

POLICY RESEARCH

How to Win Voters and Influence NIMBYs

Data center opposition is more moveable than recent media coverage implies

October 2026



Voters oppose data centers locally, but many solutions have bipartisan support

62%

oppose a data center in their community

34% → 48%

say local data centers raise their electricity bills (Feb. to July)

53%

put local concerns ahead of building faster (July), up from 42% in Feb.

64%

win rate for a message that includes bring your own power and local say

NBC, Fox, and YouGov polls find the same local opposition

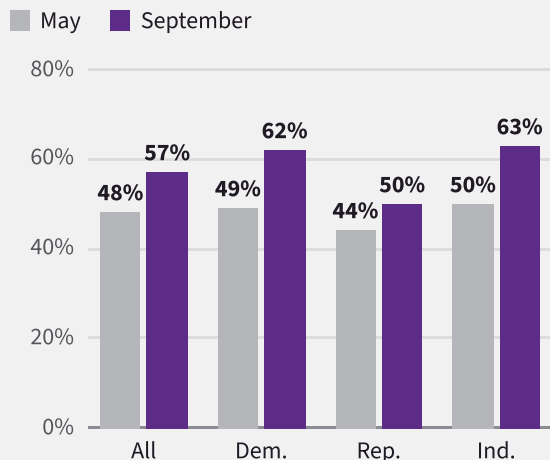
Oppose a data center in your community, across national polls

Poll	Fielded or released	Oppose	Support
Rainey Center	Sept. 10–14, 2026	62%	27%
NBC News / SurveyMonkey	Aug. 20 – Sept. 1, 2026	69%	Not reported
Fox News	July 2026	70%	30%
The Economist / YouGov	Aug. 28–31, 2026	66%	Not reported

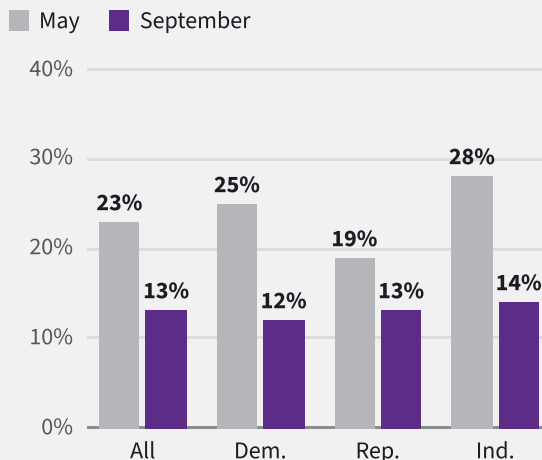
Favorable views held flat; the undecideds broke against data centers

“Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of data centers?”

Unfavorable view, May vs. September



Not sure, May vs. September

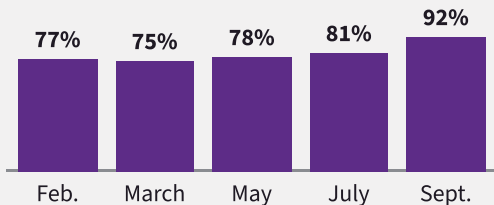


29% → 29%

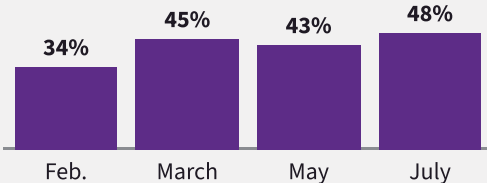
favorable, unchanged since May

The 2026 tracking points one way: more awareness, more cost worry, more demand for local control

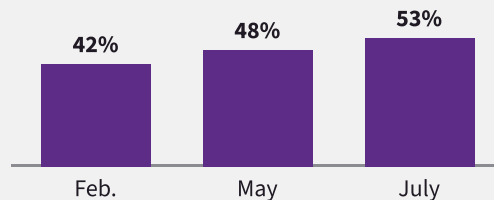
Aware of data center construction



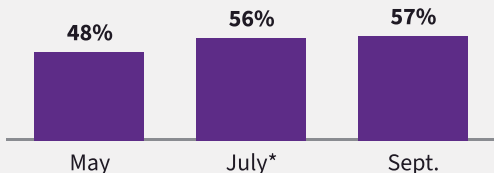
Local data centers raise my bills



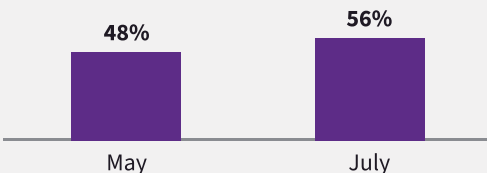
Prioritize local concerns over building faster



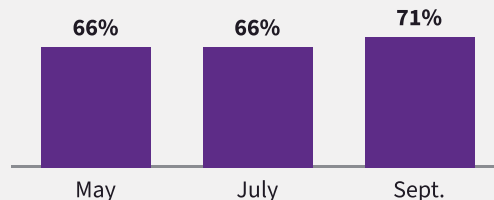
Unfavorable view of data centers



Community vote should have the primary say



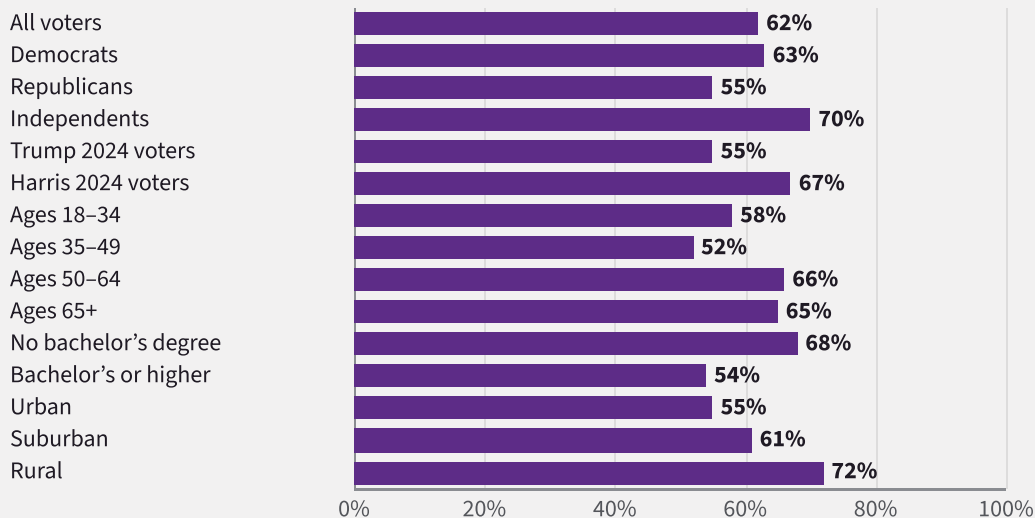
Support requiring benefit agreements



A majority opposes a local data center in every party

“Would you support or oppose a data center being built in your community?”

Percent somewhat or strongly oppose, by group



70%

of independents oppose, the most opposed party group

Opposition is broad, and almost entirely secondhand

79%

know no one who has attended a meeting or signed a petition about a project

71%

say there is no data center in their community (48%) or are not sure (23%)

24%

cannot say what a data center does

48%

say a data center uses far more water than almost any other facility

Voters are often most concerned about things they have not yet experienced, as with autonomous vehicles and AI.

WHAT VOTERS THINK

AI use divides support more than party, ideology, age, education, or income.

Daily AI users and those who live near a data center are the only groups that want one nearby.



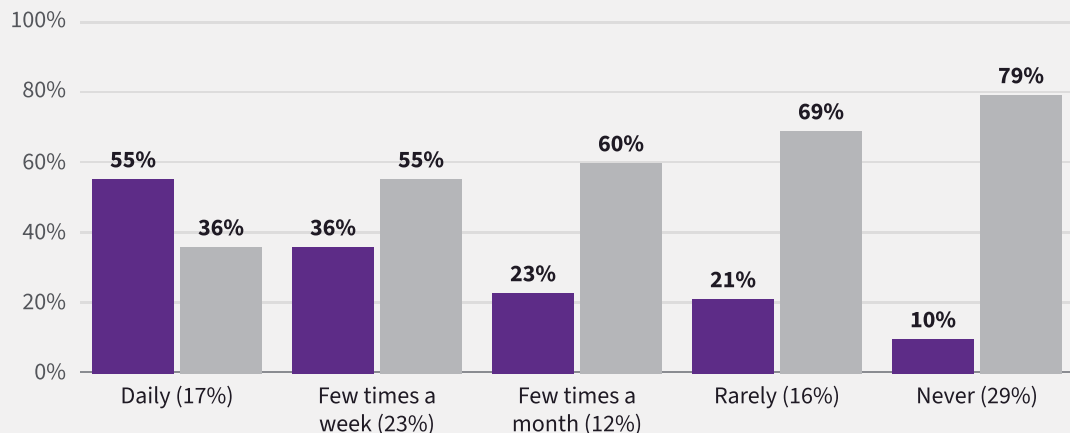
RAINEY
CENTER

AI use divides voters on data centers more than party does

Support or oppose a local data center, by how often voters use AI (share of voters in parentheses)

“How often do you personally use AI tools like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, or similar systems?”

■ Support a local data center ■ Oppose



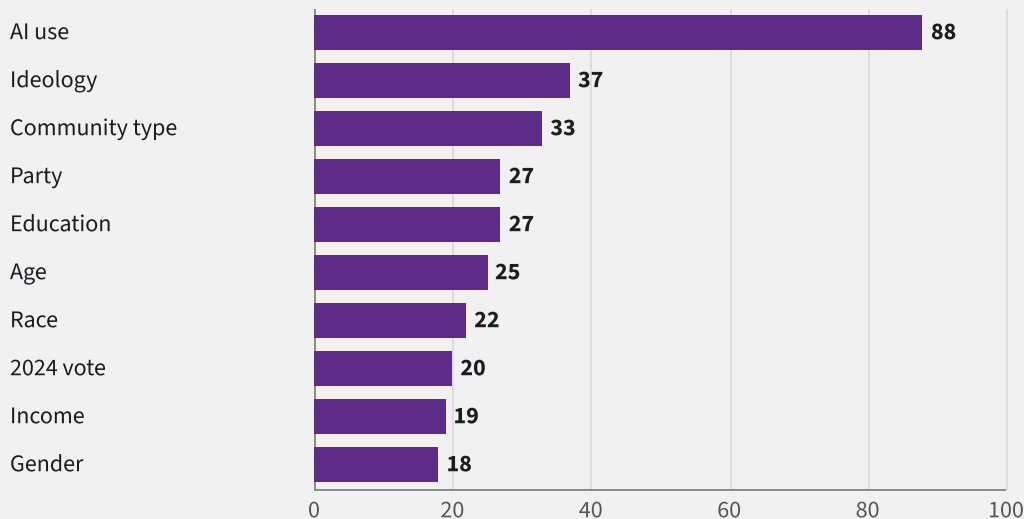
10–55%

local support by AI use, against 20–32% across party groups

AI use divides support more than any other cut in the data

Gap in net support for a local data center, highest vs. lowest group

Points of spread within each demographic cut



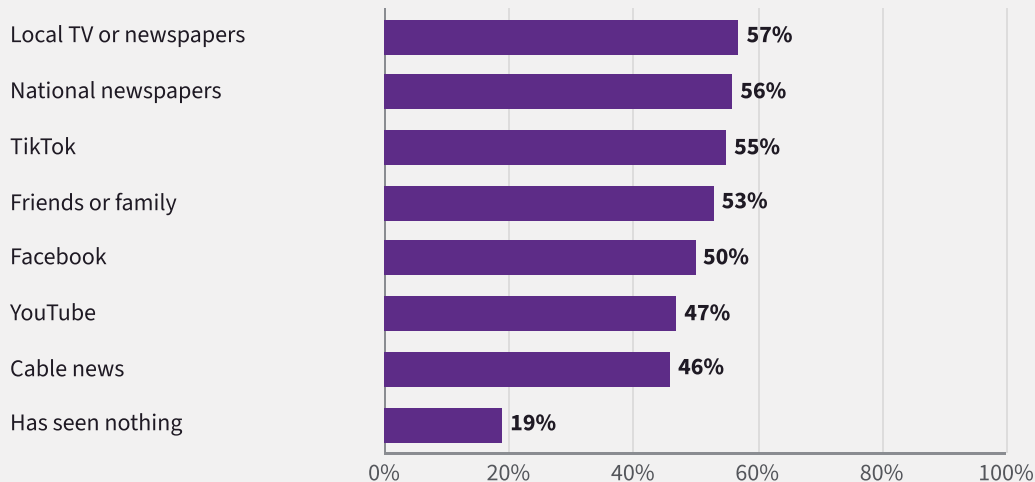
+19 to -69

net support, daily AI users to those who never use AI

No large differences in belief about data center misinformation based on news source

Believe a data center uses far more water than almost any facility, by information source

Percent, by where voters get information about data centers



48%

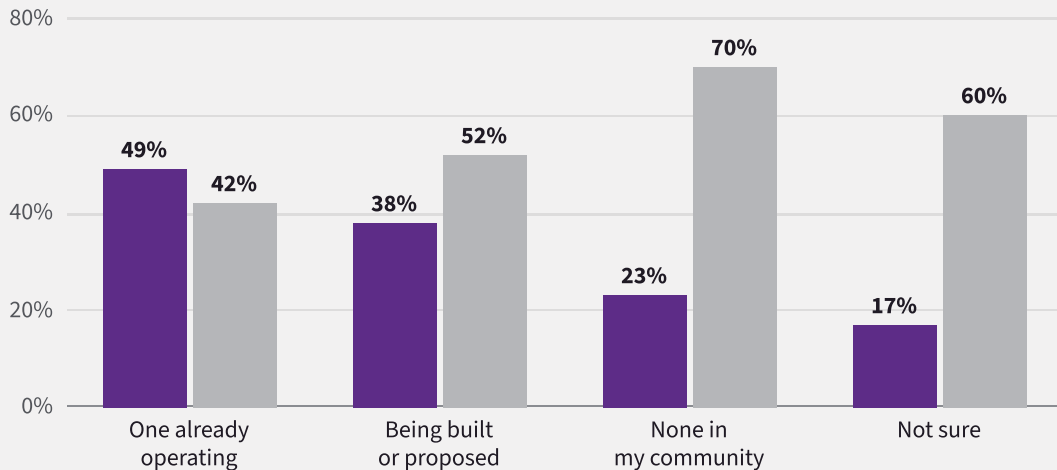
believe the water claim overall; 8% say comparable or less

Opposition runs highest where there is no data center

Support or oppose a local data center, by whether one is nearby

“Is there a data center being built or operating in your community?”

■ Support a local data center ■ Oppose



25% vs. 51%

strongly oppose where one operates vs.
where there is none

WHAT DRIVES OPPOSITION

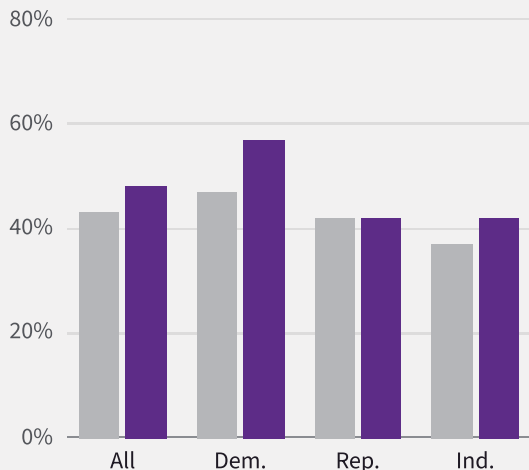
The electricity bill decides it.

Electricity costs are the first concern in every party, and every approach that clears 55% moves a cost off residents and onto developers.

Electricity costs are the core issue in both parties

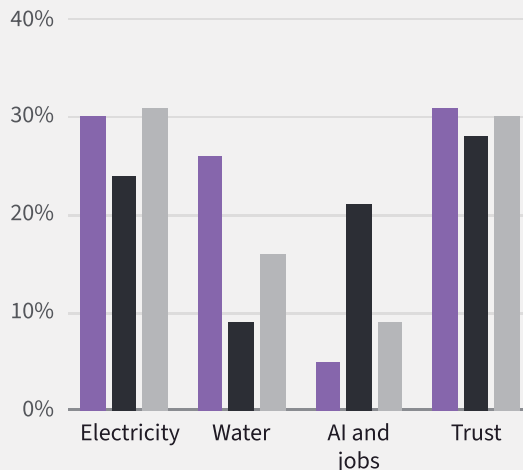
“Are data centers in your area driving up your electricity costs?”

■ May ■ July



Main concern among voters unfavorable to data centers, by party

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Independents



47% → 57%

Democrats blaming data centers for bills, May to July

Community benefit agreements and ratepayer protection lead

Support for accountability measures, by party

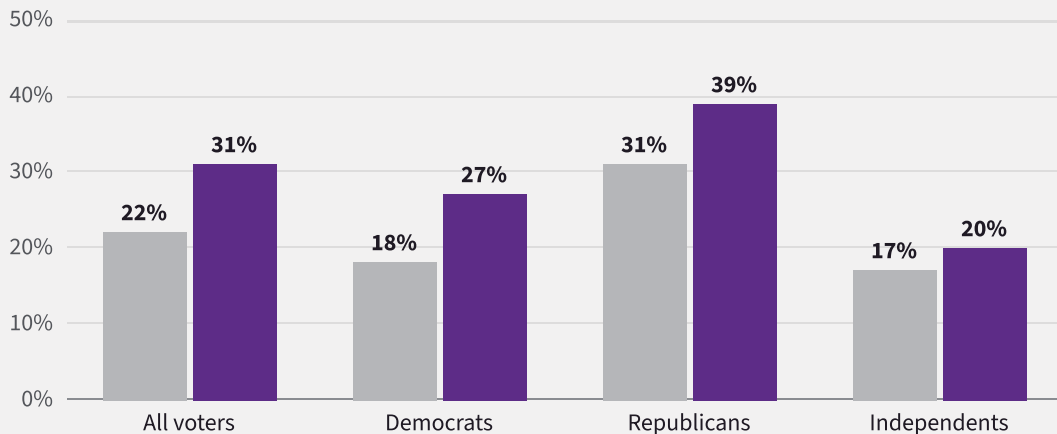
Measure	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Require community benefit agreements (Sept.)	71%	72%	70%	70%
Make the Ratepayer Pledge binding federal law (May)	61%	62%	58%	61%
Support the Ratepayer Protection Pledge (May)	56%	46%	65%	55%
More likely with disclosure of water, energy, tax breaks (July)	47%	46%	51%	42%
Faster permitting for on-site power plants (July)	47%	46%	54%	37%
More supportive if companies must build their own power (May)	33%	25%	41%	30%

Benefits and arguments raise local support, but do not reverse opposition

Support a data center in your community, before and after benefits and arguments

Percent support, July 2026

■ Before ■ After



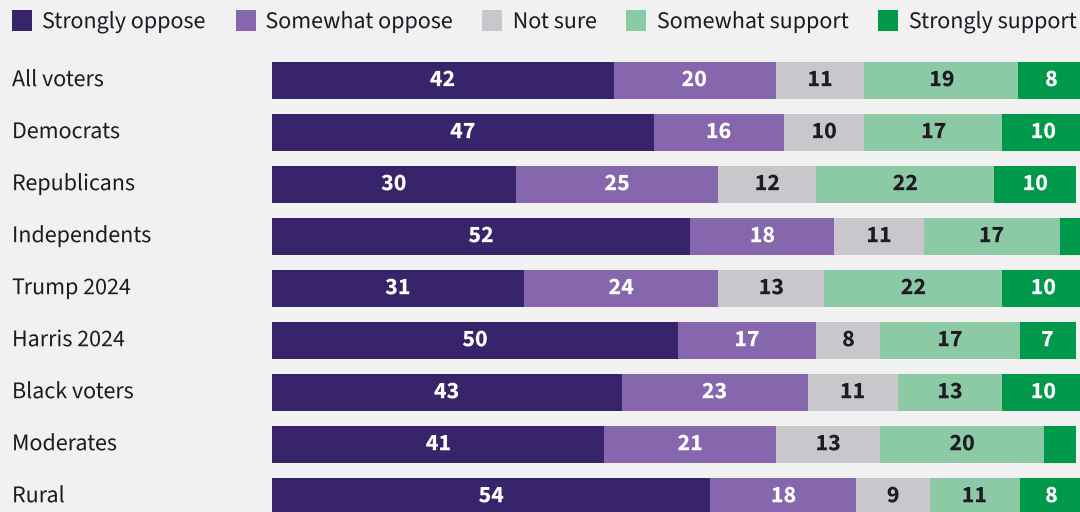
22% → 31%

local support after the full set of benefits and arguments

Republican opposition is the softest, and it moved most

"Would you support or oppose a data center being built in your community?"

Strongly oppose to strongly support, by group, Sept. 2026



30%

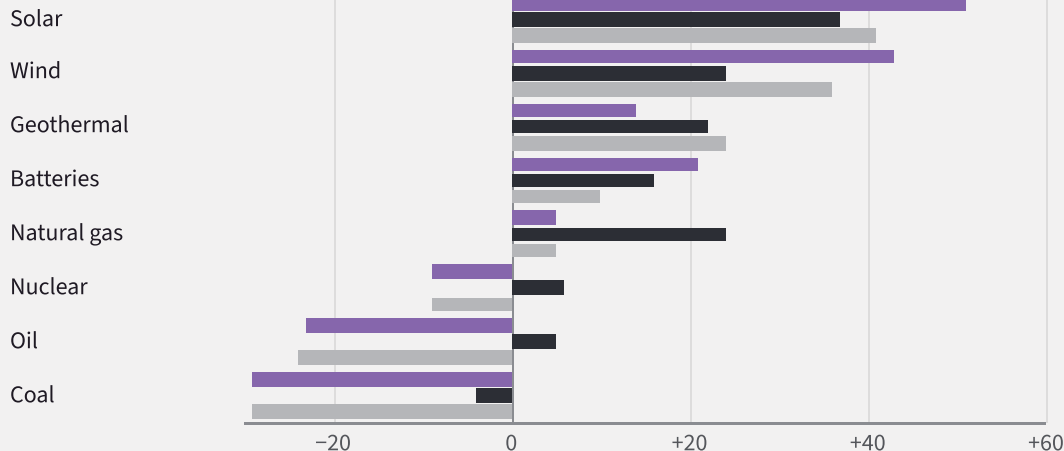
of Republicans strongly oppose, vs. 47% of Democrats and 52% of independents

Which power sources make voters more willing to accept a data center

More or less likely to support if powered by each source

Net more likely minus less likely, by party

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Independents



+44 / +34

net for solar and wind, positive with every party

POLITICS AND POLICY

16% want to pause or slow AI. The rest want conditions.

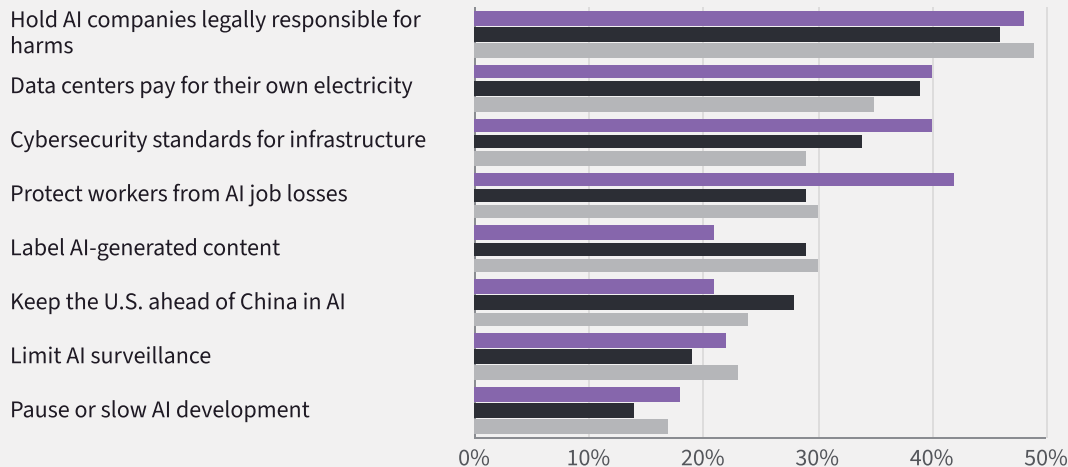
Developers bring their own power, sign benefit agreements, disclose their terms, and let the community vote. That approach wins 64% of its matchups with every party.

Voters prioritize liability, electricity, and cybersecurity over slowdown

Top three AI priorities for lawmakers, by party

“Which three of the following should be the TOP priorities for lawmakers?”

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Independents



16%

want to pause or slow AI development; 3% say lawmakers should not act

Voters reward recruitment with conditions and local say

“Which would be the better approach to data centers?”

Share of paired choices won; average 50

Own power, benefits, hiring, veto · Shapiro

Pause big projects for standards · Hochul

End tax breaks; spare farmland · Tiffany

Local final say; no secret deals · Crowley

One-year statewide pause · Hong

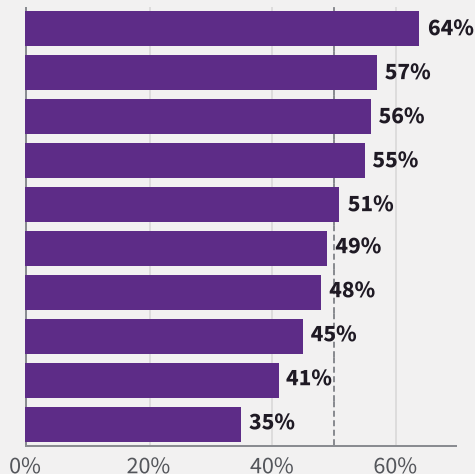
State AI hub, safety rules · Newsom

State zones override local · Morrisey

One very large rural project · Landry

Recruit hard, win the AI race · Abbott

Keep tax breaks; veto repeal · Kemp



Dashed line: 50, the average

67 / 61 / 65

top approach's win rate: Democrats,
Republicans, independents

The conditions approach leads with every party and 2024 vote group

Share of paired choices won, by group (average 50)

Approach	All	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
1. Own power, benefit deals, local hiring, veto	64	67	61	65
2. Pause largest projects until standards	57	57	54	60
3. End tax breaks; keep off farmland	56	58	60	47
4. Local final say; ban secret deals	55	53	56	56
5. One-year statewide pause	51	55	49	47
6. State AI hub with safety rules	49	51	47	47
7. State zones override local zoning	48	47	49	48
8. Court one very large rural project	45	42	48	47
9. Recruit hard to win the AI race	41	36	42	47
10. Keep tax breaks; veto repeal	35	34	34	36

Governors of both parties are already moving that way

INCENTIVES

Illinois (D) suspended new incentives for two years; Ohio (R) stopped taking applications

Texas (R) told regulators to make data centers pay their own infrastructure costs

Arizona paused its exemption through June 2029

WHO PAYS FOR THE GRID

About 23 states approved special rates for large power users, with 7 more pending

Virginia's large-load rate starts Jan. 1, 2027

Oklahoma's 2026 ratepayer law covers loads of 75 MW or more

LOCAL CONTROL

Montgomery County, Md. barred data center permits for 18 months

Monterey Park, Calif. became the first U.S. city to ban data centers by ballot

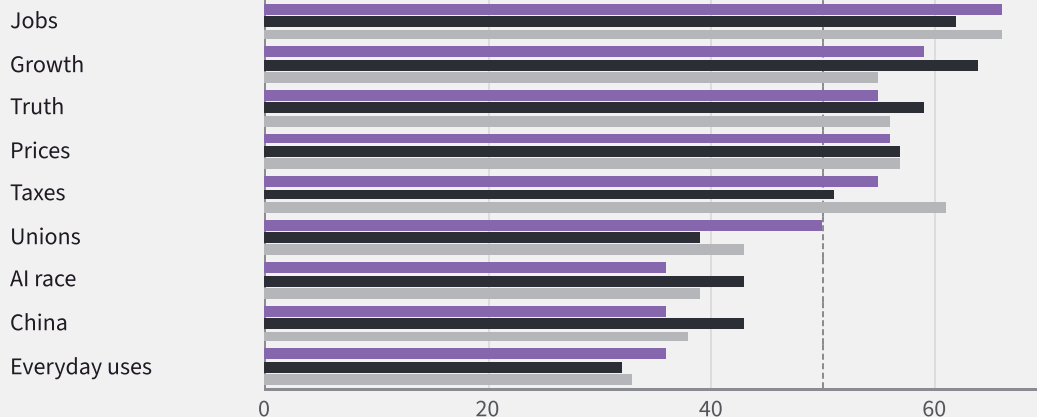
Local moratoria run from 155 days to two years

China and AI race arguments lose with both parties

Which argument for data centers is more persuasive?

Share of paired choices won, by party; average 50 (July 2026)

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Independents



Dashed line: 50, the average

43 / 43

China and AI race win rates among Republicans, below jobs, growth, prices, and taxes

Full wording of the nine arguments

JOBS

65%

Data center construction creates blue collar jobs that don't require a college degree and can't be outsourced, jobs like electrician and heat and air conditioning installation.

GROWTH

60%

AI will keep America's economy growing. Economic growth means more jobs, more prosperity and more opportunity.

TRUTH

57%

There have been a lot of lies spread about data centers. The truth is that new data centers bring their own power instead of drawing from the grid and they recycle water.

PRICES

57%

AI can keep prices low. By making companies more efficient, AI can drive lower prices for consumers, fighting inflation.

TAXES

55%

Data centers pay large amounts in taxes, which lowers property taxes for people who live near the data centers.

UNIONS

44%

AI data centers can create well-paying union jobs that create pathways to the middle class. That's why unions support data center construction.

AI RACE

40%

If we don't invest in data centers, China will beat America in the AI arms race. AI will keep America the leading superpower.

CHINA

39%

If we don't build data centers here, they will have to be built in China which means your family photos and passwords will be stored in data centers accessible to the Chinese government.

EVERYDAY USES

34%

Data centers aren't just for AI, they make it easy and cheap to stream TV shows and store emails.

What AI leaders have said, and what it costs them

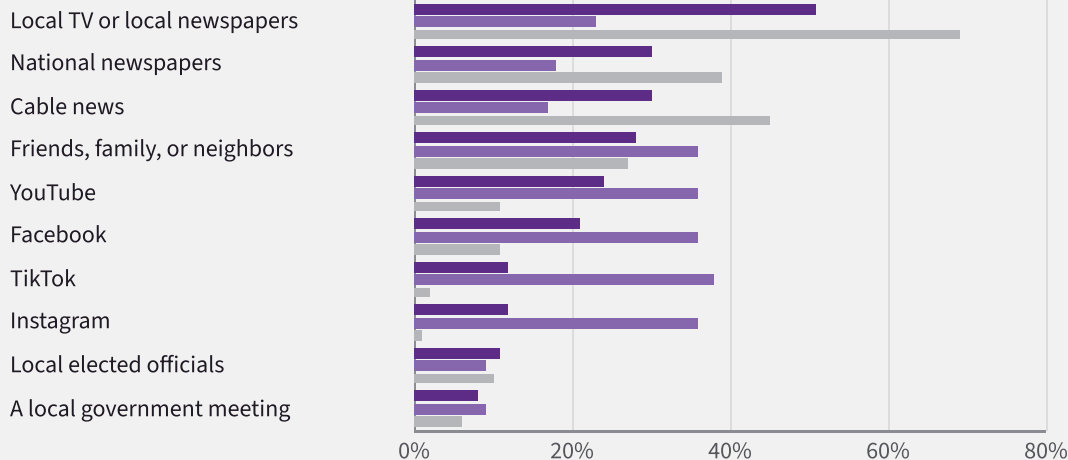
Net more positive minus more negative about AI after reading each statement	ALL VOTERS	DAILY AI USERS
“AI could wipe out half of all entry-level white-collar jobs and spike unemployment to 10 to 20 percent.”	-60	-51
“The bad case, and I think this is important to say, is like lights out for all of us.”	-47	-43
“Transhumanism. The ideal was this radical transformation where your human, natural body gets transformed into an immortal body.”	-42	-17
“It also takes a lot of energy to train a human.”	-16	+5
“Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside pandemics and nuclear war.”	-10	+3
“AI is probably the most important thing humanity has ever worked on, more profound than electricity or fire.”	-8	+23
“We must take the risks of AI as seriously as other major global challenges, like climate change.”	-4	+22

Where voters hear about data centers, and it is mostly local news

Where voters have seen, read, or heard about data centers, by age

Select all that apply

■ All voters ■ Under 35 ■ 65 and older



69% vs. 2%

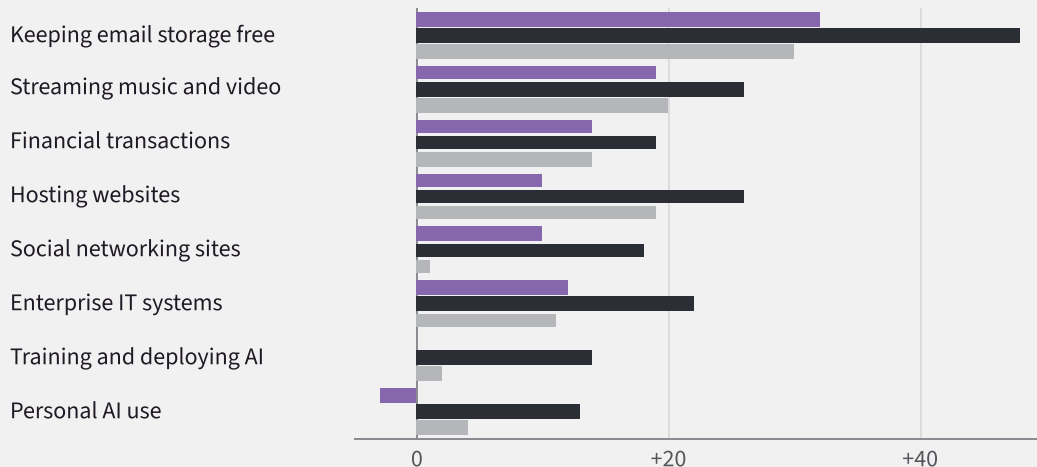
of voters 65 and older cite local news
vs. TikTok

What a data center is for changes support

Net support for data centers built for each purpose

“Do you support or oppose data centers being built to support the following?” (May 2026)

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Independents

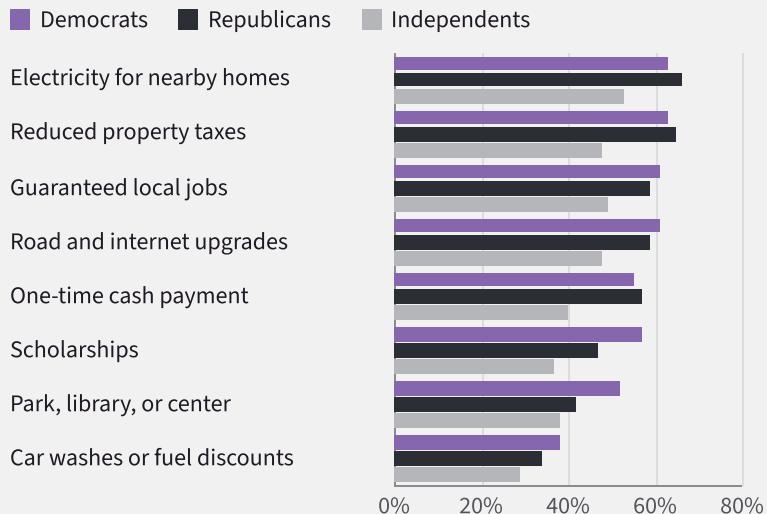


+38

net support for keeping email storage free

Bill relief works in both parties; messengers split sharply

Direct benefits: more likely to support a data center near you



Messengers: net more likely to support

Messenger	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.
Local farmer or landowner	+26	+32	+20
Small business owner	+28	+32	+11
Family member	+23	+31	+16
Police officer or firefighter	+10	+29	+12
Your state's governor	+9	+15	-4
Tech company employee	+3	+15	-11
National figure like Trump	-47	+36	-32



Thank you.

Rainey Center | September 2026 Policy Survey

Full topline, crosstabs, and session transcripts available on request.

Methodology

Survey	Field dates	Sample	MOE
June 2025 survey	June 3–5, 2025	2,529 respondents	±2.7
September 2025 omnibus	Sept. 28 – Oct. 1, 2025	2,011 likely voters	±3.1
December 2025 omnibus	Dec. 13, 2025	1,247 likely voters	±4.9
February 2026 Policy Survey	Feb. 25–27, 2026	1,008 registered voters	±3.3
March 2026 Political Survey	March 23–26, 2026	1,021 registered voters	±3.2
May 2026 Political Survey	May 17–18, 2026	1,010 registered voters	±3.3
July 2026 Omnibus	July 14–15, 2026	1,017 registered voters	±3.5
September 2026 Policy Survey	Sept. 10–14, 2026	1,004 registered voters	±4.9

Sources for outside facts

- | Construction Owners, data center tax incentives by state, 2026 (NCSL counts, Ohio, Monterey Park)
- | Newsweek, states scrapping data center tax breaks (Illinois); MultiState, June 22, 2026 (Illinois, Ohio, Texas, Arizona, Virginia)
- | The AI Consulting Network, large-load tariffs citing Edison Electric Institute (secondary; verify with EEI and the Virginia SCC)
- | Oklahoma Corporation Commission, Data Center Customer Ratepayer Protection Act of 2026
- | DataCenterBans.com (Maryland) and the SAVRN moratorium tracker (confirm with local records)
- | National polls: NBC News, Sept. 7, 2026; Fox News, July 2026; YouGov/The Economist, Sept. 1, 2026; Texas Tribune
- | Rainey Center policy lab, Raleigh, Sept. 2026: expert panel (41 min.) and lawmaker roundtable (1 hr. 45 min.); transcripts on file

Full wording of the ten lawmaker approaches (1 of 2)

- | | | |
|----------|--|---|
| 1 | <p>This lawmaker would recruit major data center investment but require developers to bring their own power with a growing share of clean energy, hold public meetings, sign community benefit agreements, hire local workers, and accept losing power before homes do in a grid emergency. Projects rejected by the local community would not move forward.</p> | <p>64%
D 67 · R 61 · I 65
SHAPIRO (D-PA)</p> |
| 2 | <p>This lawmaker would stop approving the largest new data centers until statewide standards are finished, require data centers to pay for grid upgrades and fund their own clean power, and end their tax breaks, while the state spends public money on its own AI research computing and builds new nuclear plants.</p> | <p>57%
D 57 · R 54 · I 60
HOCHUL (D-NY)</p> |
| 3 | <p>This lawmaker would end all state tax breaks and subsidies for data centers, arguing taxpayers should not be subsidizing some of the wealthiest companies in the world, keep the facilities off farmland, and keep older coal plants running to meet growing electricity demand.</p> | <p>56%
D 58 · R 60 · I 47
TIFFANY (R-WI)</p> |
| 4 | <p>This lawmaker would welcome data centers as an economic opportunity but with guardrails: local communities get the final say on each project, secret agreements between developers and local officials are banned, and companies must pay for grid upgrades so the costs do not fall on residents. They oppose any moratorium.</p> | <p>55%
D 53 · R 56 · I 56
CROWLEY (D-WI)</p> |
| 5 | <p>This lawmaker would pause all new AI data center construction statewide for one year, use the pause to write strict rules for the industry, end tax breaks for data center companies, and require any future projects to run on clean energy.</p> | <p>51%
D 55 · R 49 · I 47
HONG (D-WI)</p> |

Full wording of the ten lawmaker approaches (2 of 2)

- | | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 6 | <p>This lawmaker would keep the state the home base of the AI industry while regulating the largest AI companies directly: requiring them to publish their safety plans, report serious safety incidents to the state, and protect whistleblowers, and building a public computing cluster so startups and researchers can access AI infrastructure.</p> | <p>49%
D 51 · R 47 · I 47
NEWSOM (D-CA)</p> |
| 7 | <p>This lawmaker would create state-designated districts where data centers build and run their own power plants off the grid, with state law overriding local zoning and permitting so counties cannot block projects, utility ratepayers shielded from the costs, and data center property taxes split between cutting the state income tax and funding counties.</p> | <p>48%
D 47 · R 49 · I 48
MORRISEY (R-WV)</p> |
| 8 | <p>This lawmaker would personally court one of the largest data center projects in the country to revive a struggling rural region, with the company paying for its own new power plants, local roads and water systems, and worker training, and with tax breaks conditioned on protecting ratepayers from higher bills.</p> | <p>45%
D 42 · R 48 · I 47
LANDRY (R-LA)</p> |
| 9 | <p>This lawmaker would aggressively recruit data centers and AI companies to win the race for AI, while requiring the largest facilities to pay their own grid connection costs and power down first in an emergency so residents keep their electricity. Data centers would be kept out of rural residential neighborhoods.</p> | <p>41%
D 36 · R 42 · I 47
ABBOTT (R-TX)</p> |
| 10 | <p>This lawmaker would keep the state's tax breaks for data centers in place and veto attempts by the legislature to pause or repeal them, arguing that pulling incentives out from under projects already underway would undermine investment, jobs, and the state's standing as a leading market for the industry.</p> | <p>35%
D 34 · R 34 · I 36
KEMP (R-GA)</p> |