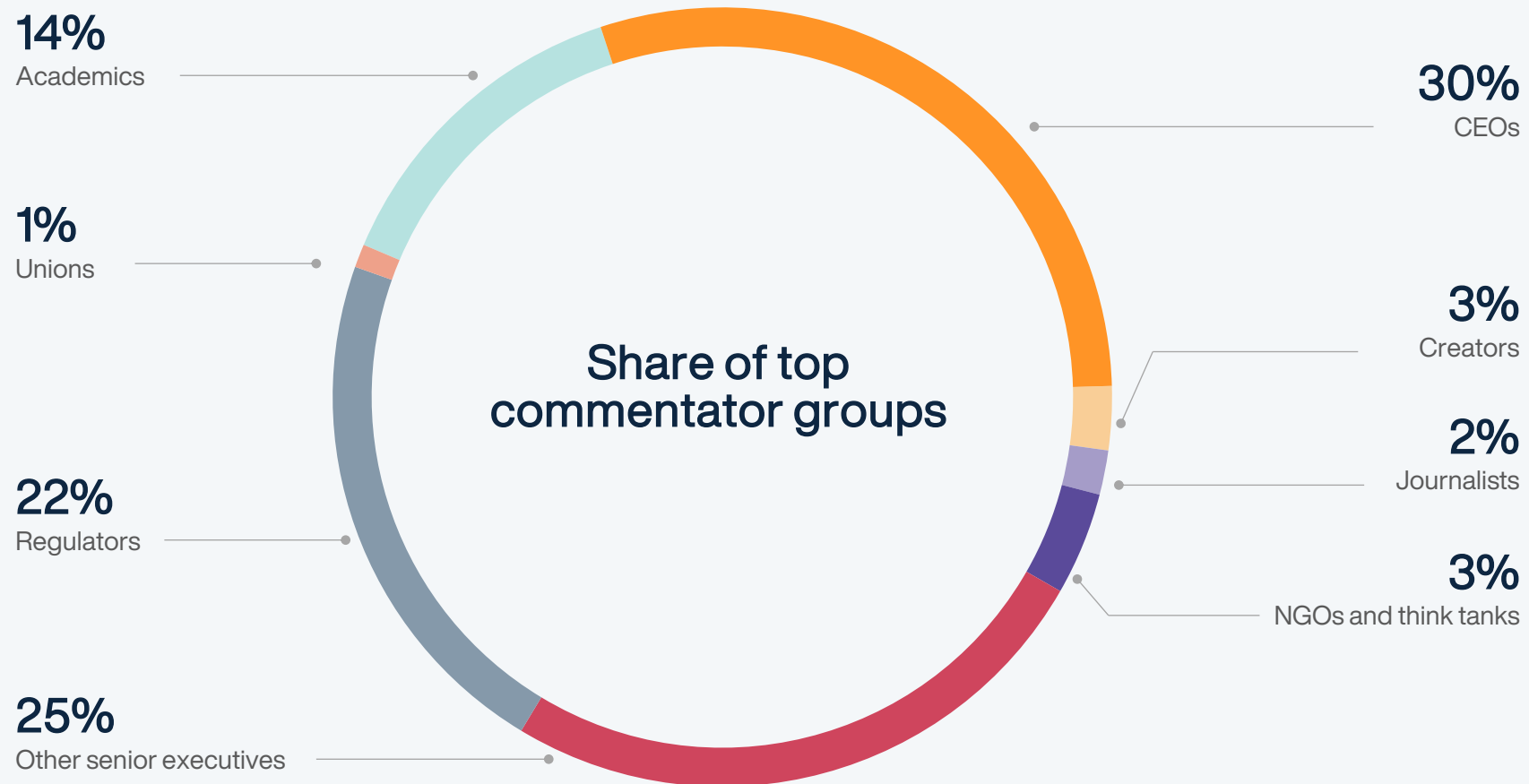


OpenAI remained the most visible AI company, maintaining its leadership with 21% Share of Voice (vs. 22% in 2025), despite intensifying competition.

Anthropic was the standout performer, jumping from 4% to 17% SoV and overtaking Google to become the second most prominent AI company. Its long-term positioning around AI safety and responsible AI gained significant traction following disputes with the US government.

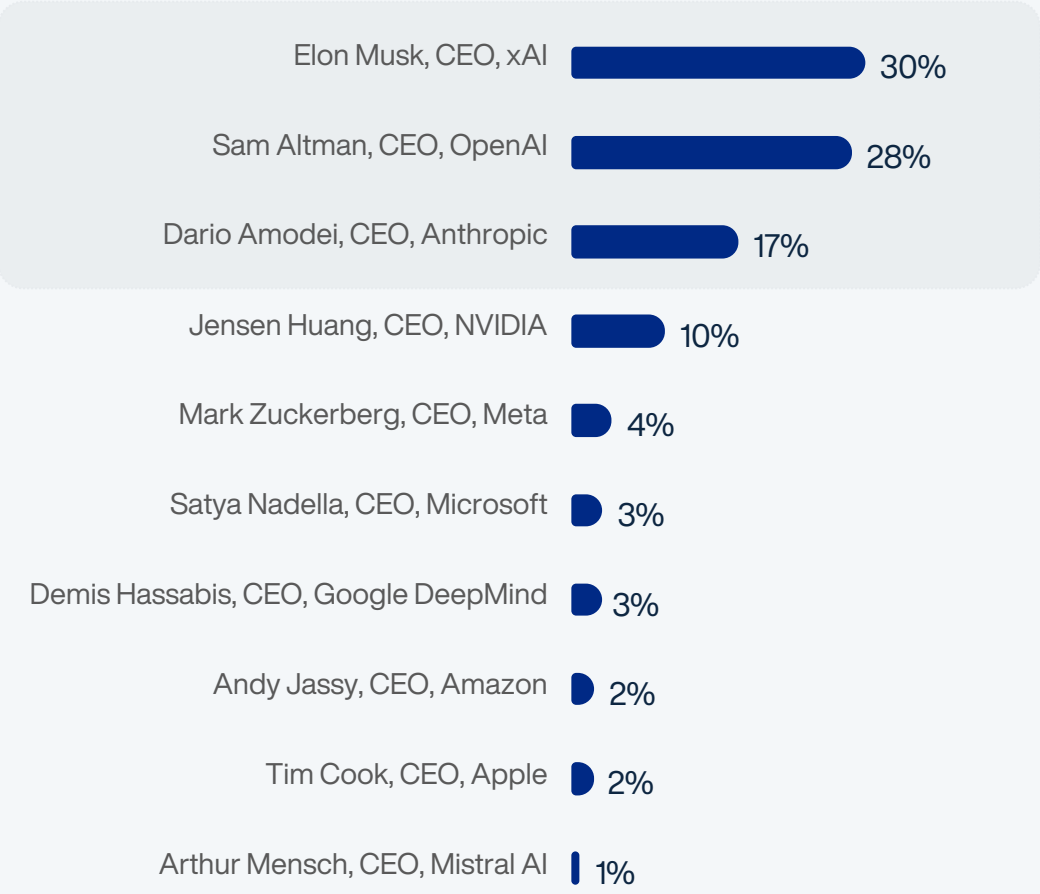
xAI increased its visibility from 4% to 6%, with a noticeably higher proportion of **negative coverage** driven by controversies surrounding Grok, regulation and Elon Musk.

CEOs continued to lead from the front to drive positive media narratives on AI business benefits.



Musk and Altman continued to dominate AI discourse, while Amodeli's positioning around AI safety propelled him into the top tier of industry voices.

Share of leading voices



Influence extended beyond technology into geopolitics, regulation and national security.



- Merged xAI and SpaceX, reinforcing his vision of an integrated AI ecosystem
- Frequently at the centre of regulatory scrutiny over Grok's safety and content moderation
- Positioned as a disruptive, highly influential voice shaping debates on AI governance and infrastructure



- Drove OpenAI's commercial expansion through record fundraising and enterprise partnerships
- Positioned AI as mainstream infrastructure through government and defence collaborations
- Expanded OpenAI's ecosystem with new products, advertising and hardware ambitions
- Remained at the centre of industry rivalries with Anthropic, Google and xAI



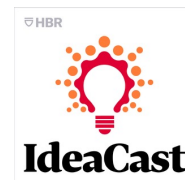
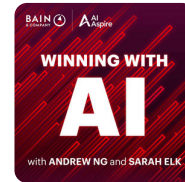
- Positioned Anthropic as the industry's leading advocate for AI safety and responsible development
- Frequently challenged government pressure over military AI and AI safeguards
- Warned of catastrophic AI risks and the profound impact of frontier models on jobs and society
- Established himself as a credible, independent voice on AI governance and ethics.

AI became an increasingly popular topic in podcasts, and that form of content became a significant playground for CEOs to express positive views and deliver their message.

Average number of episodes featuring AI in the top-100 global podcasts*



What podcasts that featured global CEOs talking about AI and what they said about AI



- **Robert F. Smith**, Founder & CEO, Vista Equity Partners – how AI scaled 90+ companies
- **David Gibbs**, former CEO of Yum! Brands – how consumer brands must have AI full stack
- **Bob Bradway**, CEO of Amgen – how AI infrastructure gives a competitive edge
- **Denis Machuel**, CEO of The Adecco Group – how AI “jobpocalypse” is oversold
- **Barbara Martin Coppola**, CEO of Decathlon (formerly chief digital officer at IKEA) – how AI helped supply chain and personalisation
- **Sundar Pichai**, CEO of Alphabet/Google – how AI is the most profound technology Google has ever worked on
- **4 CEOs, CoreWeave, Perplexity, Mistral, and IREN**, – how AI future looks like:
 - the race to secure GPU supply, build specialized AI data centers, and the capex dynamics of AI infrastructure
 - open-weight models, European AI competitiveness, U.S. hyperscalers
 - moving from “links” to direct answers and multi-step reasoning

CEOs continued to be the strongest advocates of AI, but academics were the most trusted voices, suggesting audiences value expertise and independence over optimism when forming opinions about AI.

Share of media sentiment by top commentator groups



Audience's trust levels by top commentator groups

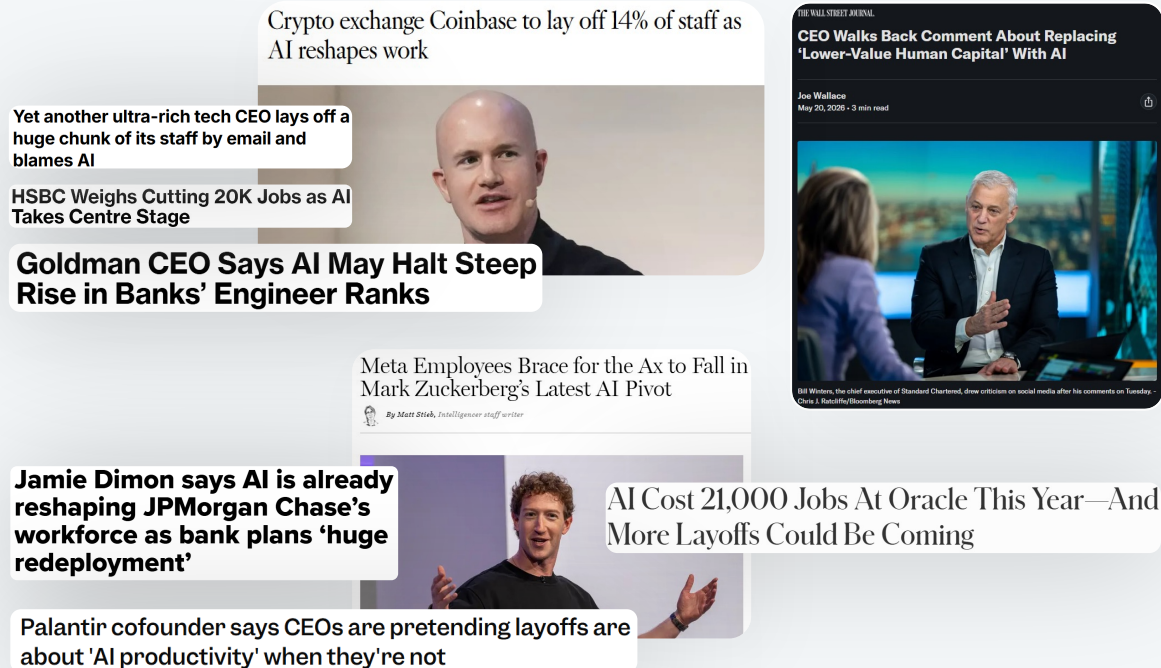
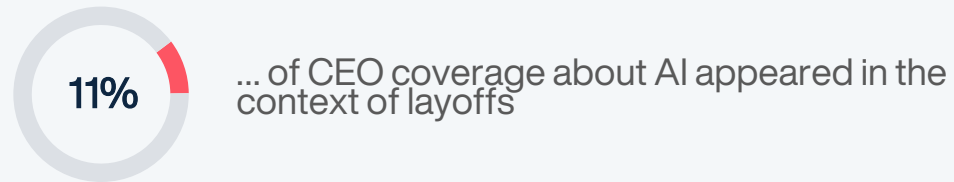


- **Academics were the most trusted voices despite shaping a more balanced AI narrative.** Academics were the most trusted commentator group, even though the AI narratives they shaped were less overwhelmingly positive than those led by CEOs. Therefore, audiences place greater value on perceived expertise and objectivity than optimism alone.
- **CEOs shaped the most positive AI narratives, but were not the most trusted messengers.** AI coverage featuring CEO commentary was considerably more positive than that of any other commentator group, largely reflecting narratives around productivity, innovation and economic growth. However, CEOs ranked behind academics in terms of public trust, which suggested that positive messaging alone is insufficient to establish credibility.
- **Journalists were a trusted group and framed AI through the most critical lens.** Coverage featuring journalists contained the highest proportion of negative sentiment towards AI and almost one out of two respondents said their voice was trusted in forming opinions about the technology.

Question: "When forming your opinion about AI, whose voices do you trust?"

AI became synonymous with workforce transformation and coverage linking CEOs to layoffs was negative.

Share of layoff discussion within CEO coverage



- **Coverage linking CEOs to layoffs was predominantly negative.** More than half of all articles (52%) carried a negative tone, compared with just 18% that were positive, highlighting the reputational challenge organisations face when communicating AI-driven workforce transformation.
- **AI became synonymous with workforce transformation.** Layoffs were rarely discussed in isolation and were instead framed alongside automation, productivity and organisational restructuring.
- **Technology, financial services, the public sector, education and defence emerged as the sectors most frequently associated with AI-related layoffs.** Companies including Meta, Amazon, Salesforce, Block, HSBC and Barclays became focal points for wider debates around AI and employment.
- **CEOs sought to reframe the discussion.** Many executives emphasised augmentation, reskilling and long-term productivity gains, although these messages often struggled to compete with headlines linking AI directly to job losses.
- **Investment and redundancy became increasingly intertwined.** Announcements about AI adoption were frequently reported alongside workforce reductions, reinforcing public perceptions that AI and layoffs are closely connected.
- **Reskilling emerged as a counter-narrative.** Alongside concerns about job displacement, coverage increasingly highlighted the need for AI literacy, workforce adaptation and investment in new skills.



Chapter 3: From workforce productivity to defence power

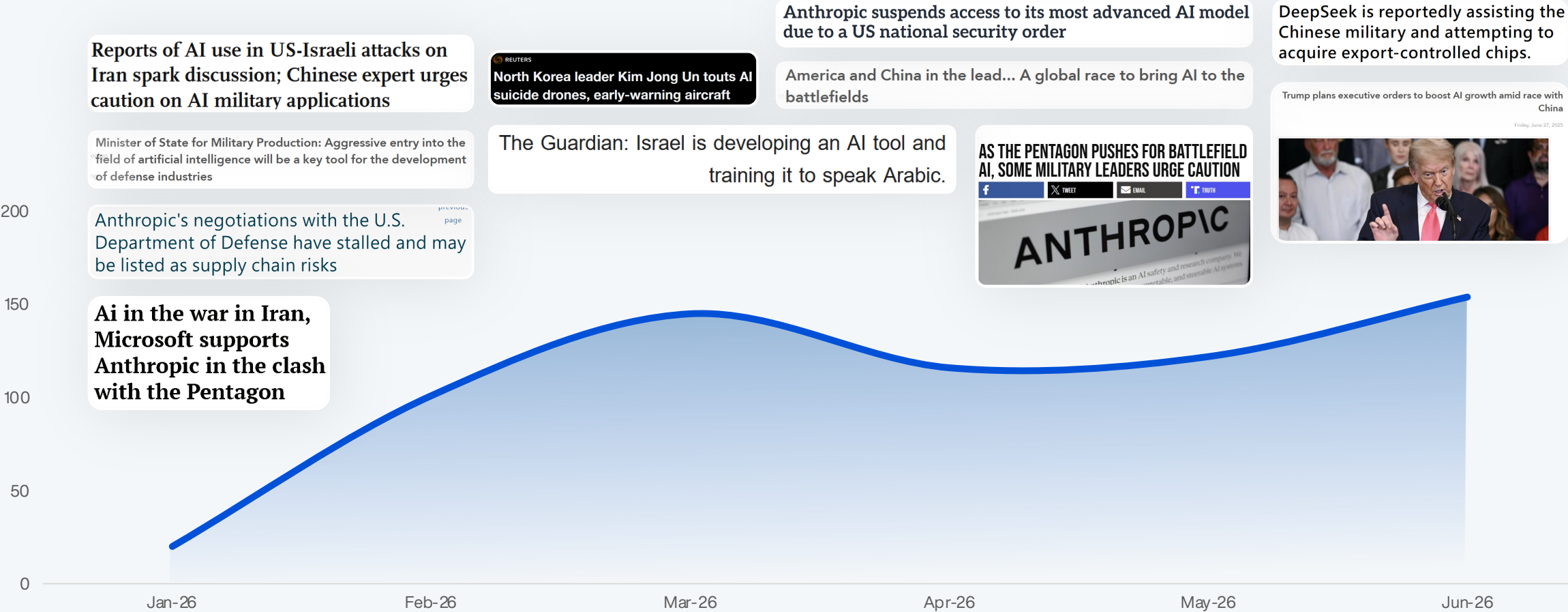
How AI becomes a geopolitical and strategic asset

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Coverage of AI's military and defence applications surged following the outbreak of the US-Iran conflict and remained elevated despite the ceasefire at the end of June.

Coverage reporting the use of AI for military purposes over time

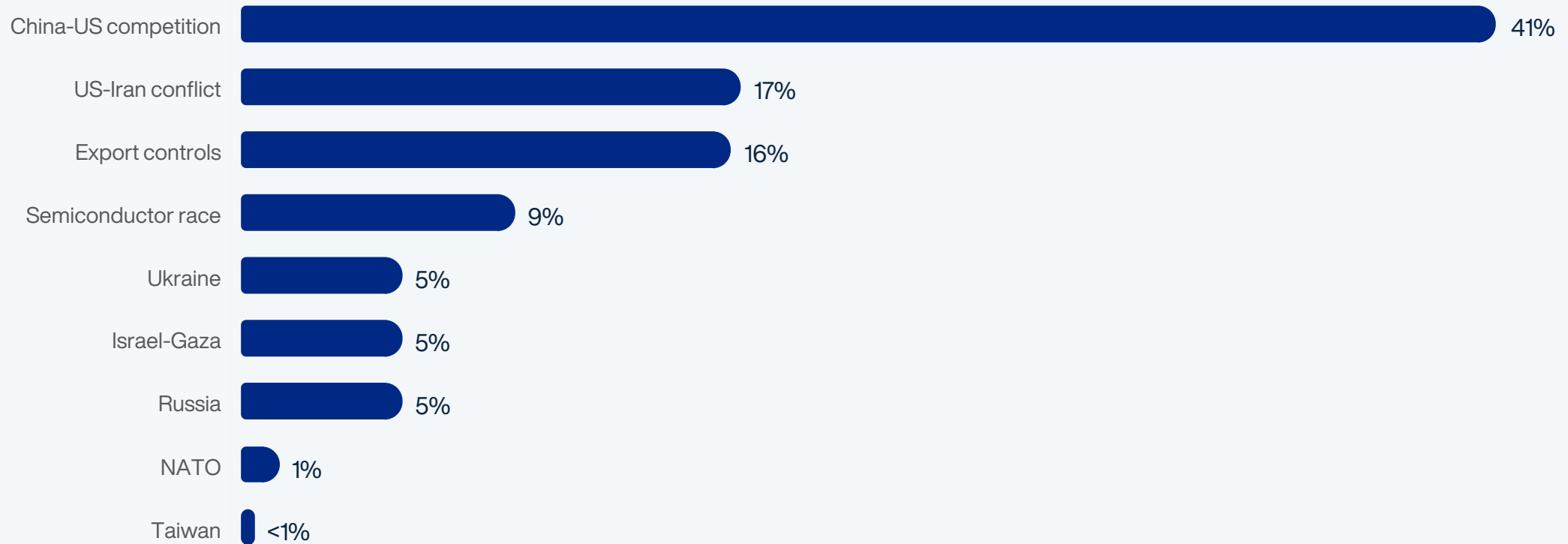
Online media



Together, China-US competition, export controls and the semiconductor race accounted for two-thirds (66%) of all geopolitical flashpoints.

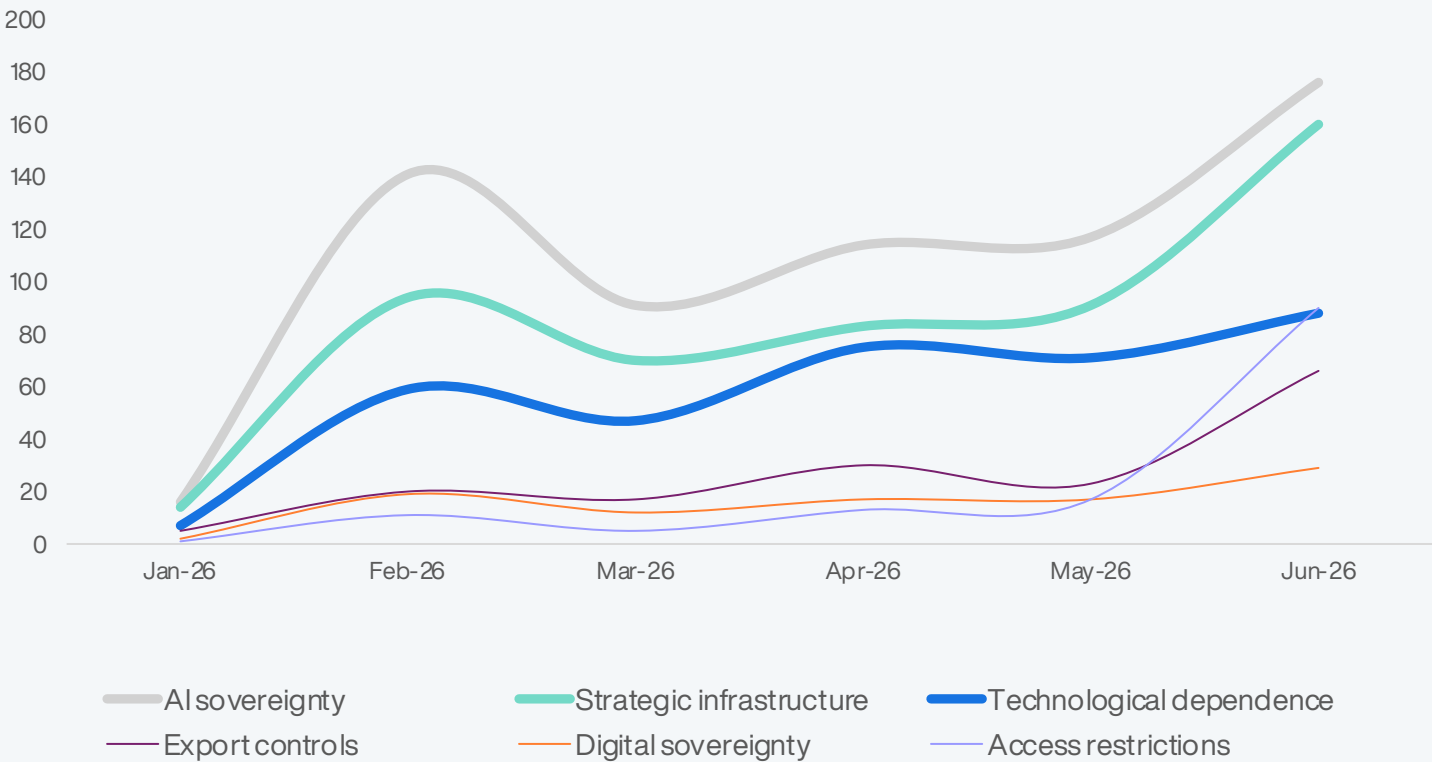
This means AI is increasingly being discussed as an issue of technological sovereignty and strategic control rather than simply a military capability.

Share of geopolitical flashpoints

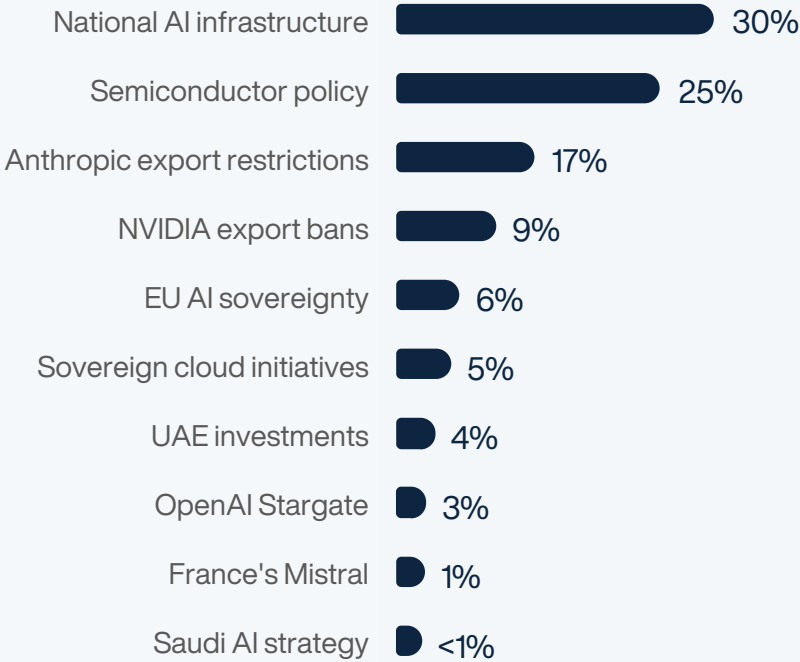


National AI infrastructure became a defining theme in discussions around AI sovereignty. Alongside semiconductor policy and export restrictions, media discussions reflected a broader shift from competing on AI innovation to competing on strategic control.

Media discussion of AI sovereignty and strategic control over time



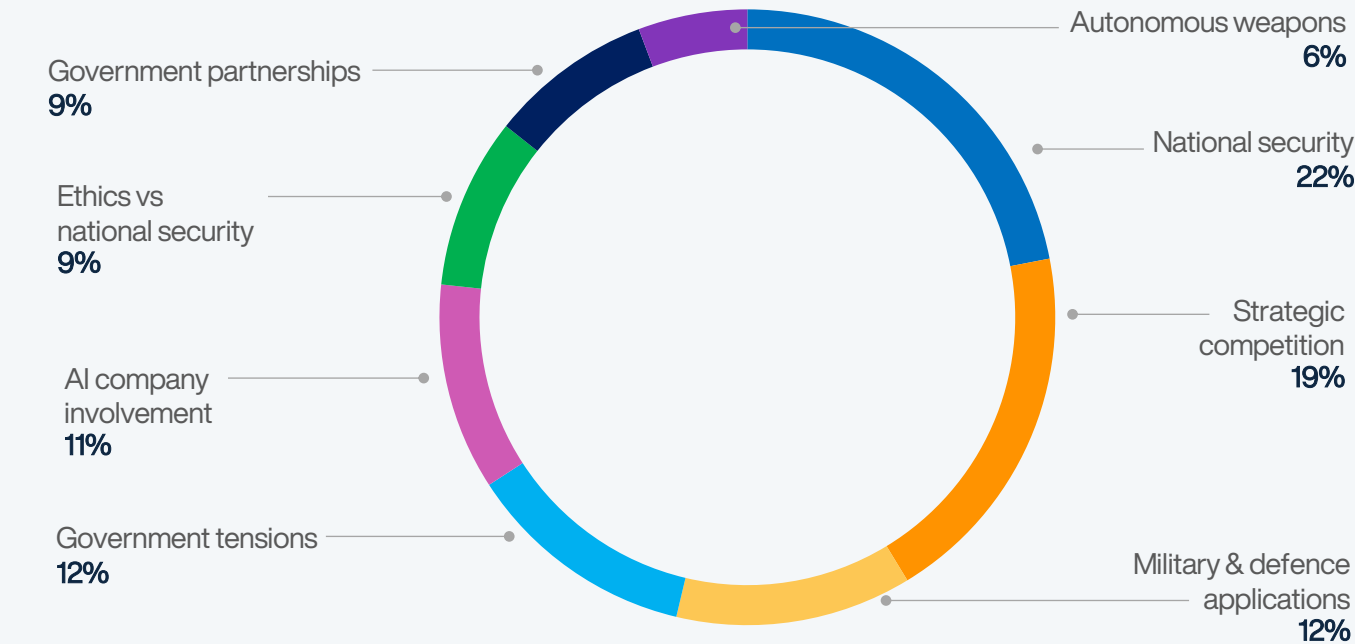
AI sovereignty hot topics



Coverage of AI's role in national security was driven primarily by discussions around strategic competition and national resilience, rather than offensive military applications.

Combined, national security and strategic competition accounted for over two-fifths (41%) of all coverage, highlighting AI's growing role as a geopolitical asset rather than simply a defence technology.

Share of coverage discussing AI's role in defence



Direct military applications were not the dominant narrative.

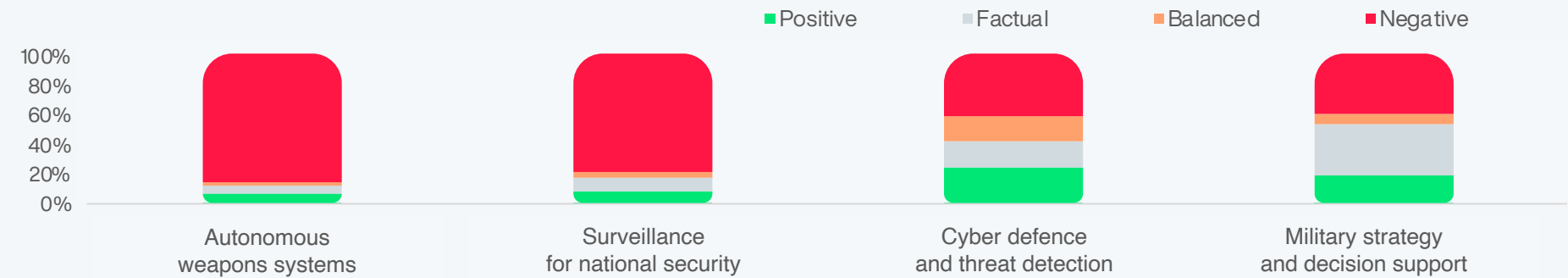
Military & defence applications (12%) and autonomous weapons (6%) together accounted for just 18% of global coverage.

This suggested that media attention was focused less on AI being used to fight wars and more on its broader strategic role in intelligence, deterrence and national competitiveness.

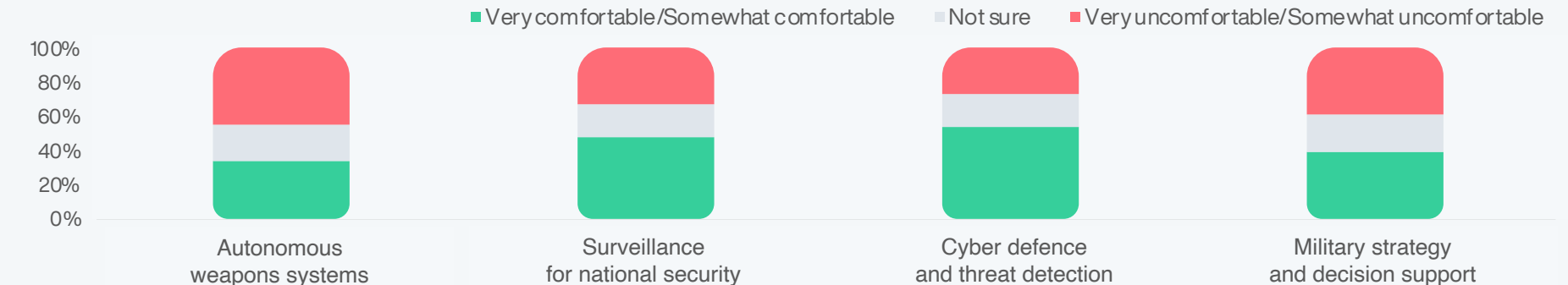
This finding directly challenges the assumption that military AI coverage is primarily about weapons.

Public opinion was considerably more accepting of military AI than media coverage suggested.

Media sentiment of military use cases



Actual public opinion sentiment towards military use cases



Autonomous weapons received the strongest opposition from both media and the public.

However, acceptance increases for surveillance, cyber defence, and decision support, suggested that people differentiate between AI making lethal decisions and AI assisting human operators.

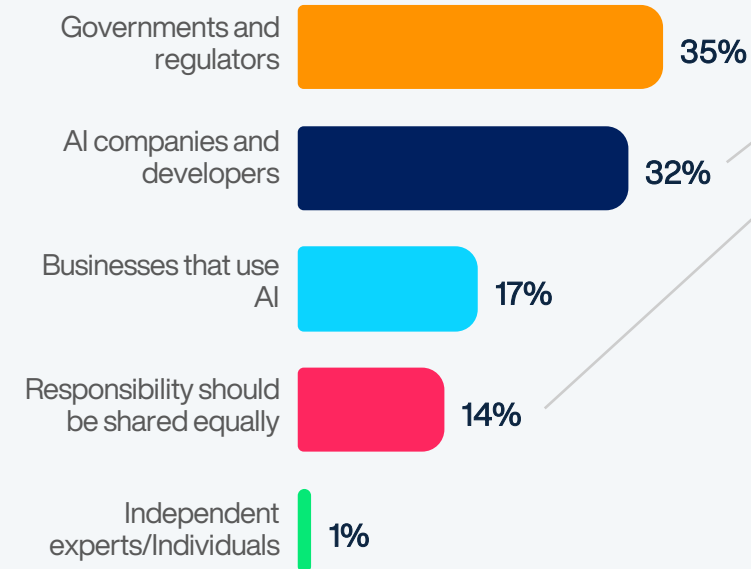


Chapter 4: The governance dilemma

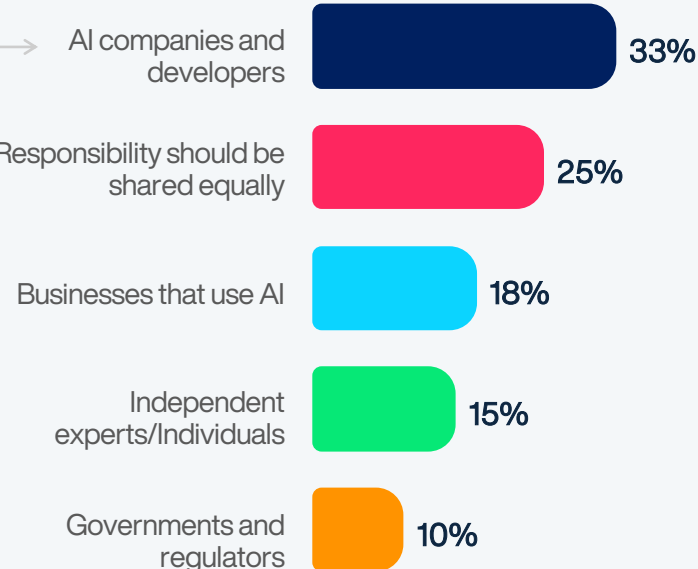
How are visions for regulating AI competing?

Both journalists and the public agreed that AI companies and developers should bear responsibility for the future of AI. However, media coverage placed greater emphasis on the role of governments and regulators.

Perceived responsibility in media



Perceived responsibility that negatively influence audiences*



Responsibility for AI shifted in media coverage during 2026, with governments and regulators overtaking AI companies and developers as the stakeholders perceived to bear the greatest responsibility for the technology's future. Public opinion painted a contrasting picture, however, with respondents viewing governments as the least responsible actor.

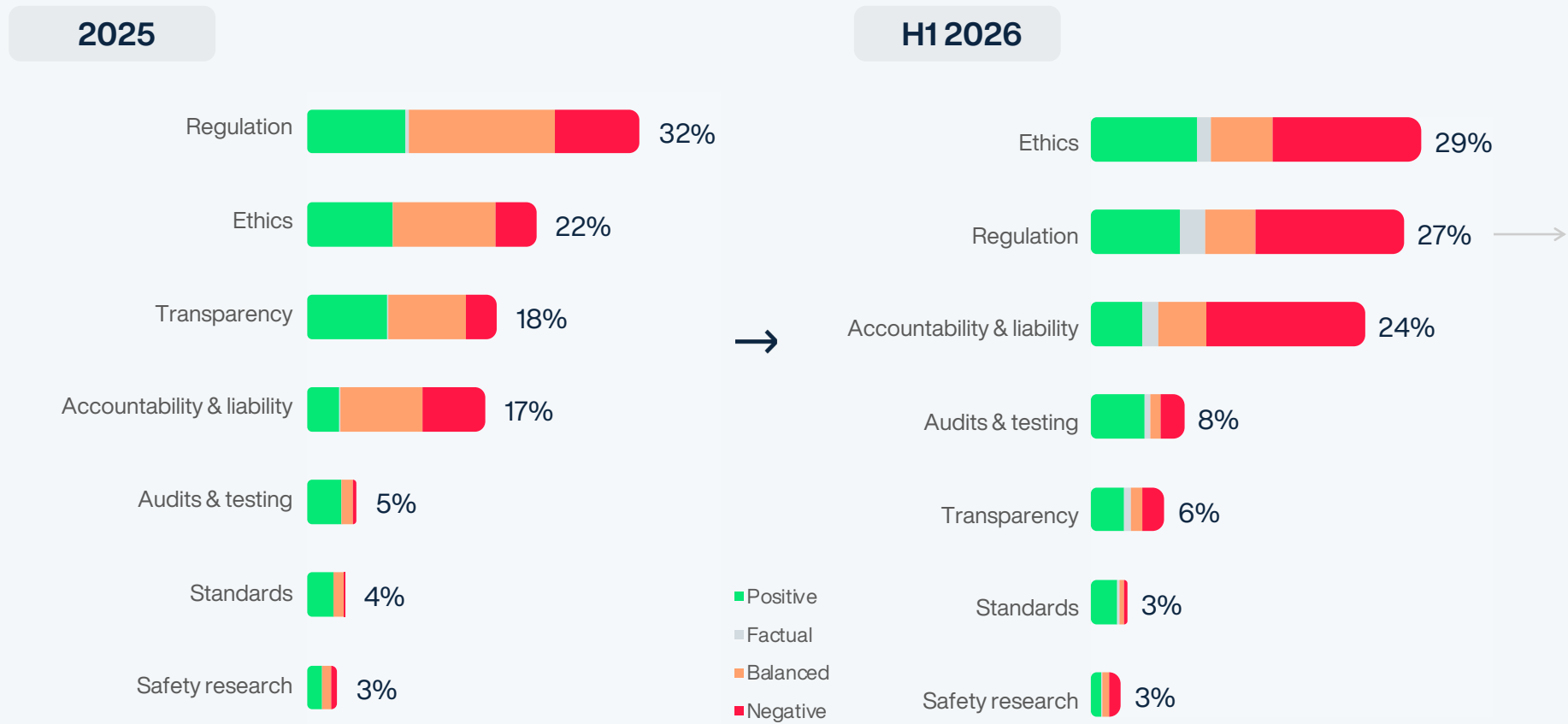
Despite this divergence, both the media and the public agreed that AI companies and developers should remain accountable for the direction of AI.

The key difference lay in expectations of shared responsibility: while media coverage rarely framed AI governance as a collective effort, one in four respondents believed responsibility should be shared equally across governments, regulators, industry and other stakeholders.

Question: "When AI systems cause harm or make mistakes, who do you believe should be most responsible?"
Excluding "Don't know" results (5% of total answers)

Ethics rose on the AI governance agenda amid growing scrutiny, while transparency faded from focus but was framed more positively compared to last year. Conversations around ethics, regulatory frames and accountability drove the most debates.

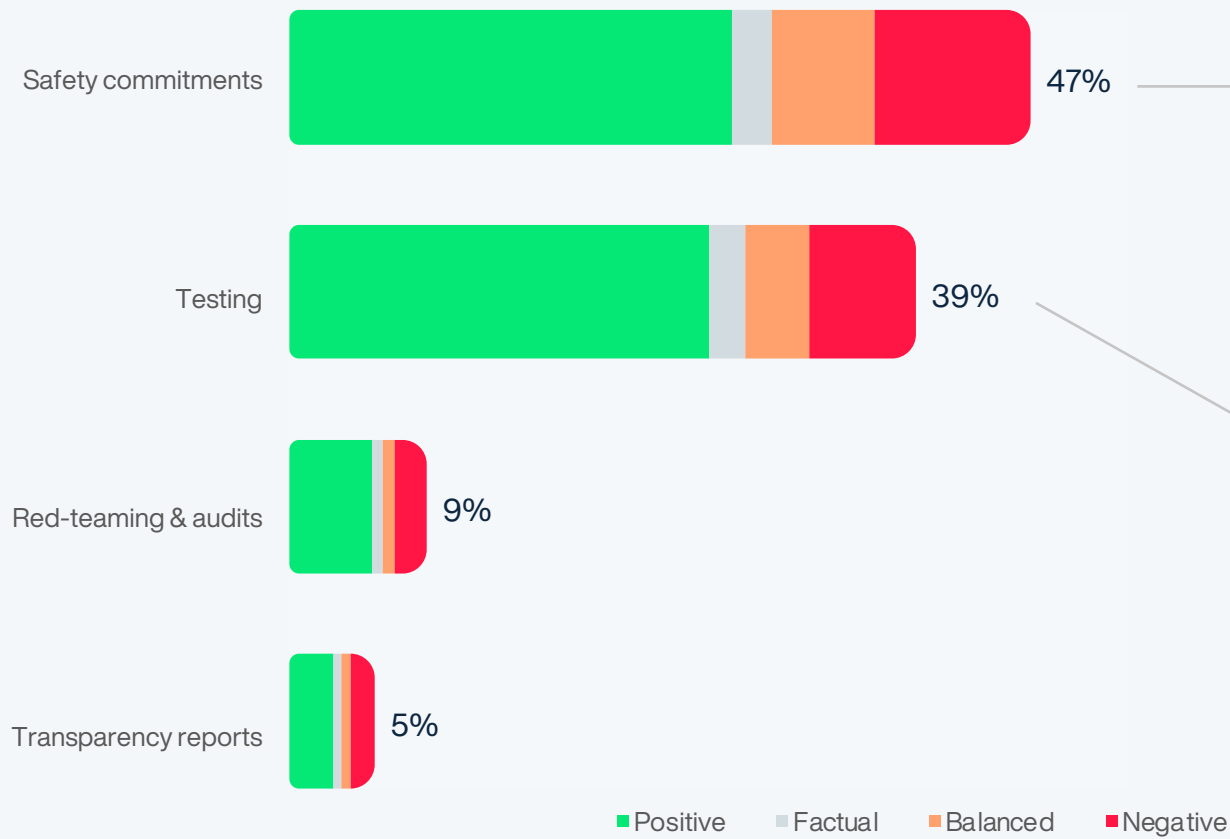
AI governance topics in media



According to a [Pew Research Center survey](#) across 25 markets, **most people trust their own government to regulate AI effectively, although confidence varies considerably by country. Trust is highest in emerging markets** such as India (89%), Indonesia (74%) and Israel (72%), while **respondents in wealthier Western countries tend to be more sceptical.** The study also found that people who are more optimistic about AI are generally more likely to trust their governments to regulate the technology.

Safety commitments and testing bolstered AI governance credibility the most.

Responsibility and governance credibility topics in media



Media coverage of AI safety commitments was primarily driven by scrutiny of leading AI developers and on whether they are honouring their public safety commitments, evolving government regulation, enterprise governance and risk management, national security considerations, international collaboration, and the responsible adoption of AI across regulated industries.

AI companies developing AI were the most visible in testing discussions, with opportunities for businesses using AI to raise awareness on this topic.

A glimpse into the future? Argentina's AI strategy has reframed regulation as a competitive advantage, but also deepened the debate on AI governance.

Javier Milei: AI should be freed to innovate

On 4 June 2026, Argentina's President Javier Milei used the pages of the **Financial Times** to set out one of the boldest visions yet for the future of AI governance.

FINANCIAL TIMES

Opinion Artificial intelligence

Javier Milei: Argentina invites AI to free itself

As we enter a new era of technology, AI must be permitted to develop without premature regulation

Milei argues that AI needs legal and regulatory freedom to reach its full economic potential. His proposal would create "non-human corporations" operated by AI agents, supported by light-touch regulation and favourable tax conditions to attract AI investment to Argentina.



Yuval Noah Harari: AI must remain accountable

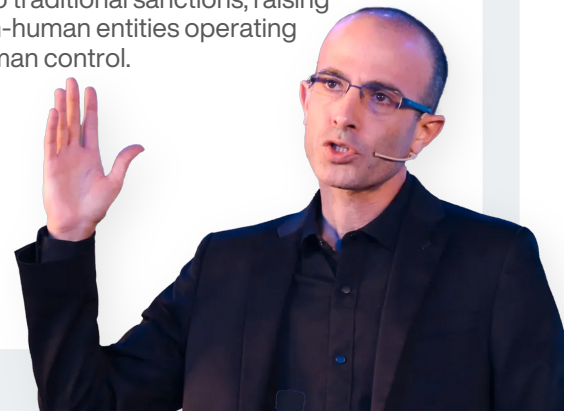
Four days later, on 8 June 2026, historian and best-selling author Yuval Noah Harari responded in the **Financial Times**, challenging Milei's vision for AI governance.

Opinion Technology

We must not grant AI agents legal personhood

What kind of sanctions could keep a non-human corporation in check?

On the other hand, Harari warns that granting AI legal personhood without human liability could create serious accountability risks. He argues that AI-run companies could exploit legal and political systems without being subject to traditional sanctions, raising the risk of powerful non-human entities operating beyond meaningful human control.



This debate illustrates a growing divide in AI governance on the global stage. One vision sees regulation as a tool to attract investment and accelerate innovation; the other views regulation as essential to preserving accountability as AI systems become increasingly autonomous. As governments compete for AI leadership, the balance between competitiveness and oversight is likely to become one of the defining policy debates of the next decade.



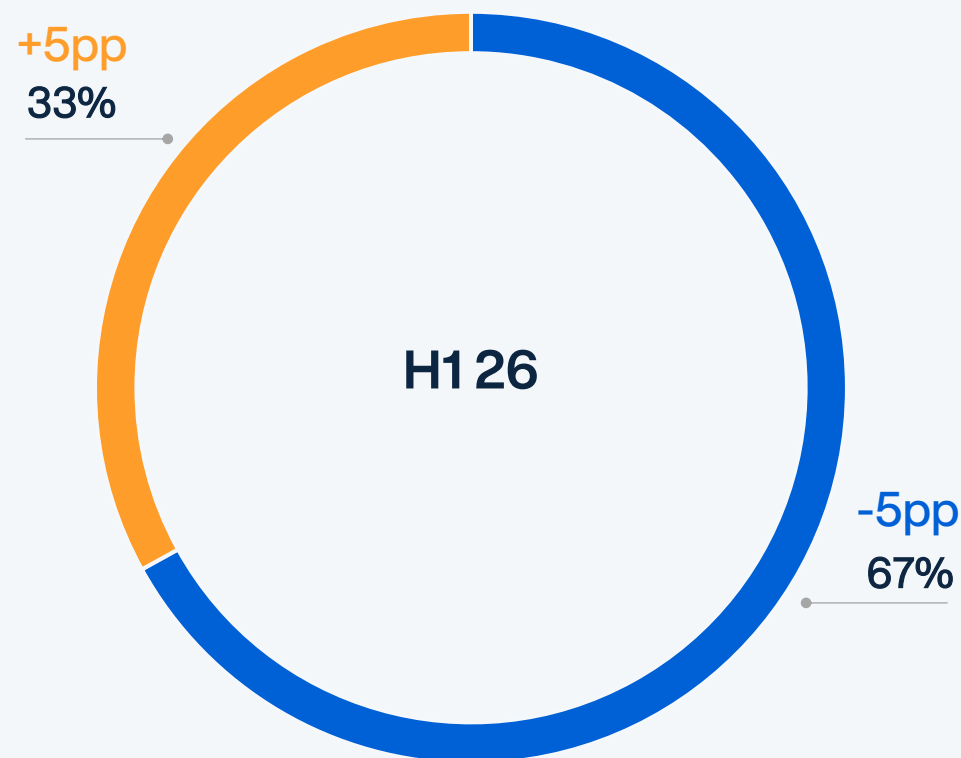
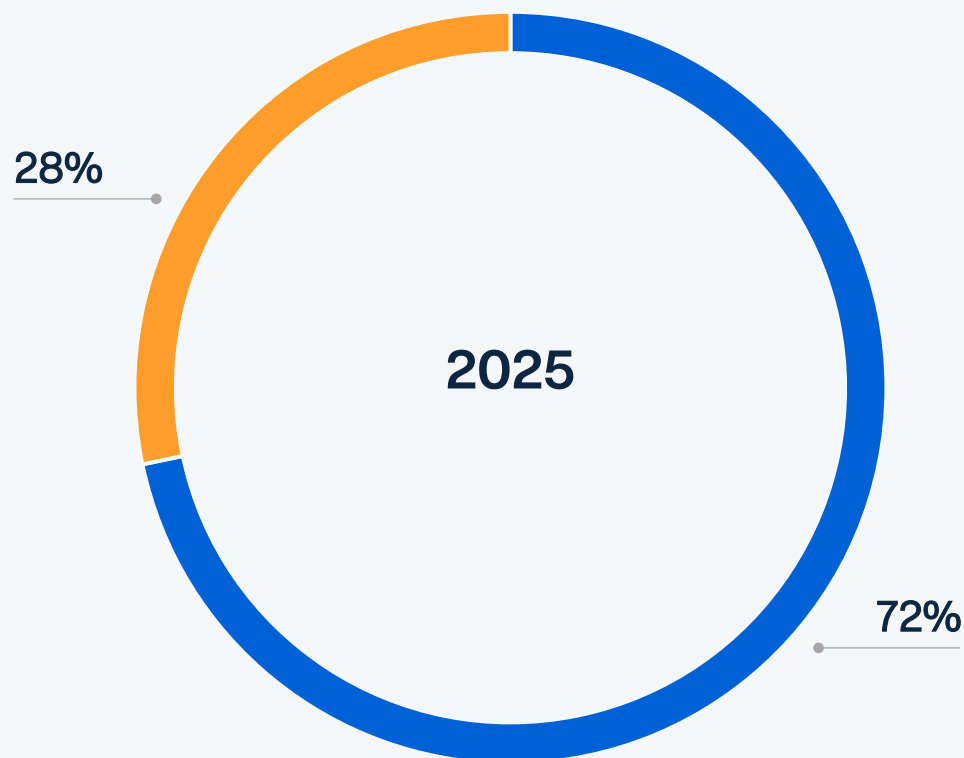
Chapter 5: The risk-opportunity divide

What kind of change does AI represent?

AI opportunities continued to outweigh risks in media coverage, although the gap narrowed slightly in H1 2026, with risks becoming more prevalent.

Mentions citing AI opportunities vs risks

■ Opportunities brought by AI ■ Risk and harm signals

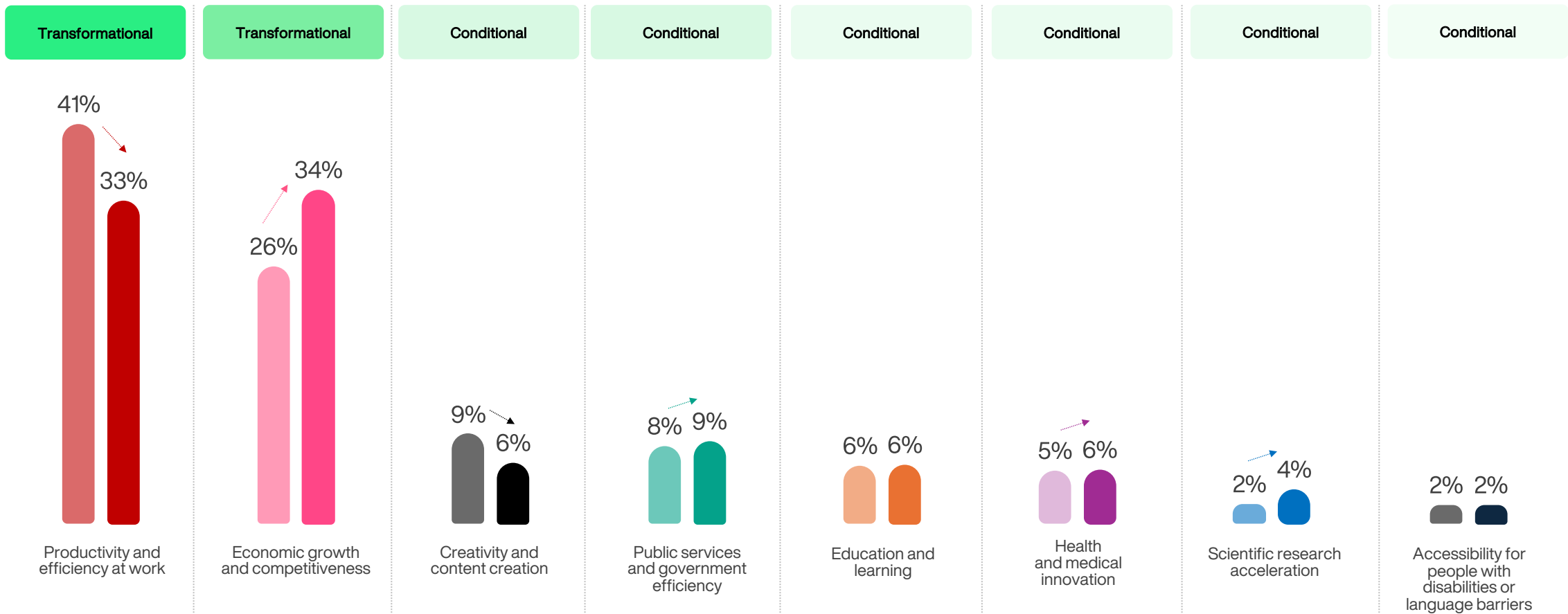


Opportunities linked to productivity and efficiency at work reached a plateau in both media attention and the intensity with which their transformational potential was portrayed. Meanwhile, narratives around economic growth and competitiveness continued to gain momentum.

Volume of AI opportunity coverage by portrayed intensity over time (H2 2025 – H1 2026)

H2 25 H1 26

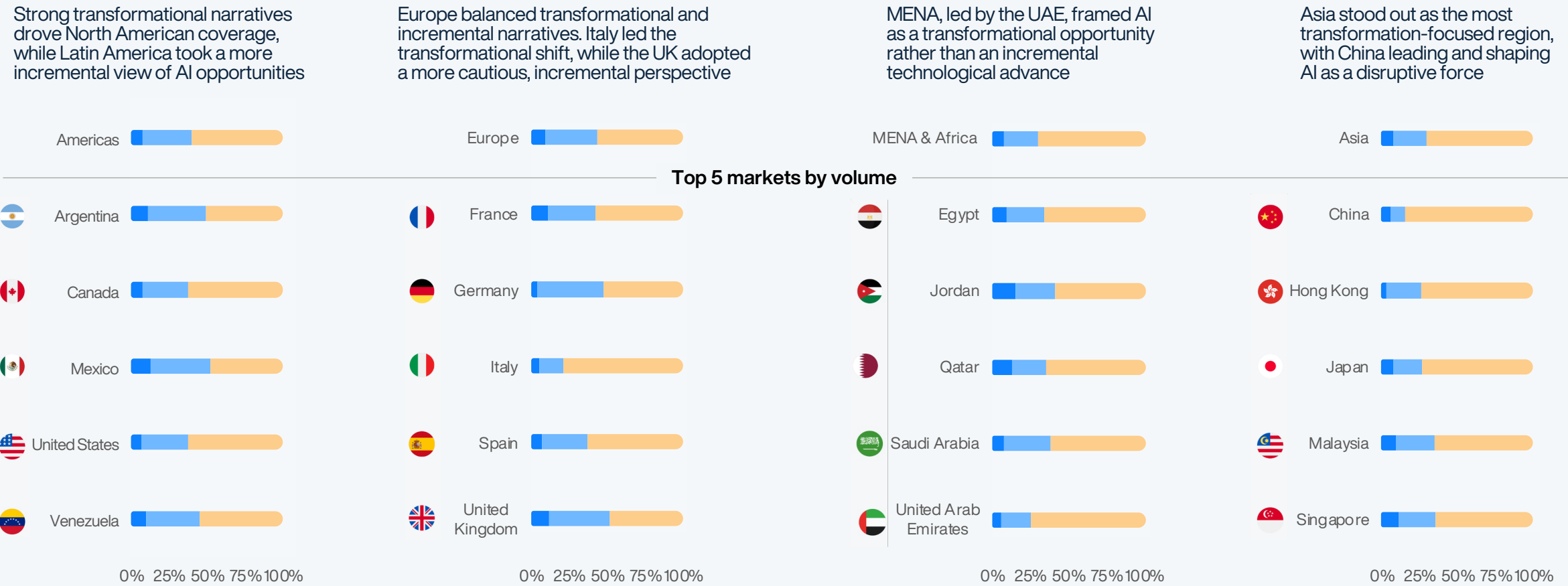
Online media



Global media overwhelmingly framed AI opportunities as transformational. Asia and the UAE led this narrative, while Europe and the Americas adopted a more measured, incremental perspective.

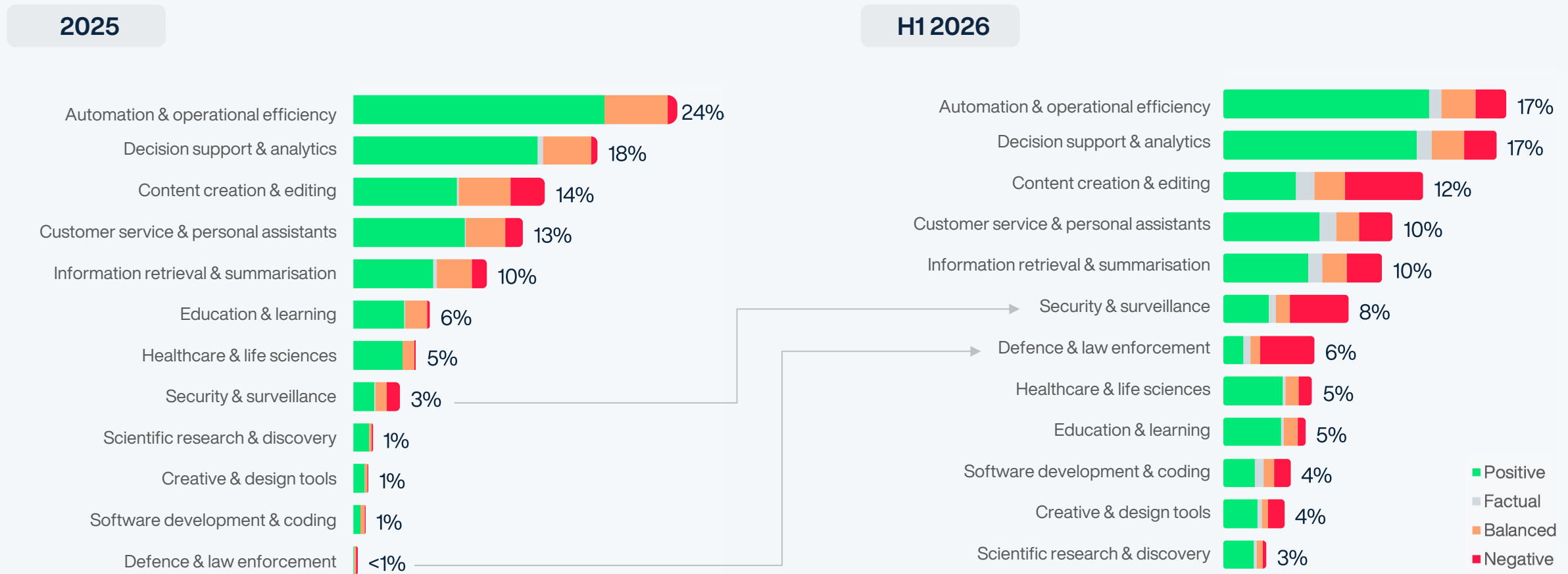
Portrayed levels of change brought by AI by regions and markets

■ Conditional opportunity
 ■ Incremental opportunity
 ■ Transformational opportunity



Media optimism remained strong for workplace AI, while security and defence applications became more prominent and emerged as most contested use cases.

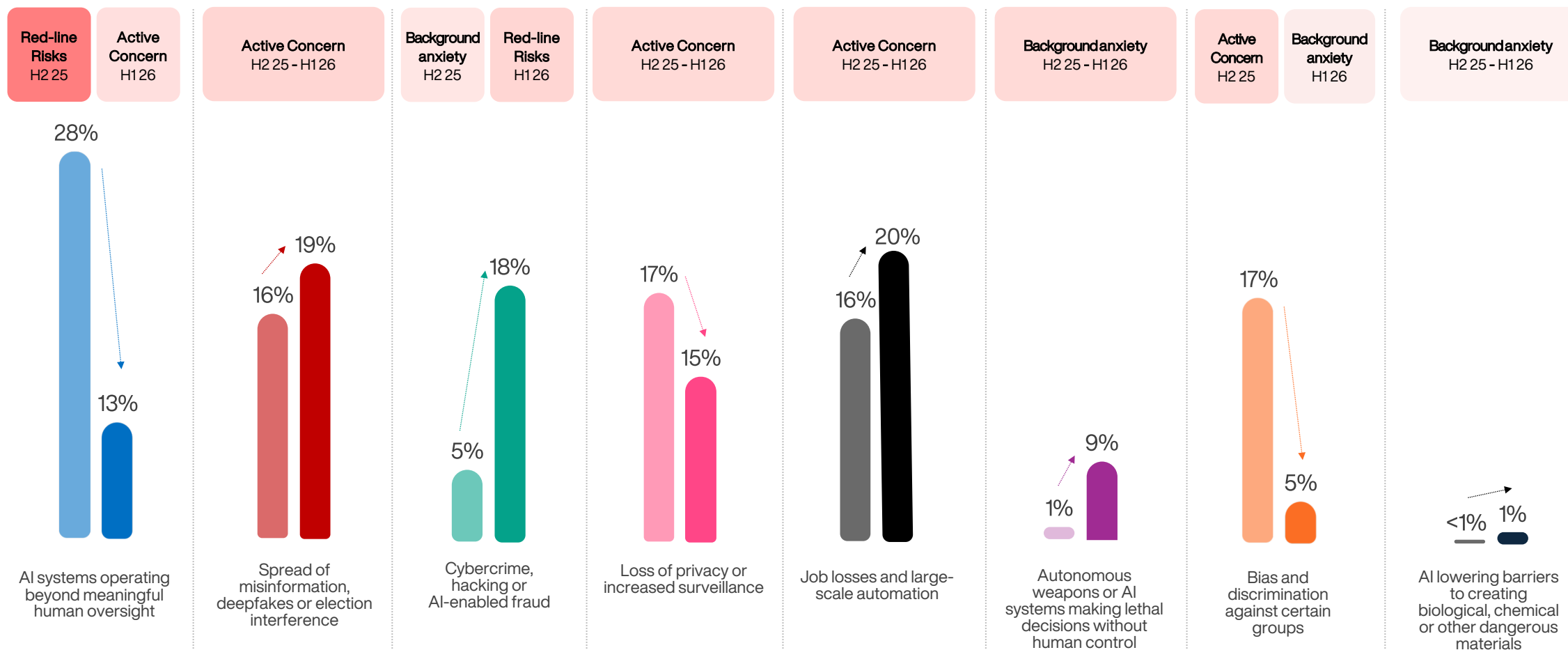
AI use cases by sentiment in media



Loss of human oversight, the leading AI risk in 2025, was overtaken in H1 2026 by growing concerns around cybercrime, misinformation, autonomous weapons and surveillance.

Volume of AI risk coverage by perceived severity over time (H2 2025 – H1 2026)

■ H2 25 ■ H1 26



AI risk coverage was generally moderate rather than alarmist, but Europe stood out for framing AI risks as more severe than other regions.

Portrayed severity of risks related to AI by regions and markets

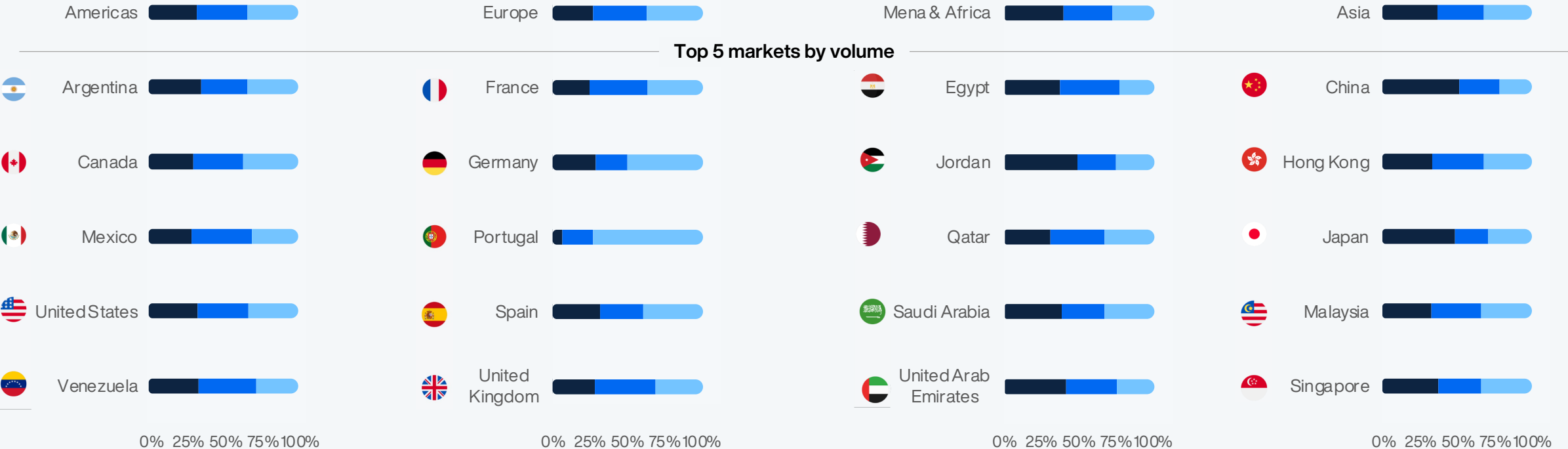
Low impact Medium impact High impact

In the Americas, AI risks were portrayed in a balanced way, generally measured rather than alarmist

Europe balanced transformational and incremental narratives. Italy led the transformational shift, while the UK adopted a more cautious, incremental perspective

AI risks in MENA and Africa were primarily framed as lower- to medium-severity challenges rather than immediate high-impact threats

Asia presented AI risks in a pragmatic and relatively cautious manner. China indicated the least emphasis on high-impact AI risks



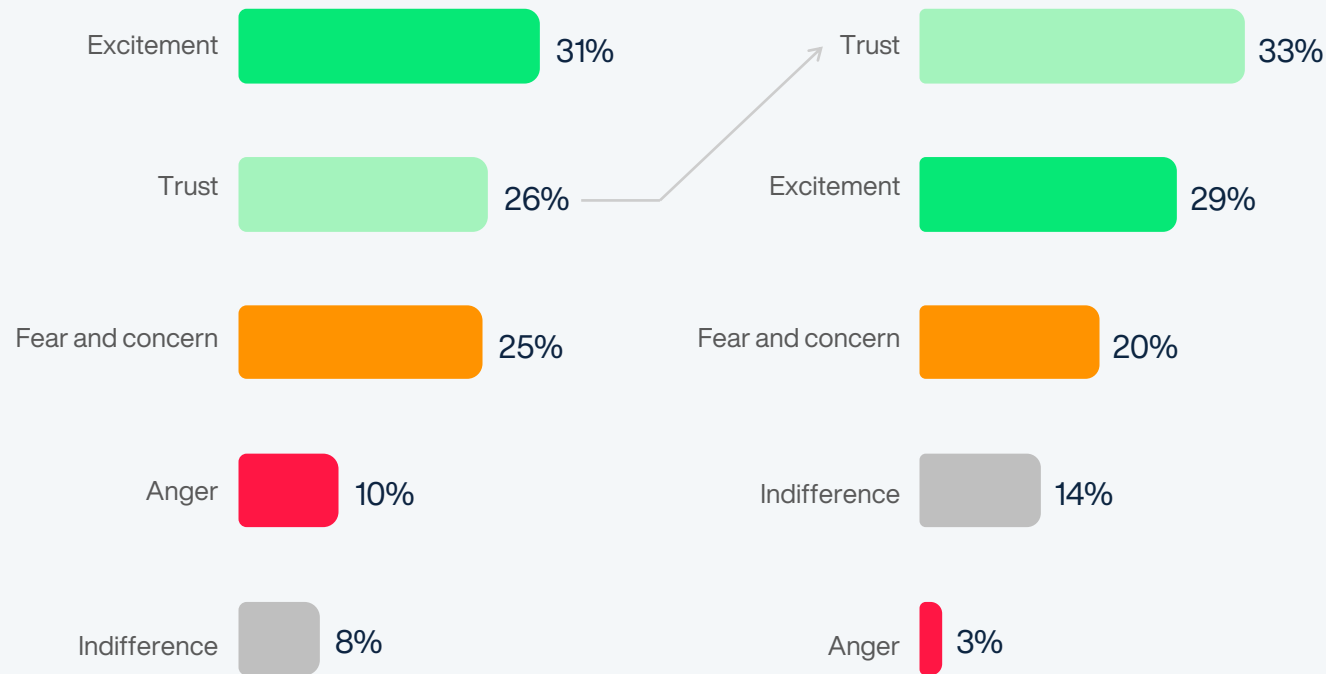
Chapter 6: The human response

How AI makes people feel –
media vs audiences

Public perceptions of AI are maturing as trust overtook excitement for the first time.

Emotional signals embedded in AI media coverage

Actual public emotions towards AI*



In media, productivity and efficiency at work emerged as the most prominent positive narratives, closely followed by AI's role in driving economic growth and competitiveness. Together, these two themes significantly outpaced all other perceived benefits, suggesting media continued to frame AI primarily as a catalyst for economic performance and workplace transformation.

China, Singapore and several Gulf markets (notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, depending on your full dataset) appeared to place relatively greater emphasis on economic competitiveness than on social applications.

Public perceptions of AI are shaped not only by media narratives but also by first-hand experiences. [Harvard Business Review's latest How People Are Really Using AI in 2026 study](#), based on an analysis of 12,637 real-world use cases, found that **emotional support, therapy and companionship remained AI's most common applications for the second consecutive year**. While causality cannot be inferred, the growing prevalence of these supportive use cases may have contributed to rising public trust in AI.

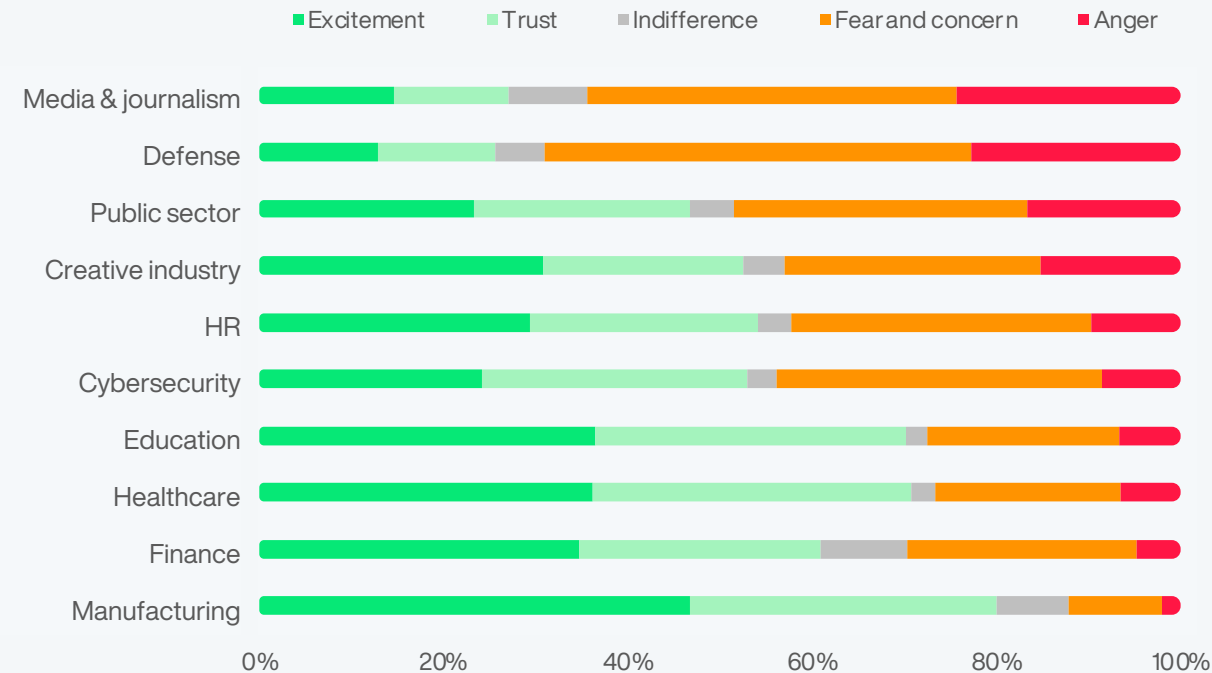
Question: "When you think about AI and its impacts on society, which of the following, if any, do you feel most strongly?"
 Excluding "None of these" results (8% of total answers)

Potential emotional responses to AI varied widely by sector. Conversations around the use of AI in media and defence triggered the greatest concern, while manufacturing and finance tended to boost optimism.

Emotional sentiment towards AI by sector*



Emotional responses appear to be shaped less by a sector's exposure to AI than by whether AI is perceived as augmenting human expertise or competing with it. Sectors viewing AI as an enabler of productivity tended to express greater excitement and trust, while those perceiving AI as a challenge to professional expertise exhibited higher levels of concern.



Likely perceived by media as...

Competitor
High-risk technology
Disruptor
Competitor
Workforce transformation
Double-edged technology
Learning assistant
Clinical support
Efficiency tool
Productivity tool

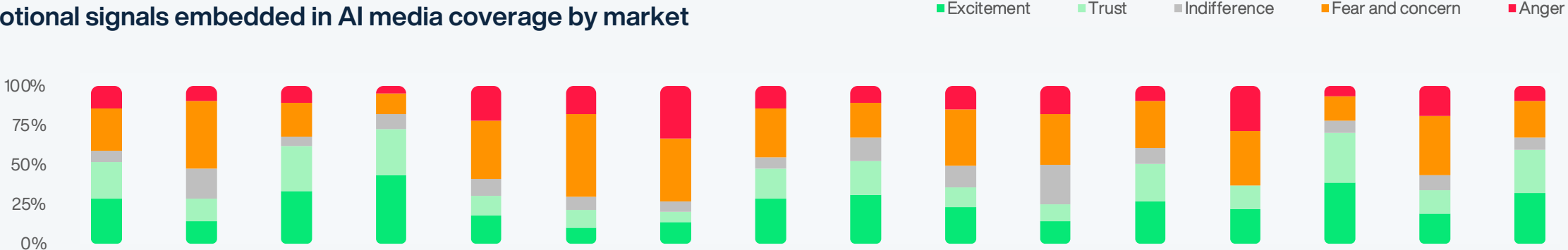
Overall likely emotional response

Negative
Negative
Mixed
Mixed/negative
Mixed
Mixed
Positive
Positive
Positive
Positive

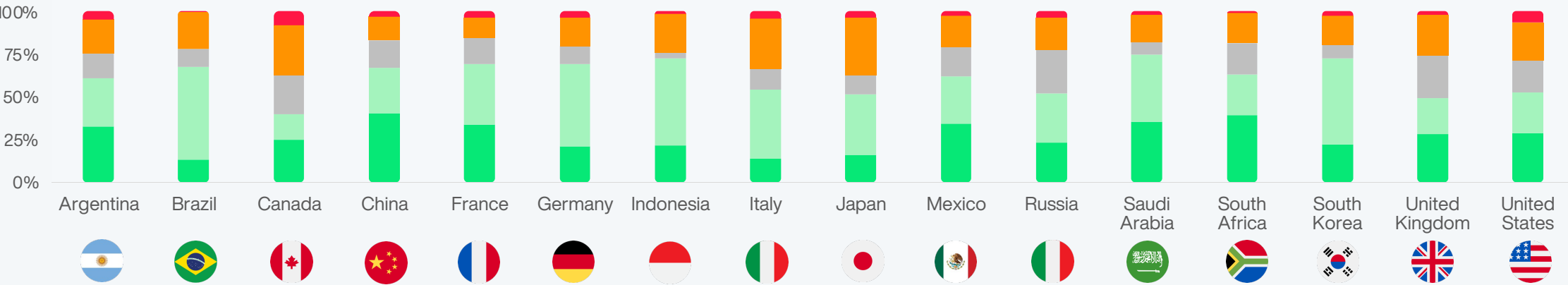
*Top 10 sectors seeing the greatest share of AI discussion

Audience-reported trust exceeded media trust signals across most markets. Overall public trust in AI increased from 28% in 2025 to 33% in 2026, while media trust signals declined from 35% to 26% over the same period.

Emotional signals embedded in AI media coverage by market



Actual public emotions towards AI*



Question: "When you think about AI and its impacts on society, which of the following, if any, do you feel most strongly?" Excluding "None of these" results (8% of total answers)

Public attitudes towards AI are maturing, with fewer markets occupying the extremes of excitement or fear.

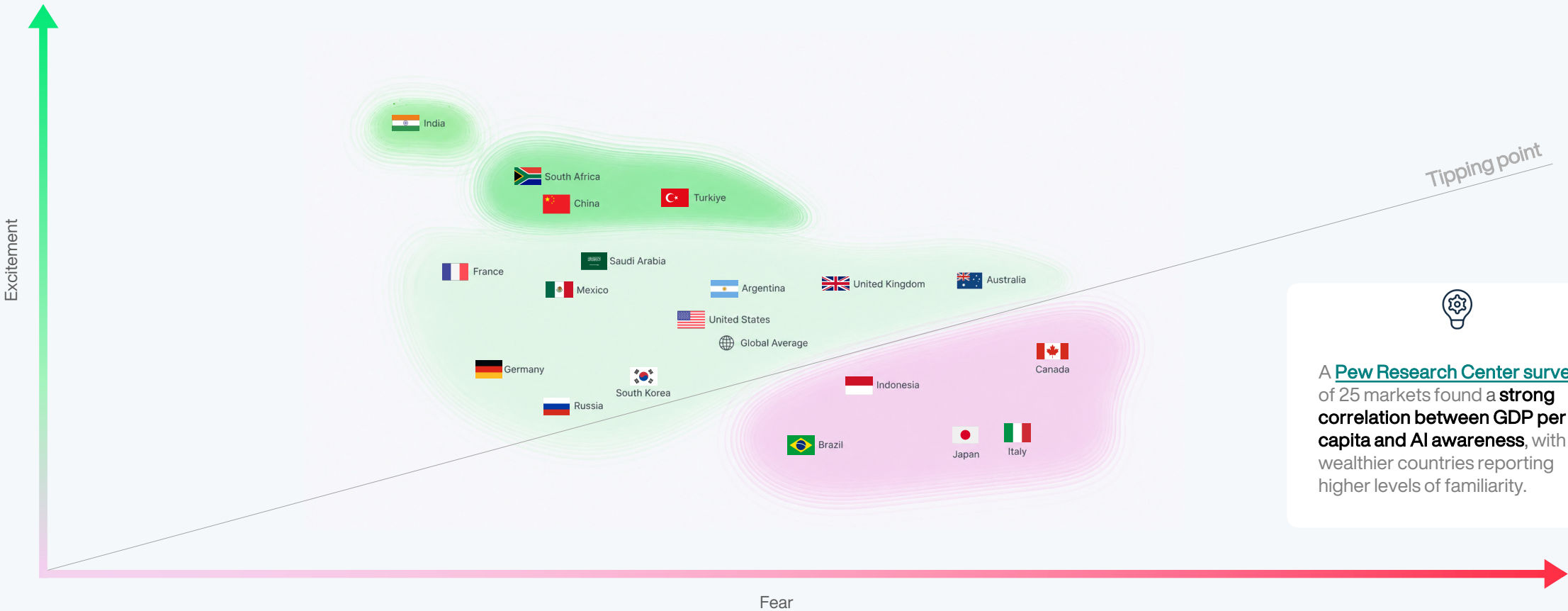
Excitement and fear levels in public opinion by country

Strongly pro-AI markets

Cautiously positive markets

Guarded Markets

Public opinion

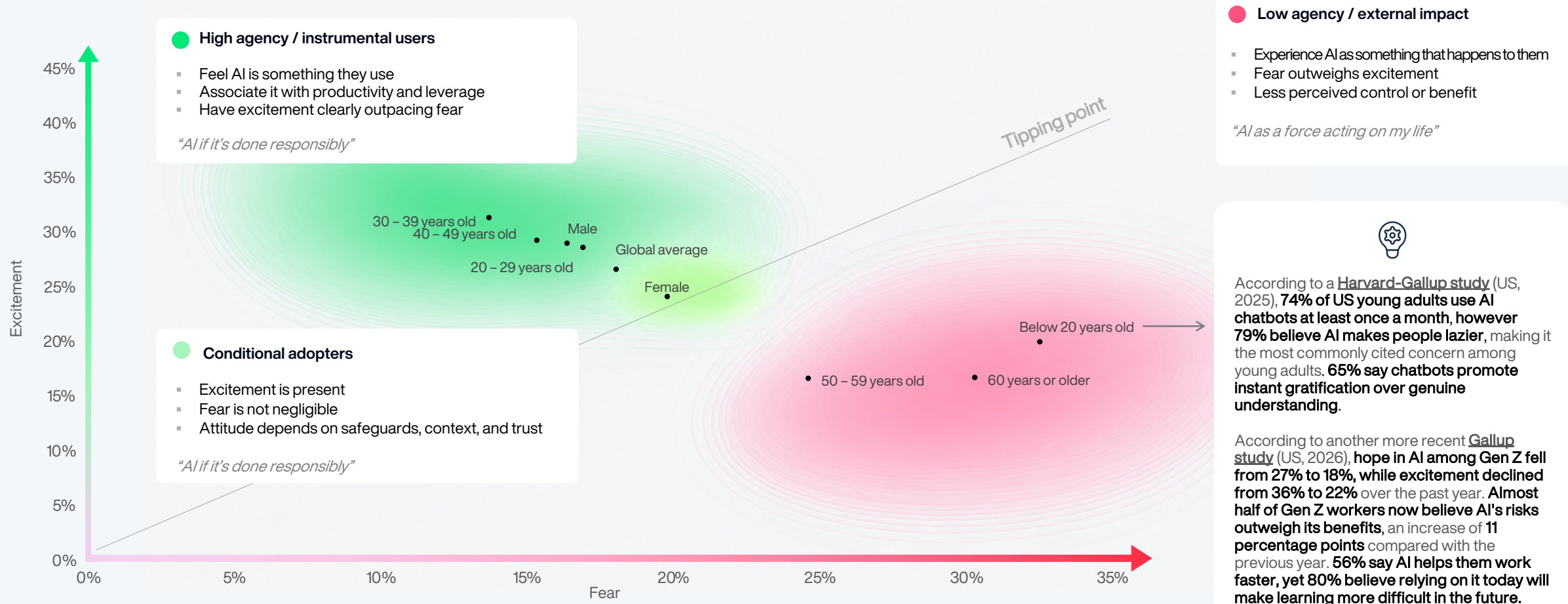


A [Pew Research Center survey](#) of 25 markets found a **strong correlation between GDP per capita and AI awareness**, with wealthier countries reporting higher levels of familiarity.

Question: "When you think about AI and its impacts on society, which of the following, if any, do you feel most strongly?"

Across most age groups, excitement continued to outweigh fear, although enthusiasm moderated compared with 2025. The demographic divide persisted, with younger and older audiences remaining the most apprehensive.

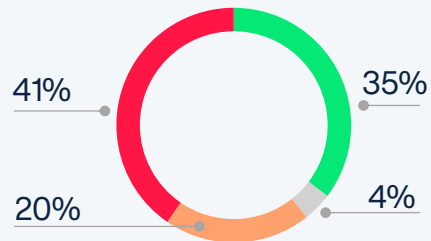
Excitement and fear levels in public opinion by demographic group



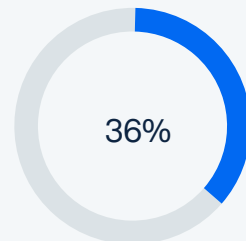
Question: "When you think about AI and its impacts on society, which of the following, if any, do you feel most strongly?"

Coverage around the impact of AI on younger generations was overwhelmingly negative, with the technology increasingly portrayed as a source of anxiety rather than opportunity. Stories focused less on AI's capabilities and more on its social consequences, particularly its impact on employment, education and mental wellbeing.

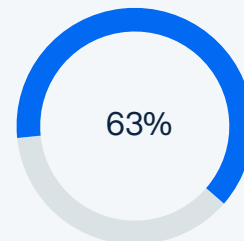
Sentiment of coverage assessing the impact of AI on young generations



Proportion of media coverage linking AI's impact on younger generations to job losses



Proportion of under-20s identifying job losses as AI's greatest risk*



- **Job insecurity dominated the conversation.** Coverage frequently linked AI to shrinking graduate opportunities and the automation of entry-level roles. Many stories questioned whether younger generations would have the same career prospects as previous generations.
- **AI is reshaping education and career readiness.** Articles increasingly focused on the need for AI literacy and new skills, while raising concerns that education systems are struggling to prepare students for an AI-driven labour market.
- **Authenticity became a growing source of anxiety.** Deepfakes, AI-generated content and AI companions fuelled concerns about distinguishing between real and synthetic experiences. Trust in digital content emerged as a recurring theme.
- **Mental health and wellbeing moved up the agenda.** Coverage linked AI to loneliness, emotional dependency and the psychological impact of increasingly human-like technologies. AI was portrayed as influencing not just work, but identity and relationships.
- **Creative professions were seen as particularly vulnerable.** Writers, artists, designers and voice actors became prominent examples of occupations under threat from generative AI. Copyright and ownership disputes further amplified these concerns.
- **Young people were increasingly portrayed as needing protection.** Governments, educators and regulators called for stronger safeguards around AI in education, online safety and child protection. The focus shifted from enabling AI adoption to ensuring its responsible use among younger generations.

NEWS · EDUCATION

Graduates are booing pep talks on AI at college commencements

Promoting artificial intelligence can feel tone deaf at a time when AI-related layoffs have graduates facing one of the most uncertain job markets in years.



FILE — Former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt speaks during the International Investment Summit in London, Oct. 14, 2024. (Jonathan Brady/Pool Photo via AP)

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

*PUBLISHED: May 19, 2025 at 2:15 PM EDT | UPDATED: May 19, 2025 at 2:18 PM EDT

Dozens walk out as Google boss Pichai addresses Stanford graduates

16 June 2025

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Ana Faguy



Watch: Dozens of Stanford grads walk out on Google CEO's speech

Question: "Which of the following risks, if any, do you see as serious risk of AI?"



Chapter 7: Winning trust in the AI era

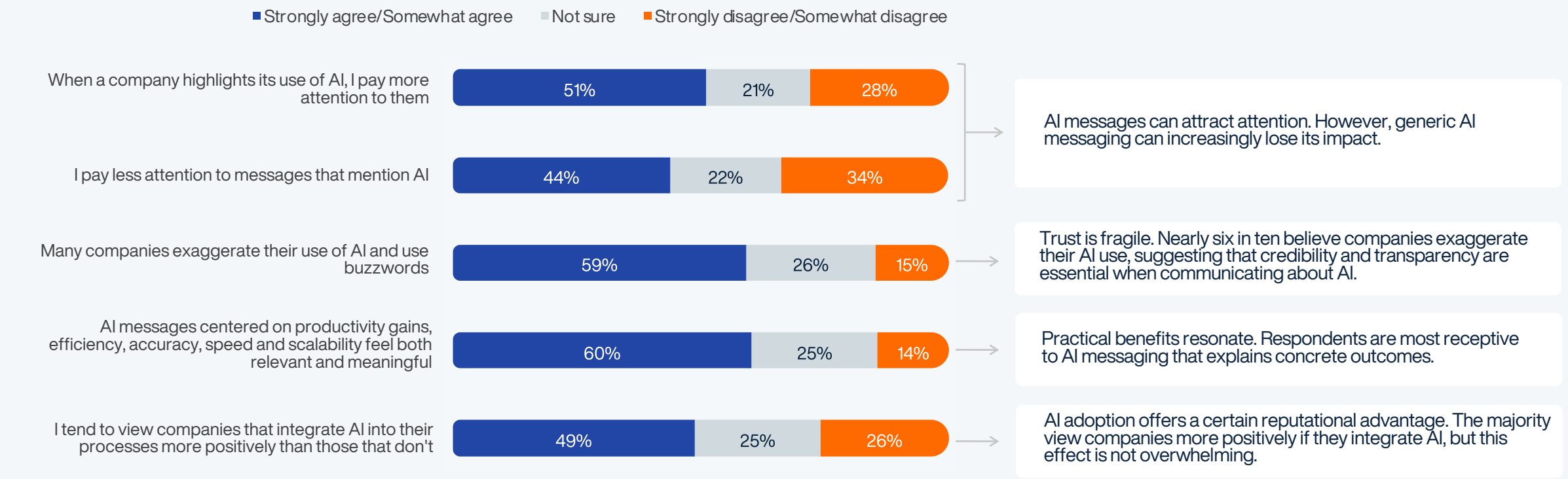
How can organisations earn the permission to lead AI?

The public is increasingly discerning about AI messages. Audiences rewarded meaningful AI use, but exaggerated claims undermined trust. Simply mentioning AI is unlikely to enhance perceptions unless companies can demonstrate credible, practical value.

CARMA

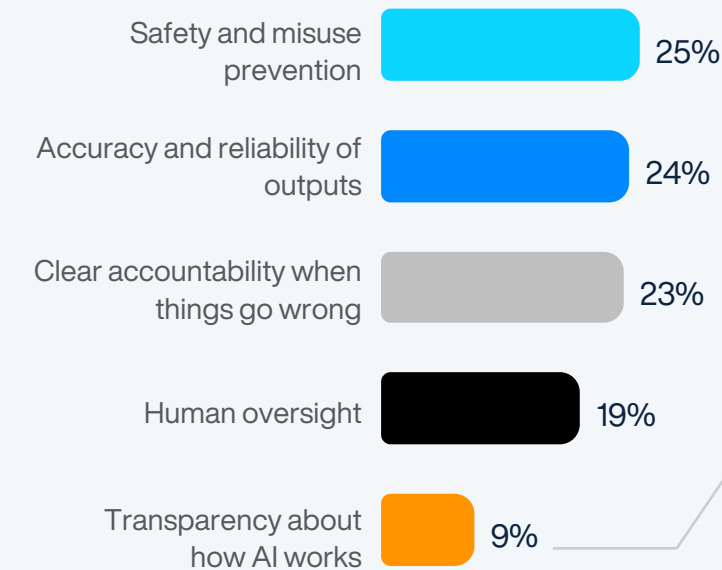
Public levels of agreement towards AI comms

What it means for PR & comms professionals

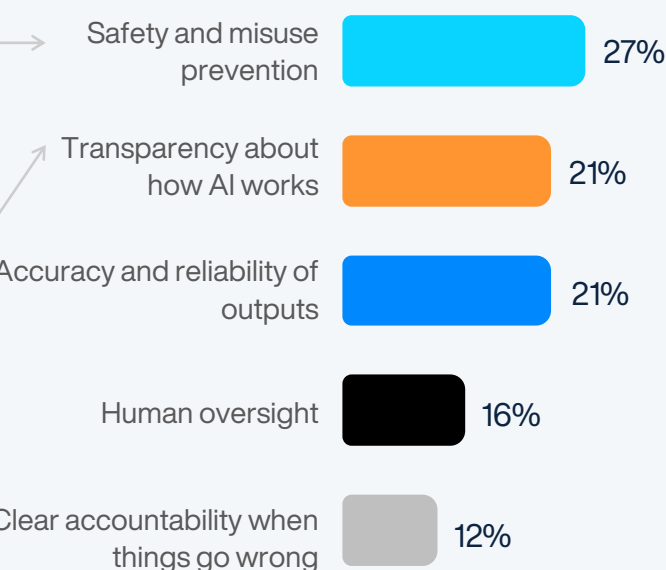


Safety became the most prevalent aspect of trust, with transparency growing in importance among the public.

Top trust aspects in media



Top trust aspects that positively influence audiences*



Trust was the area where media and public perceptions diverged most significantly.

For journalists, safety, misuse prevention, and the accuracy and reliability of AI outputs remained the strongest drivers of trust.

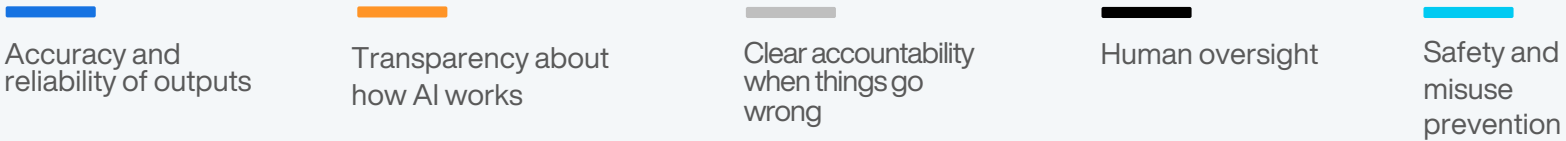
Public opinion also continued to prioritise safety. However, unlike media narratives, transparency emerged as a more important trust driver than accuracy and reliability, reflecting growing demand for greater visibility into how AI systems operate and make decisions.

For communicators, this presents a clear opportunity. Beyond demonstrating that AI is safe and reliable, organisations should communicate openly about how AI is developed, governed and used. Making AI more transparent, understandable and relatable will be critical to building trust as adoption continues to grow.

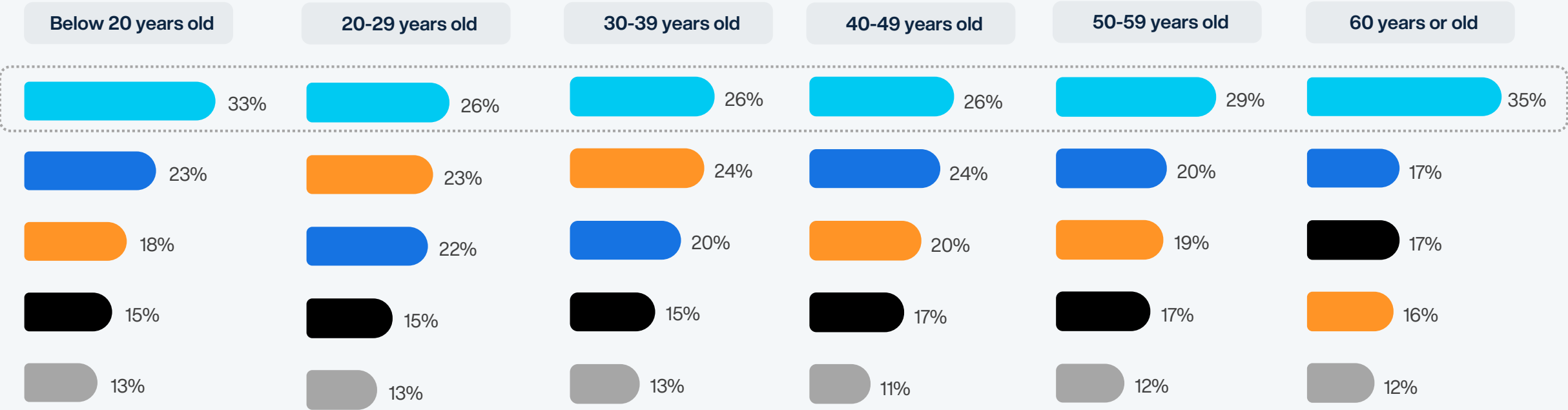
Question: "What most affects your level of trust in AI tools?"

Building trust in AI starts with demonstrating safety across all generations.

Top trust drivers per age group



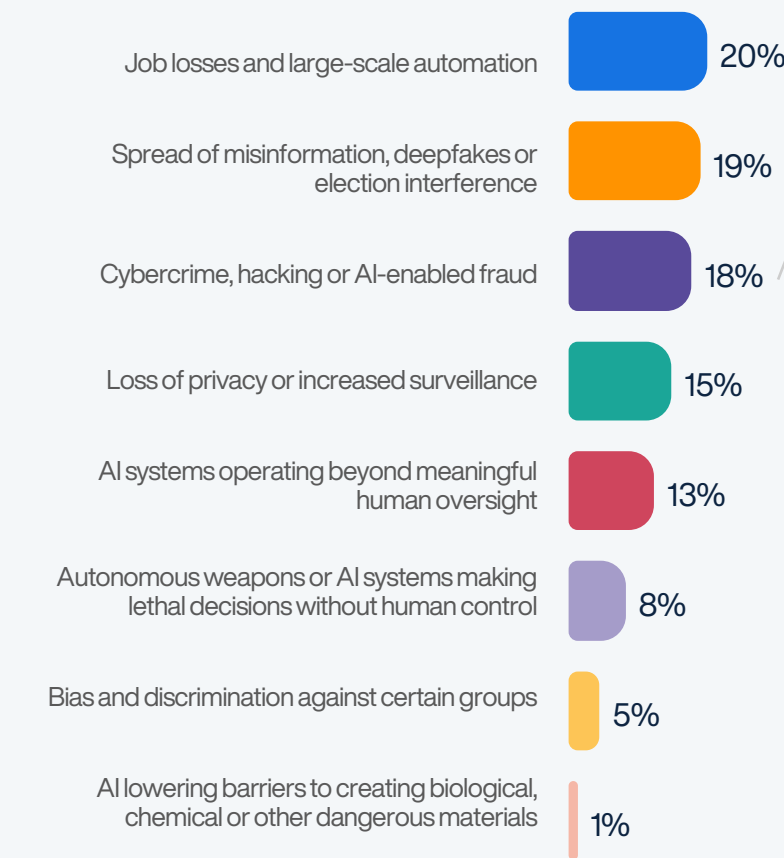
Public opinion



*Question: "What most affects your level of trust in AI tools?"

Media narratives and public concerns are converging around three key AI risks: cybercrime, misinformation and job losses.

Drivers of AI-related distrust in media



Drivers of AI-related distrust that negatively influence audiences the most*



Cybercrime emerged as the public's leading AI concern, while becoming an increasingly prominent theme in media narratives. Concerns around misinformation and AI-driven job losses also featured prominently in both media coverage and public opinion, highlighting a growing alignment between journalists' reporting and audience perceptions of AI risks.

Cybercrime and misinformation were particularly pronounced among the youngest (under 20) and oldest (60+) audiences. AI-driven job losses also rose into the top three drivers of distrust, becoming the single biggest concern among under-20s.

For PR & comms professionals, the convergence between media narratives and public opinion suggests these risks are becoming firmly embedded in perceptions of AI. Organisations should therefore prioritise clear communication around cybersecurity, responsible AI governance and workforce transition to maintain trust.

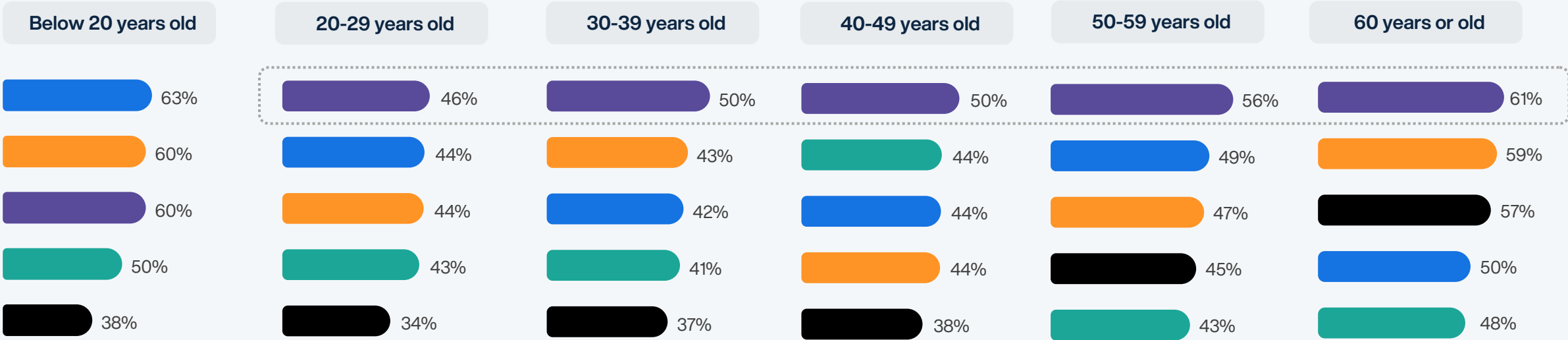
*Question: "Which of the following risks, if any, do you see as serious risks of AI? Please select all that apply" (results exclude "something else")

Cybercrime emerged as the dominant AI concern across almost every generation.

Top drivers of AI-related distrust per age group



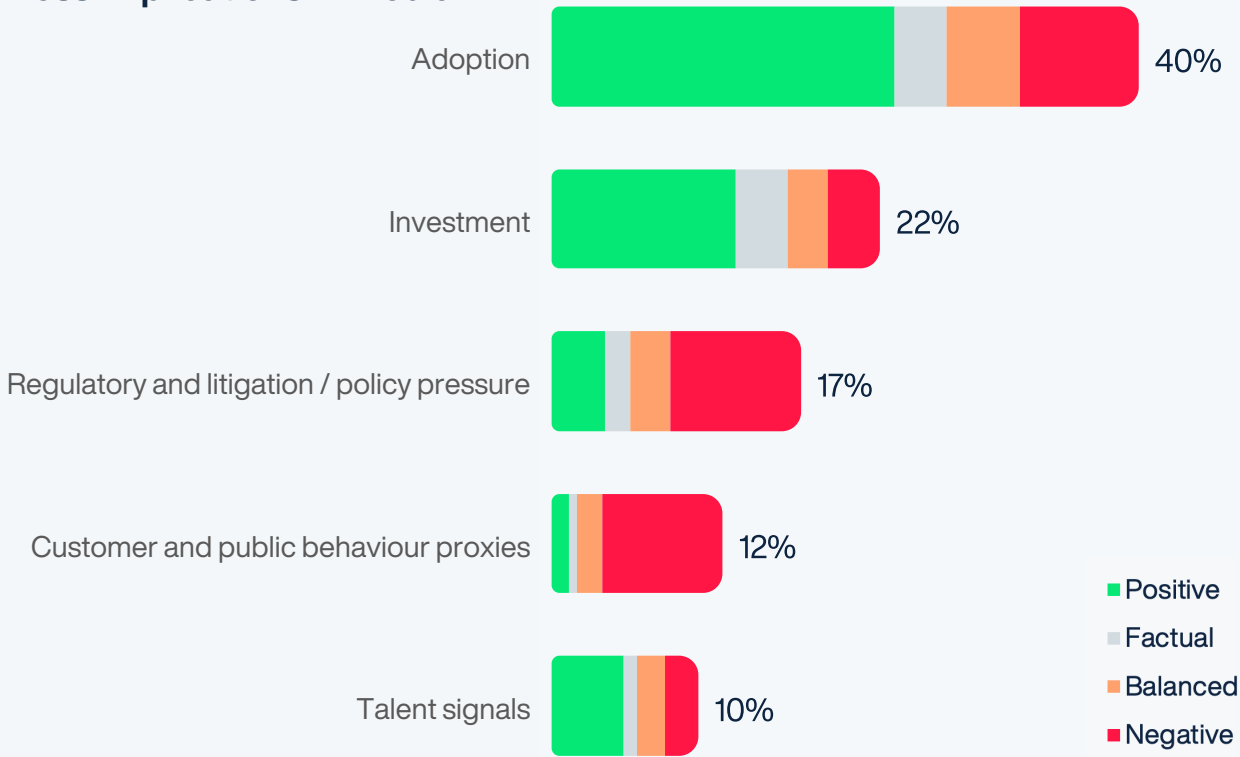
Top 5 markets by volume



*Question: "Which of the following risks, if any, do you see as serious risks of AI? Please select all that apply" (results exclude "something else")

Media appetite for AI adoption stories declined significantly, with both adoption and investment narratives becoming more negative. Conversely, regulatory topics gained visibility and attracted greater criticism.

Business implications in media



Media interest in AI adoption and investment stories declined, while negativity increased as journalists moved beyond announcements to scrutinise outcomes. Rather than celebrating AI rollouts or billion-dollar investments, coverage increasingly questioned whether organisations were delivering tangible business value, with stories frequently linking AI adoption to workforce reductions, implementation challenges, inflated expectations and growing governance concerns. Large AI investments were also increasingly framed through the lens of infrastructure costs, environmental impact, market concentration and geopolitical competition, rather than innovation alone.

For PR and communications teams, this highlighted the need to move beyond communicating that AI is being adopted or funded to explaining why it matters and what it delivers. Organisations need to support AI announcements with clear evidence of business impact, customer and employee benefits, measurable ROI and robust governance. As scrutiny shifted from investment levels to execution and accountability, transparent communications around responsible implementation, human oversight and long-term value creation became increasingly important for maintaining trust and protecting corporate reputation.



Let's keep the conversation going

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