Examining human reliance on artificial intelligence in decision making
Pearson et al, 2026

Context

This experimental study investigates how human attitudes towards AI affect the quality of decision-making when AI guidance is involved. This study is particularly concerned with the "Technological Protection" fallacy, which is the widespread but mistaken belief that using technology automatically removes bias from decision-making

Key Insights

Humans are not passive followers

Study participants showed some strategic judgement and tended to follow guidance when it appeared useful and disregard it when it didn't regardless of whether it came from an AI or human.

Positive attitudes towards AI impaired decision quality

Participants who held more favourable views of AI showed poorer ability to distinguish correct from incorrect information when receiving AI guidance, this effect was unique to the AI condition and did not occur when the same participants received human guidance.

AI guidance may introduce its own bias

The findings suggest that rather than AI removing bias from decision, AI guidance may introduce its own unique biases and those who are most enthusiastic about AI are more vulnerable to them.

Critical, reflective use of AI is essential

The study also found that participants who always followed the AI guidance performed worse than those who used it selectively.

Implications

- Does your organisation actively challenge the Technological Protection fallacy, or is it quietly assumed?

- If the staff most enthusiastic about AI are also the most susceptible to its biases, how are you identifying and managing that risk within your decision-making processes?

- What training or governance structures do you have in place to preserve and strengthen human judgment alongside AI adoption, rather than allowing it to quietly atrophy?

Pearson, J., Dror, I. E., Jayes, E., Whordley, G.-R., Mason, G., & Nightingale, S. (2026). Examining human reliance on artificial intelligence in decision making. Scientific Reports, 16, Article 5345. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-026-34983-y