RESEARCH BRIEFING · INITIAL FINDINGS

AI: the growing UK pushback

A report outlining the initial findings from a UK-wide survey of current attitudes to AI, including why people choose to limit or reject the use of AI tools.

A report from **King's Digital Futures Institute** and **RAi UK**, authored by:

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Executive Summary July 2026

People are pushing back against AI. This report outlines the initial findings from a UK survey of current attitudes to AI, including where people choose to limit or reject the use of AI tools. The survey of 2,055 UK adults was carried out by Deltapoll for King's Digital Future Institute and RAi UK across 12th-15th June 2026. We also provide insight from a roundtable hosted at King's College London on 24th February 2026 on *AI: friction, rejection, and resistance*.

- Our survey shows that **people are becoming more cautious about AI**. They acknowledge potential uses and benefits while simultaneously worrying about possible downsides.

- **Attitudes to AI have become more negative** over the past three years, and **people are actively choosing to limit their use of AI tools**. Access to and awareness of AI do not automatically translate into regular use. A rejection of AI is not simply due to lack of skills.

- There are also generational differences in attitudes to AI: Gen Z are more likely to use AI regularly, but they **also feel AI has more risks than benefits** and are more likely to limit their use of it, despite being overwhelmingly confident in their ability to use it.

- Overall, **the majority of people think it would be difficult or impossible for them to avoid being exposed to AI** even if they wanted to, raising questions about how people can meaningfully consent to the use of AI in today's society.

AI use in the UK

46% of UK adults use AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Copilot once a week or more. 32% say they do not use AI tools.

More people are using AI for personal use (58%) than for work (26%) or education (13%), although younger demographics are more likely to use AI for multiple purposes.

Only 26% of UK adults say they have been encouraged to use AI at their workplace or place of education. 44% say they have been neither encouraged nor discouraged.

People increasingly see more risks than benefits

Concerns about the risks of AI have grown. Between October 2023 and June 2026, the share of UK adults who think AI has more risks than benefits has risen from 48% to 52%, while those who see more benefits than risks has fallen from 38% to 34%[1].

In both 2023 and 2026, when asked to describe how they felt about AI, 'nervous' was the option most frequently selected by respondents.

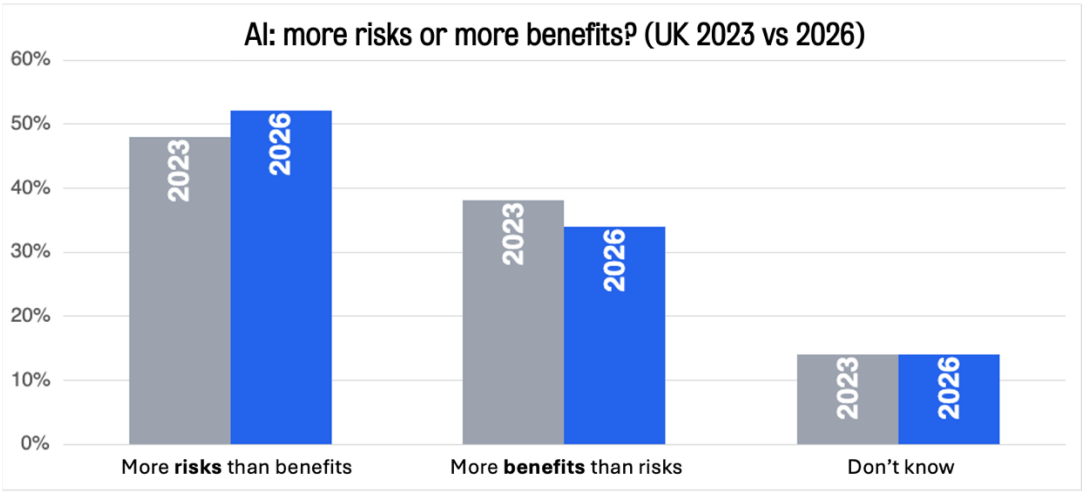

Figure: Potential benefits vs risks of AI: 2023 vs 2026. "Thinking about the potential benefits and risks of AI, which of the following statements do you most agree with?" (% of all UK adults). 2023: Deltapoll/CDEI, n=1,090 (Oct 2023) | 2026: Deltapoll for DFI & RAi, n=2,055 (June 2026)

Non-users think there are more risks than benefits (71%) with only 13% thinking the opposite. However, daily AI users are still divided. **Over a third of people who use AI every day feel AI has more risks than benefits.** Experience doesn't eliminate concern.

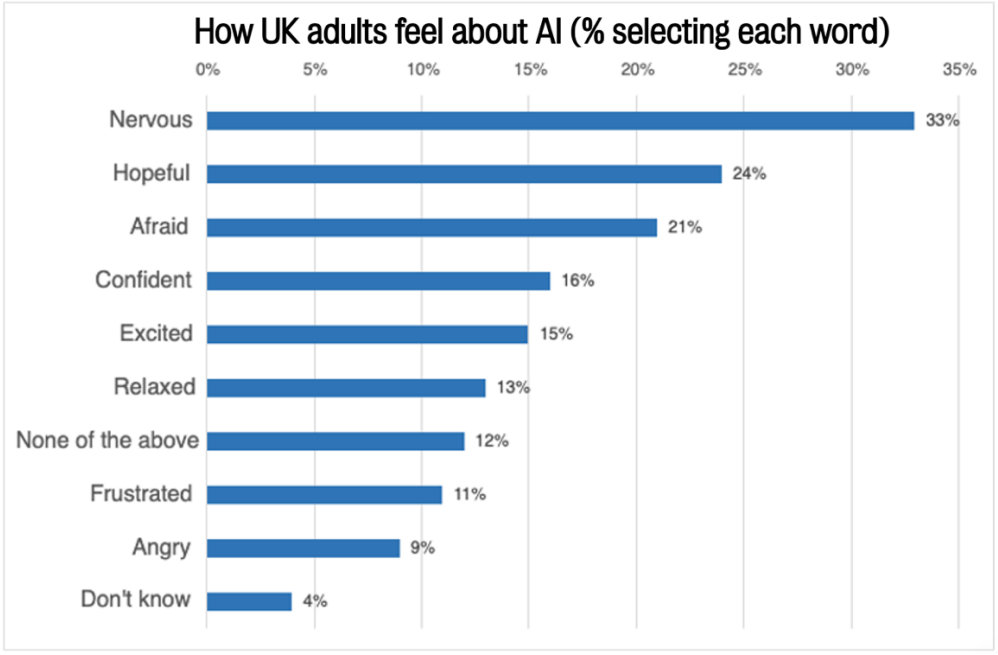

Figure: Which words best describe how you feel about AI? Source: Deltapoll survey for KCL & RAi, 2,055 UK adults, fieldwork 12–15 June 2026. Base: all UK adults. Multi-select: respondents could choose more than one word.

[1] The same question was asked in a Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation survey carried out by Deltapoll to conduct research on public opinion towards AI safety ahead of the UK's AI Safety Summit 2023 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-survey-of-public-opinion-on-ai-safety.

The public view is nuanced

Compared to 2023[2], **people's attitudes about whether AI will benefit them personally have become more defined but more divided**. In 2026, 38% agree that AI will benefit them (up from 32% in 2023), but the percentage who disagree has also increased from 19% to 27%. The notable shift here is away from the middle ground: more people now see potential personal benefit from AI, but a growing share are also unconvinced, which suggests increasing polarisation.

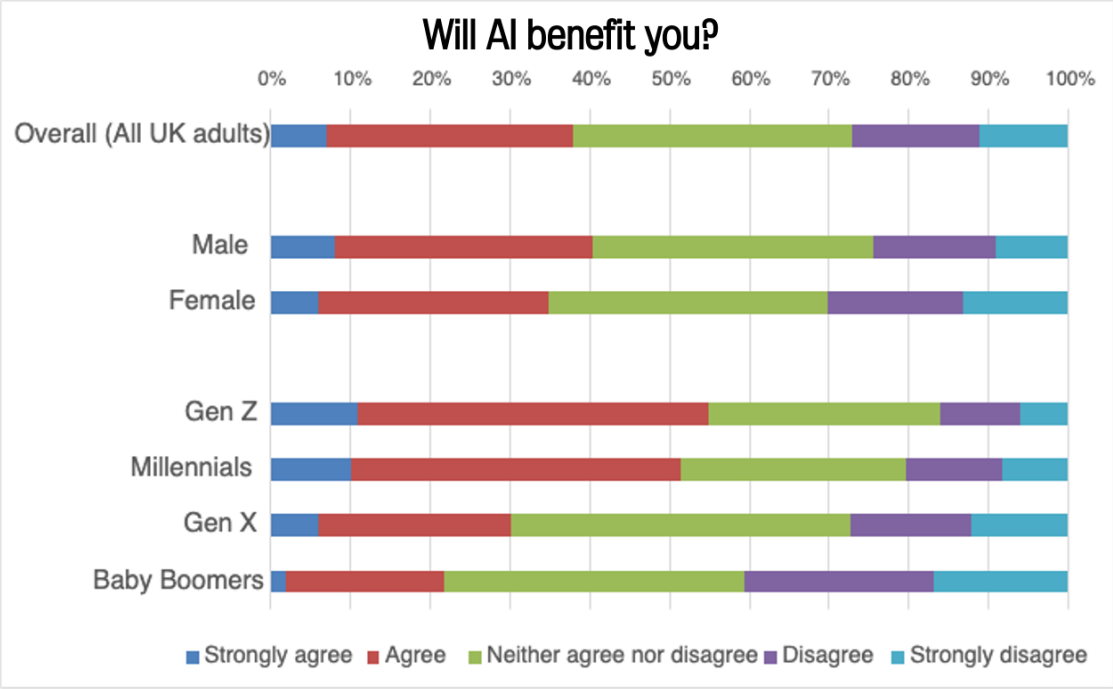

Figure: To what extent do you agree that AI will benefit you? (by Gender and Generation) Source: Deltapoll survey for DFI & RAi, 2,055 UK adults, fieldwork 12–15 June 2026. Base: all UK adults.

However, public attitudes are not split between a clear 'pro' and 'anti' AI. Many individuals hold both opinions at once, describing it as useful, while remaining uneasy about its implications. We asked people to say in their own words what they would like to tell us about AI. Most free-text comments from survey respondents expressed mixed or conditional views, giving examples of applications for efficiency and productivity, while simultaneously expressing strong concerns about risk, trust, and societal impact:

> *"I use AI and awful lot and find it very useful. However I do fear that if not regulated very stringently there is a danger to its usage. I don't think we can get away without using it now and they makes me really worried and sad. So although I use it every day I really wish it wasn't a thing. We just don't know what's real or not anymore."*

> *"I'm excited about it, but also concerned about the effects."*

> *"I think AI is good for certain things and can help a lot however it can become too much using too much resources and can lead to negatives impacts if used wrong"*

[2] The same question was asked in an Office for National Statistics survey on Public awareness, opinions and expectations about artificial intelligence: July to October 2023.
https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/articles/publicawarenessopinionsandexpectationsaboutartificialintelligence/julytooctober2023

Age, gender, and income matter

Age plays a role in attitudes to AI. We compared the findings across generations: Gen Z (those born between 1998 and 2012), Millennials (1982 to 1997), Gen X (1966 to 1981) and Baby Boomers (1946 to 1965).

62% of older respondents – the Boomers – think there are more risks than benefits to AI compared with 49% of Gen X and 44% of Millennials. **But even for the youngest cohort, Gen Z, a majority are worried about risk. They are also the age group who are most likely to limit their AI use.**

Meanwhile, **men are substantially more optimistic about AI benefits (41%) than women (27%).** This echoes recent findings from King's Institute of Artificial Intelligence and The Policy Institute concerning gender attitudes in the context of AI and the future of work, which reported that women are more likely to disagree than to agree that AI is positive for humanity, positive for the UK, or that AI will improve their lives. [3]

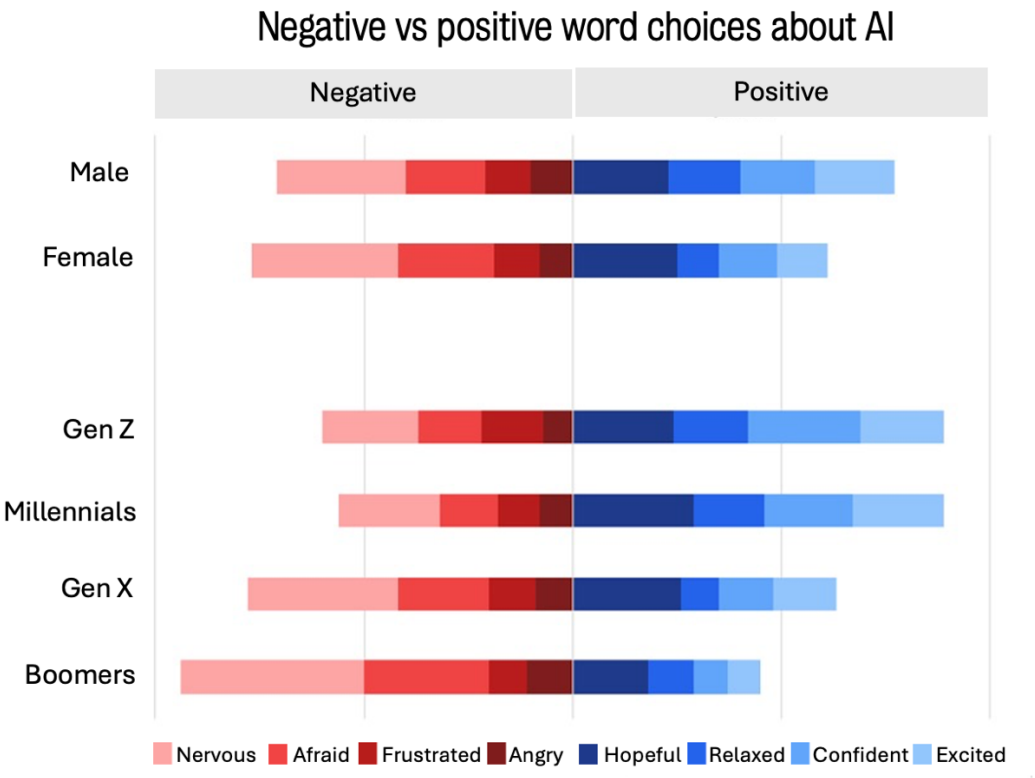

Figure: Which words best describe how you feel about AI? Source: Deltapoll survey for DFI & RAi, 2,055 UK adults, fieldwork 12–15 June 2026. Base: all UK adults. Multi-select: respondents could choose more than one word.

An additional finding was that **income demonstrates a strong positive association with AI use**. Higher-income respondents are more likely to use AI frequently. The percentage of those reporting a perceived benefit increases consistently across higher income brackets. This supports the findings around demographic variances in the Ada Lovelace Institute's and The Alan Turing Institute's *Attitudes to AI* research – an in-depth study through a lens of equity and inclusion.[4] Similarly, the RAi-funded *Public Voices in AI* project highlights how public hopes, concerns and experiences – particularly those of marginalised groups – are frequently missing from conversations about AI, an absence which inhibits progress.[5]

[3] *AI and the Future of Work: Attitudes, beliefs and behaviour among the British public, workers, university students and employers*. King's Institute of AI and The Policy Institute, May 2026. https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/ai-and-the-future-of-work-digital.pdf

[4] Modhvadia, R., Sippy, T., Field Reid, O., and Margetts, H., *How Do People Feel About AI? Wave two of a nationally representative survey of UK attitudes to AI designed through a lens of equity and inclusion.* Ada Lovelace Institute and The Alan Turing Institute, 2025) https://attitudestoai.uk/

[5] https://digitalgood.net/research/public-voices-in-ai/

People limit their own AI use, even those who are most positive about it

42% of individuals deliberately limit the amount of AI they use (46% say they don't limit; 12% say they don't know). When asked to choose the single main reason for limiting their use, **the most common reason is data privacy, security and compliance** (29%). By contrast, only 6% of those limiting their AI use say that they feel they do not feel prepared to use it effectively, indicating that lack of skills is much less of a factor in rejection. Gen Z are most likely to limit their use of AI tools, despite being the age group who feel they will benefit the most from the technology, and despite 93% of this group describing themselves as "very" or "fairly" confident in their ability to use AI.

There is, as might be expected, particularly high self-limitation among people with negative AI feeling (67% of AI-negative respondents say they limit AI use, compared with 26% of AI-positive respondents) but **even among AI-positive respondents, the finding that more than a quarter say they limit their use points to controlled adoption** rather than simple enthusiasm.

Most important reason for limiting AI use

Which single reason is most important to you?

Reason	Overall %
I am concerned about data privacy, security or compliance when using AI	29%
I prefer to keep doing my work the way I do it now	22%
I am ethically opposed to using AI	11%
I don't believe AI can assist with the work I do	8%
I do not feel prepared to use AI effectively	6%
I am concerned about my role being replaced by AI	6%
I'm not permitted to use AI in my role	5%
I do not have access to AI in my role	3%
I do not have time to learn how to use AI	3%
I have used AI and do not find it useful in my role	2%
It costs too much	1%
Other	1%
Don't know	3%

Base: All UK adults who report limiting their AI use (respondents selecting their single most important reason). Source: Deltapoll for DFI and RAi. Sample: 2,055 UK adults. Fieldwork: 12–15 June 2026.

These results resemble those from a Gallup study in February 2026 of US workers, where the most commonly cited factor by infrequent users and non-users was a preference to keep doing work the way it is currently done, with concerns about data privacy, security and compliance in second place.[6]

Even when AI is available, and even when people feel confident in their ability with it, whether people use it or not often comes down to how relevant or risky they perceive it to be.

[6] The same question was asked in a Gallup study of AI in the Workplace: What Separates Adopters and Holdouts, February 2026. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/704252/workplace-separates-adopters-holdouts.aspx

AI: a question of consent?

For many people, AI is no longer something they can simply opt out of, with **70% of all those surveyed thinking it would be difficult or impossible for them to avoid being exposed to AI**, raising questions about how people can meaningfully consent to the use of AI in today's society.

As AI becomes embedded by default into software platforms, making it harder to avoid, users need meaningful ways to consent to its use – namely the ability to choose when it is applied, how it interacts with them, and how they can opt out where it matters.

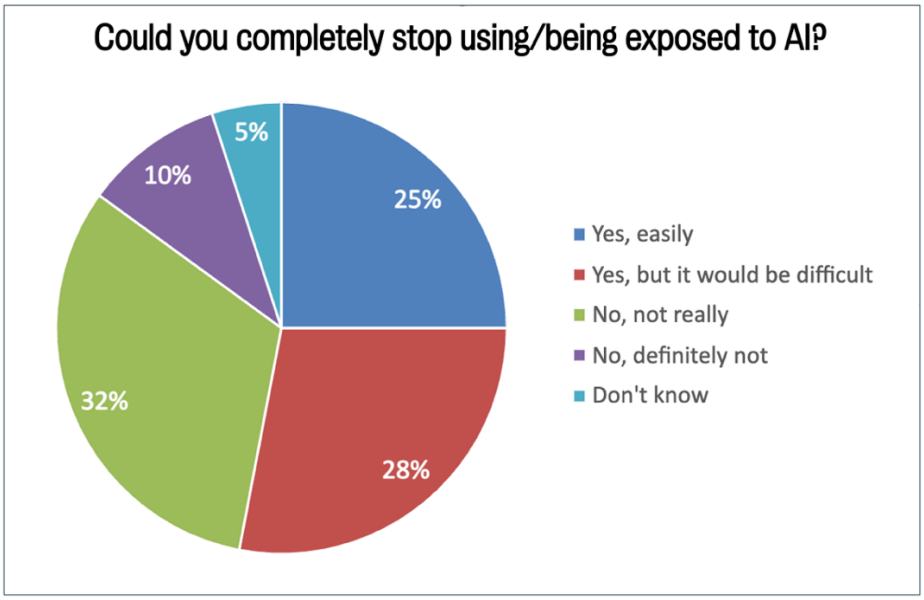

Figure: If you wanted to, do you think you could completely stop using or being exposed to AI in your daily life? Base: All UK Adults (n=2,055). Source: Deltapoll for DFI and RAi, fieldwork 12–15 June 2026.

"Worse than wind turbines": AI's relative popularity

When asked to rate their feelings about a selection of public figures, places and groups, people are more positive about the NHS (63%) and wind turbines (52%) than they are about AI (29%), although AI is more popular than the M1 motorway (19%) and Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, the former Prince Andrew (7%).

Q13. For each of the following terms, public figures, places and groups, please rate your feelings toward each one.		Positive	Negative
1	David Attenborough	78%	5%
2	The NHS	63%	13%
3	Wind turbines	52%	12%
4	King Charles III	47%	19%
5	The BBC	35%	32%
6	Pope Leo XIV	29%	12%
7	Artificial Intelligence (AI)	29%	39%
8	The M1 Motorway	19%	13%
9	Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex (formerly Meghan Markle)	17%	46%
10	Keir Starmer	15%	61%
11	Donald Trump	14%	66%
12	Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor (the former Prince Andrew)	7%	71%

Base: All UK Adults (n=2,055).. Source: Deltapoll for DFI and RAi. Fieldwork: 12–15 June 2026.

Background & Context

Resistance to AI is becoming more visible. From tech entrepreneurs being booed during their commencement speeches in US graduations, to protests about data centres, people are pushing back. In March 2026, the UK government announced it would not pursue its preferred "opt-out" proposal on copyright following backlash from the creative industries. Most of the 11,520 responses to the consultation rejected the government's preferred approach, which would have allowed AI developers to train their models on lawfully accessed copyrighted material unless the copyright holder had specifically refused permission. Also this year, 29,000 people in the UK have signed petitions calling for the government scrap public contracts with Palantir, a US tech company that uses AI for data analytics, particularly in the domain of defence, surveillance and policing.

Roundtable: *AI: Friction, Rejection and Resistance*

To explore the extent of public negativity about AI, we held a roundtable on *AI: Friction, Rejection and Resistance* in late February 2026, bringing together academics, civil society, policymakers, researchers, and campaigners, all of whom have knowledge on attitudes to and narratives surrounding AI. In our discussions, AI resistance was identified as a response to how AI is being imposed on people, rather than as a mere rejection of technology. Attendees described people resisting AI (in various forms, from active campaigning to everyday choices) when it fails to work for them, when it undermines human agency, when it is driven by what is perceived as 'Big Tech' power, or when it enters workplaces and public services without clear accountability. In this sense, resistance includes refusal, avoidance, scepticism, and demands for better governance.

Consent was a central theme. When AI is offered as a tool, people can, in principle, choose whether or not to use it. But **when AI becomes infrastructure and is built into welfare systems, borders, workplaces, education, health, or everyday digital services, opting out can become difficult or impossible**, and this is echoed in our survey findings. The question is not whether people accept AI, but whether they have any *meaningful* choice about when, how, why, and whether it is used on them.

Multiple contributors pushed for **AI to be understood not as a tool but as an apparatus or infrastructure**, with implications that extend to sovereignty, accountability, and political economy. This framing was also connected to concerns about geopolitical power: the tech industry was described as echoing colonial logic, with the large AI companies operating as if rules simply don't apply to them. Resistance is often less about the technology itself and more about that imbalance of power, environmental concerns, social media dynamics, and a general distrust of large platforms, all of which our survey respondents mentioned in their free text comments. In this case, the term 'AI' can serve as a proxy for wider systemic critique.

Finally, people may reject AI because it simply isn't working for them, rather than as a conscious political act, or because they lack the skills needed to use it. This means resistance and adoption can increase simultaneously, as reinforced by the survey findings, **underlining the need for participatory, community-driven approaches** in AI rollout.

Methodology

The survey was carried out by Deltapoll between 12th-15th June 2026. The sample size was 2,055 adults in the United Kingdom. All data have been weighted to be representative of the UK's adult population as a whole. The term 'artificial intelligence' was defined by asking respondents about "artificial intelligence tools, sometimes called AI tools (for example, ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot)."

The survey was approved by Research Ethics at King's College London, UK (approval number: MRA-25/26-57121). The survey materials and data will be available as open access resources pending the publication of our full findings as an academic paper.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to those who contributed to this work via our roundtable: Mustafa Ali, Open University; Kester Brewin, Associate Director, Institute for the Future of Work; Andy Stirling, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex; Birgit Neu, Industry Advisory Board, King's Digital Futures Institute; Chi Onwurah, Science, Innovation & Technology Select Committee; Clementine Collett, University of Cambridge Minderoo Centre for Technology & Democracy; Genevieve Liveley, University of Bristol; Jacopo Domenicucci, King's College London; Jasleen Chaggar, Big Brother Watch; Jeni Tennison, Connected by Data; Louise Crow, mysociety; Mirca Madianou, Goldsmiths, University of London; Octavia Field Reid, Ada Lovelace Institute; Paolo Ruffino, King's College London; Rachel Coldicutt, Careful Trouble; Susan Oman, University of Sheffield; Tom Crick, Chief Scientific Adviser for DCMS. Thanks also to Joe Twyman and Freddie Boon from Deltapoll.

About this research

This research was supported by King's Digital Futures Institute, King's College London and RAi UK (UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, grant EP/Y009800/1).

The **King's Digital Futures Institute (DFI)** connects expertise from across all disciplines at King's College London to forge a better relationship between the individual and technology, through combining technological expertise with a deep understanding of human needs, cultures and behaviours, and by addressing questions of ethics, bias, transparency and responsibility. Our guiding aim is to ask how we can live well with technology.

Responsible AI UK (RAi) brings together researchers from across the four nations of the UK to understand how we should shape the development of AI to benefit people, communities and society. It is an open, multidisciplinary network, drawing on a wide range of academic disciplines. This stems from our conviction that developing responsible AI will require as much focus on the human, and human societies, as it does on AI. Funded by the UKRI Technology Missions Fund, we convene researchers, industry professionals, policy makers and civil society organisations.

Contact

If you have found this report helpful and/or it has informed your work, or if you have further questions, please let us know.

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Suggested citation

Devlin, K., Stilgoe, J., Orchard, D., Peter, O. (2026). *AI: the growing UK pushback. Research briefing and initial findings*. King's Digital Futures Institute and RAi UK. http://doi.org/10.18742/pub01-262