MINDEROO FOUNDATION | Safe AI

National Track Survey Report

September 2026

SafeAI.org.au



Executive Summary

A year on from our first national survey on artificial intelligence (AI), a clearer picture is emerging of how Australians think about the technology.

People are becoming more familiar with AI and increasingly using it in their everyday lives. But confidence is not keeping pace. Concern about the risks is growing, support for stronger safeguards is increasing and Australians want greater assurance that AI is being developed and used with clear rules that reflect Australian interests.

The picture is not uniform, with the gap between Australians who use AI and those who do not now a defining feature of sentiment.



50% now say the risks of AI outweigh the benefits, up from 46% in both August 2025 and January 2026.

Executive Summary

Public confidence is not keeping pace with AI

Australians are becoming more familiar with AI but their overall view of the technology has hardened.

Half now say the risks of AI outweigh the benefits, compared with 46% in prior surveys. Just under a third believe the benefits outweigh the risks. The divide between those who use AI and those who do not is stark, with seven in ten non-users (71%) saying the risks outweigh the benefits compared with 38% of AI users.

Australians are also increasingly concerned about the pace of change. Seventy per cent now believe AI is moving too fast, the highest result across our three surveys and up from 63% in January 2026. Again, non-users (86%) are far more likely than AI users (61%) to hold this view.

At the same time, people remain more positive about AI in their own lives (52% positive, 38% negative) while being almost evenly split about the implications for society (46% positive, 44% negative). Older Australians, women and people in regional and rural areas are consistently more concerned.



Executive Summary

The benefit case is weakening, and concern is broadening

Australians continue to see potential benefits from AI, particularly through productivity gains, improved healthcare and better disaster prediction and response.

But the benefits are becoming harder for people to name. Efficiency and productivity has fallen from 24% in August 2025 to 15% today and one in five (19%) now say there is no benefit at all.

Immediate harms remain at the centre of public concern. Misinformation and deepfakes, criminal misuse and cybercrime, and data privacy continue to rank among the issues Australians are most worried about.

Concern is also broadening. Every AI risk tracked from the previous survey recorded an increase. Eighty-four per cent are now concerned about AI reducing human creativity and critical thinking, while concern about its environmental impact rose ten percentage points to 79%. Concern about job losses remains high at 82% and 81% are concerned about the most popular AI tools being owned and controlled by big technology companies.



Executive Summary

People want safeguards alongside innovation, but patience is tightening

Australians continue to favour an approach to AI that protects people while allowing innovation.

A balanced approach remains the most popular position. However, support for strict rules that limit risk, even if they slow innovation, has risen from 28% to 36% and now 39%. Among people who do not use AI, strict rules are now the preferred option (62%).

When the balanced approach is removed as an option, 69% of Australians favour stricter safeguards over minimal regulation. This preference has remained unchanged across the two most recent surveys.

Australians still see the benefits of AI, but the research suggests their tolerance for safeguards lagging behind the technology is narrowing.



Executive Summary

AI use is growing even as concern increases

Despite these concerns, Australians are not turning away from AI.

Personal use has increased from 50% in August 2025 to 55% today, while work use has remained relatively stable at around one-third of Australians.

The bigger shift is among people already using AI.
Daily use has increased from 38% in August 2025 to 52% today.
ChatGPT remains the most used tool but is losing share (75% to 68%), with Gemini (30% to 39%) and Claude (6% to 19%) gaining ground.

Health advice is the fastest-growing use (34%, up five points since January), even though it was the least trusted of the AI uses tested in our August 2025 survey (43%).

Across our three surveys, AI use has grown alongside rising concern. Greater familiarity and more frequent use have not, on their own, resolved questions about how AI's risks will be managed.



Executive Summary

Public support for safeguards is stronger than awareness of government action

Australians continue to look first to government to manage the risks of AI (40%), ahead of technology companies (27%) and international institutions (10%).

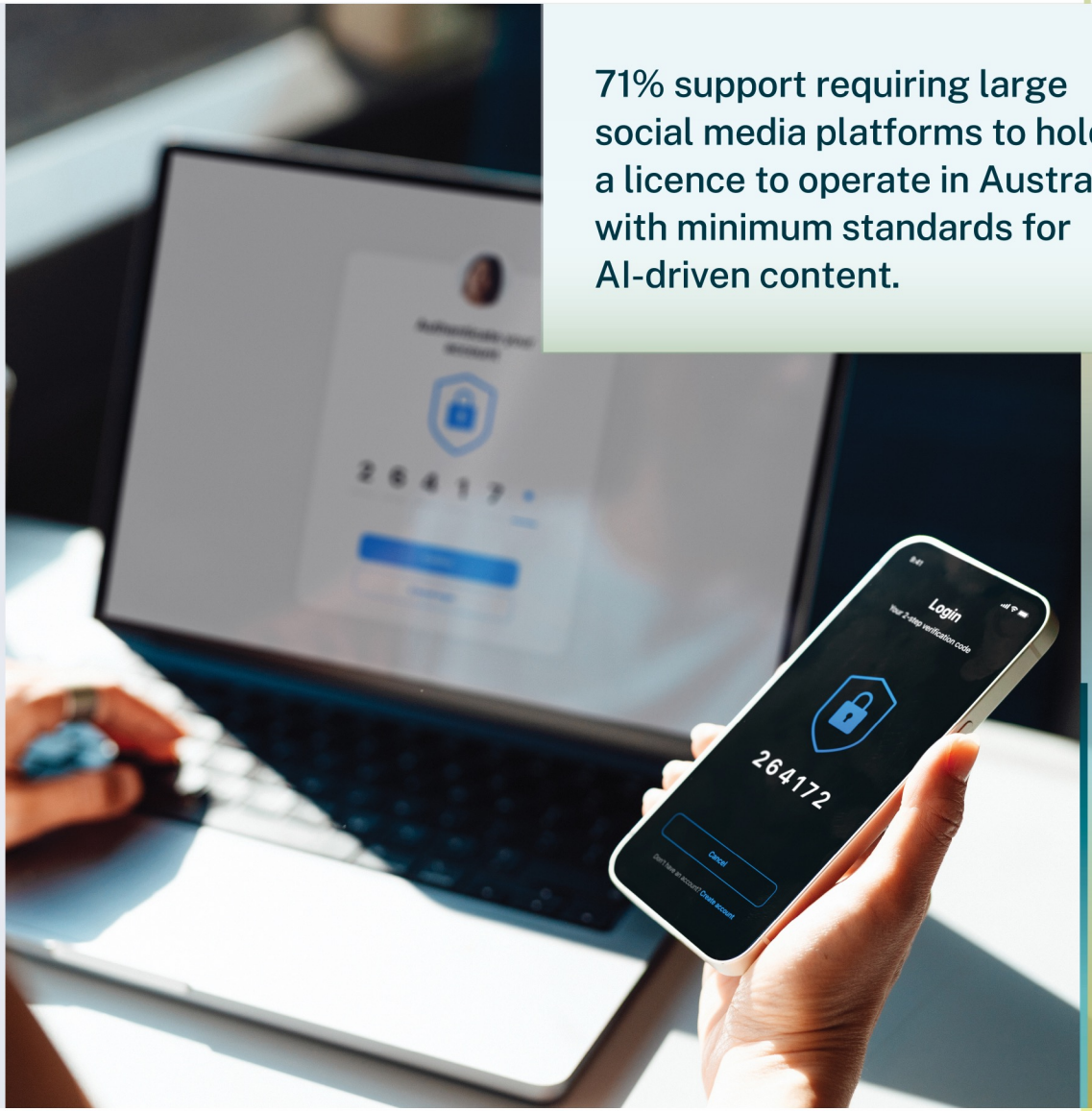
Awareness of government action has improved but remains relatively low. Fifteen per cent now recall hearing about recent Australian Government plans or actions on AI, up from 4% in January 2026. Awareness of the AI Safety Institute or National AI Plan has increased from 9% to 13%.

When those initiatives are explained, however, support is strong. Seventy-six per cent support their creation, compared with 12% opposed.

There is also considerable support for further examination of AI's impacts. While only 14% of Australians had heard of South Australia's Royal Commission into AI, 70% support a Royal Commission into the technology, including 75% of people who use AI.

These findings highlight an opportunity to build public understanding of proposed safeguards and demonstrate how government and industry intend to manage the risks of AI.

71% support requiring large social media platforms to hold a licence to operate in Australia, with minimum standards for AI-driven content.



Executive Summary

Australians want AI development on Australian terms

The latest research also reveals a preference for Australian-developed AI and rules that reflect Australian interests.

Asked how comfortable respondents would be using an AI model from a list of countries, Australians were most comfortable with the idea of an Australian-developed model at 72%, followed by models developed in the United Kingdom (63%) and European Union (61%). Comfort is considerably lower for models developed in the United States (47%), China (29%) and India (28%).

That trust also extends internationally. In each of the five overseas markets we surveyed*, more people said verification by Australia's AI Safety Institute would increase their trust in an AI model than said it would not.

When asked what would give them the most confidence that AI is being used safely in Australia, the most common response was rules set by the Australian Government for Australian conditions (34%).

Australians also want clear safeguards around the infrastructure supporting AI. Support is strongest for legally binding national AI standards (82%), and requiring large data centres to manage their water use (80%) and as much energy back into the grid as they take out (77%).

These findings point to support for domestic AI capability and infrastructure where it comes with binding Australian rules, environmental safeguards and a clear say over how the technology is developed and governed. Clear Australian laws, stronger domestic capability and international cooperation with like-minded countries are what Australians say would help build their confidence and trust.

Australian-developed AI has a clear trust advantage: 72% are comfortable with it, more than any overseas market tested.

*AI, trust and international cooperation: Public attitudes across six countries, September 2026

Methodology

Nationwide survey

Results in this report are based upon questions asked in a Talbot Mills Research nationwide online survey. The basis of the sample is n=2,308 nationally representative respondents in Australia aged 18 or over.

Fieldwork dates

Fieldwork for the questions in this report was conducted between the 26th August and the 13th September 2026.

Representative sample

Interlocked age, gender and regional quotas were used during sampling. Weighting was further used to enhance how closely the results represent the adult population of Australia. The survey was oversampled for South Australia to achieve n=500 and corrected for via weighting.

The maximum sampling error for a sample size of 2,308 at the 95% confidence level is ± 2.0%.

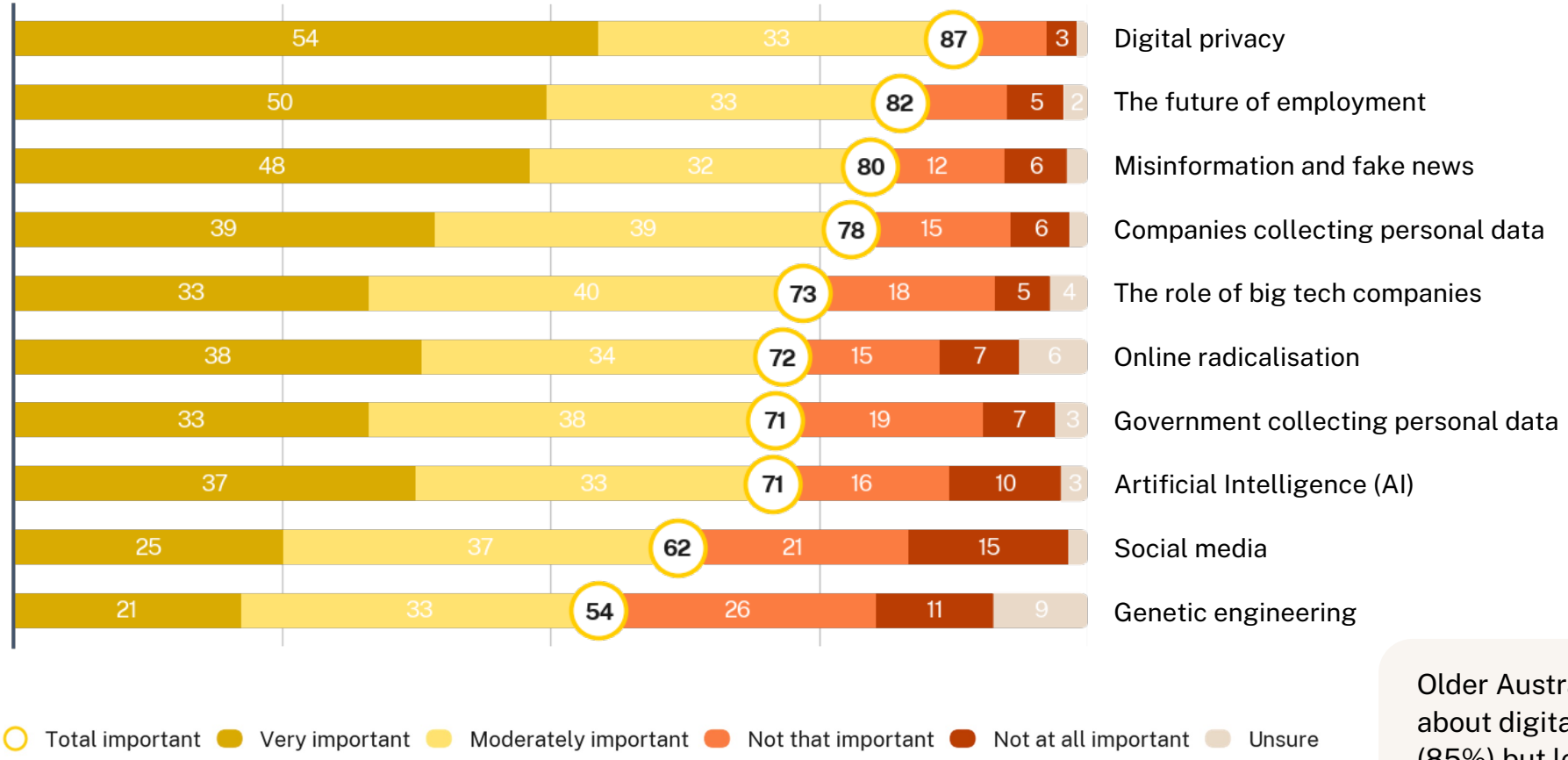
Reporting

All numbers are shown rounded to zero decimal places. Hence specified totals are not always exactly equal to the sum of the specified sub-totals. The differences are seldom more than 1%. (For example: 2.7 + 3.5 = 6.2 would appear: 3 + 4 = 6).

Awareness and attitudes toward AI

Personal importance of technology and digital issues

How important to you personally are the following issues? (%)

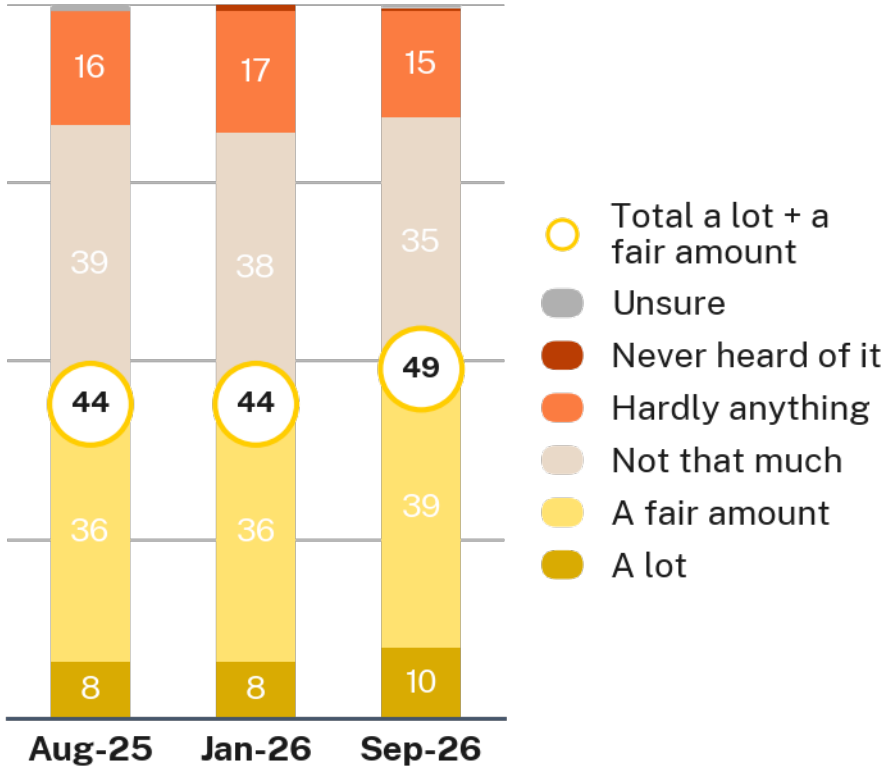


Older Australians (60+) were more concerned about digital privacy (93%) and misinformation (85%) but less about employment (74%) and social media (52%).

Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

Declared knowledge of Artificial Intelligence

How much would you say you know about artificial intelligence (AI)? (%)



Those who use AI were more likely to say they know at least a fair amount (65%) than non-users (23%).

Knowledge of AI by age:

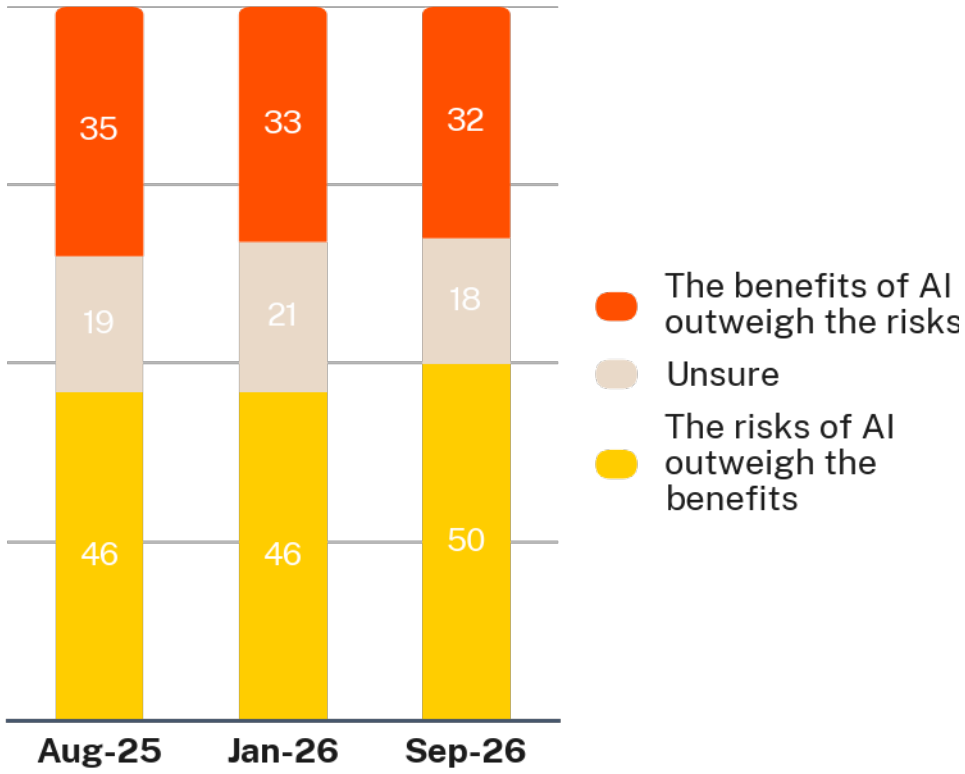
18-29:	73% a lot + a fair amount
30-44:	62%
45-59:	41%
60+:	25%

Men were more likely to say they know at least a fair amount (55%) than women (43%).

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Perceived balance of AI risks and benefits

Overall do you think: (%)



AI users were more likely to see the benefits (38% risks / 47% benefits) than non-users (71% / 9%).

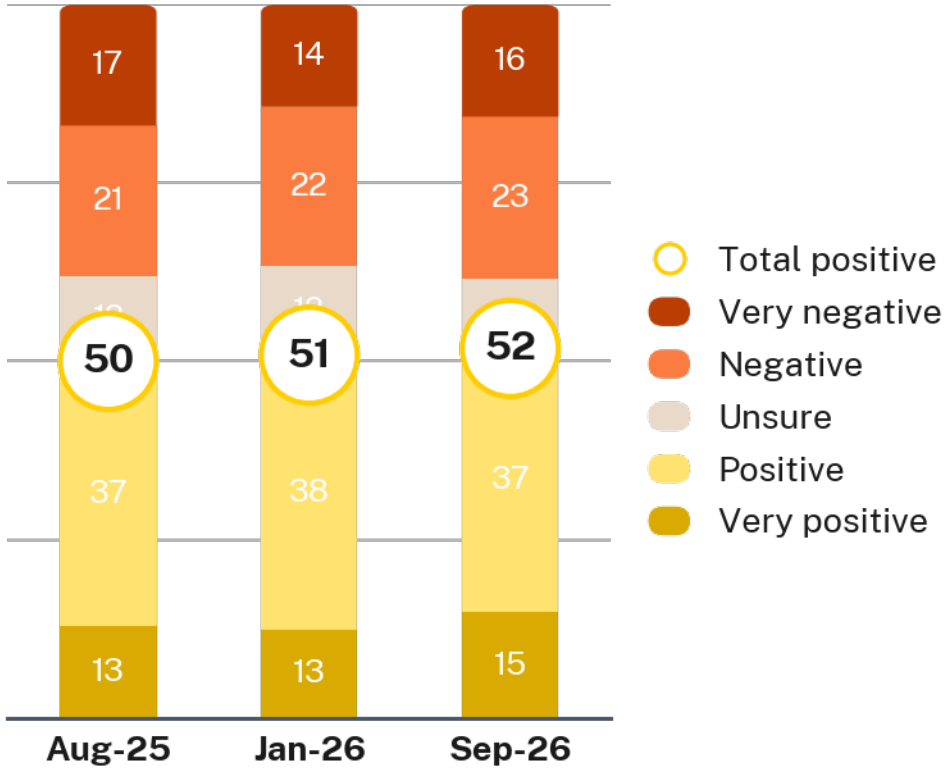
Risks / benefits by age:

18-29:	46% / 43%
30-44:	45% / 40%
45-59:	51% / 32%
60+:	57% / 18%

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Personal views on artificial intelligence

Thinking about artificial intelligence (AI), for you personally and for society in general, this technology is overall...? - You personally (%)



Younger Australians saw AI far more positively:

18-29:	72% positive / 10% negative
30-44:	64% / 10%
45-59:	50% / 15%
60+:	28% / 26%

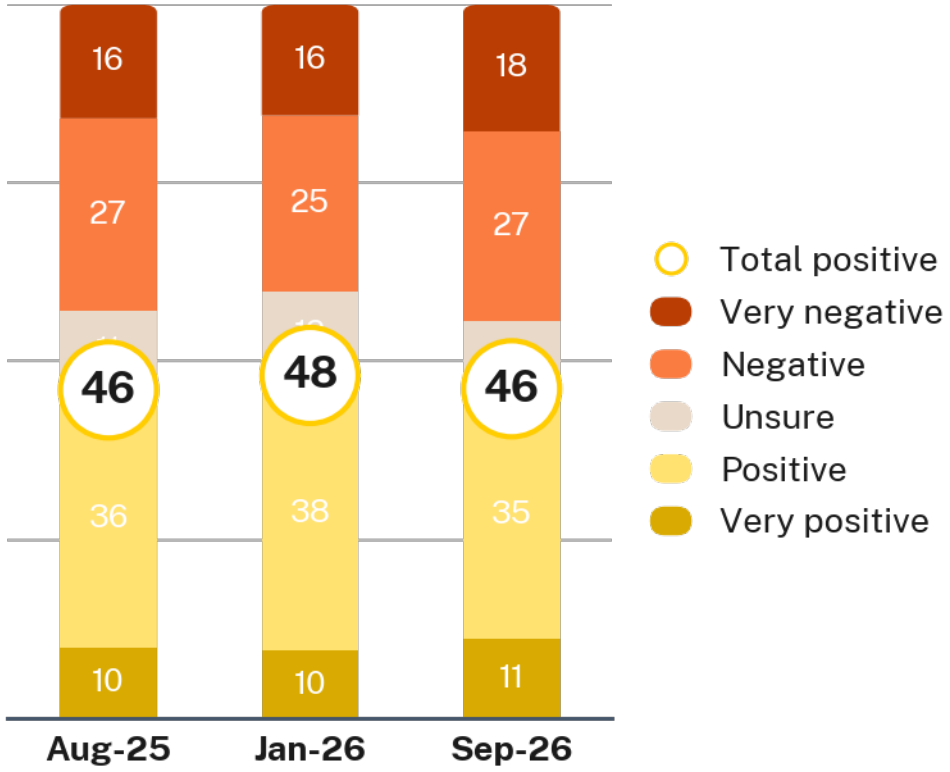
Men were more positive (57% / 15%) than women (47% / 17%).

80% of those who use AI for work were positive and 75% who use it personally, compared to just 14% of those who don't use it.

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Perceptions of artificial intelligence for society

Thinking about artificial intelligence (AI), for you personally and for society in general, this technology is overall...? - Society in general (%)



Those who use AI were more positive (64%) than negative (29%), while non-users were more negative (72%) than positive (17%).

Younger respondents were more positive:

18-29:	63% positive / 29% negative
30-44:	57% / 37%
45-59:	42% / 48%
60+:	27% / 58%

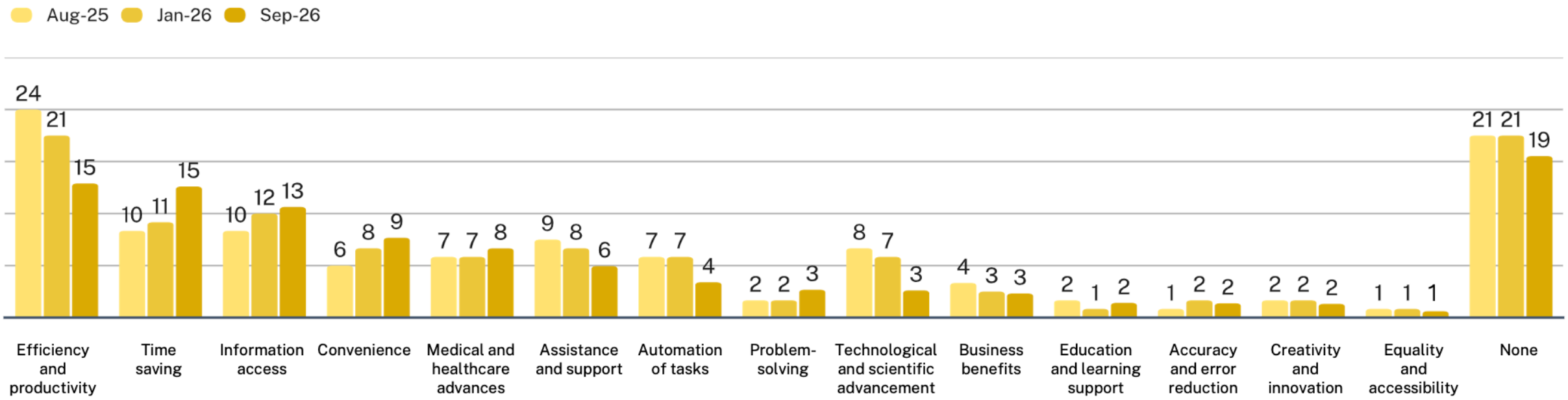
Men were more positive (52%) than negative (40%), while women were more negative than positive (40% positive / 48% negative).

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

AI benefits and concerns

Perceived greatest benefits of AI

Very briefly, what do you think is likely to be the biggest benefit of AI? (%)



Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,305

Perceived likelihood of AI benefits

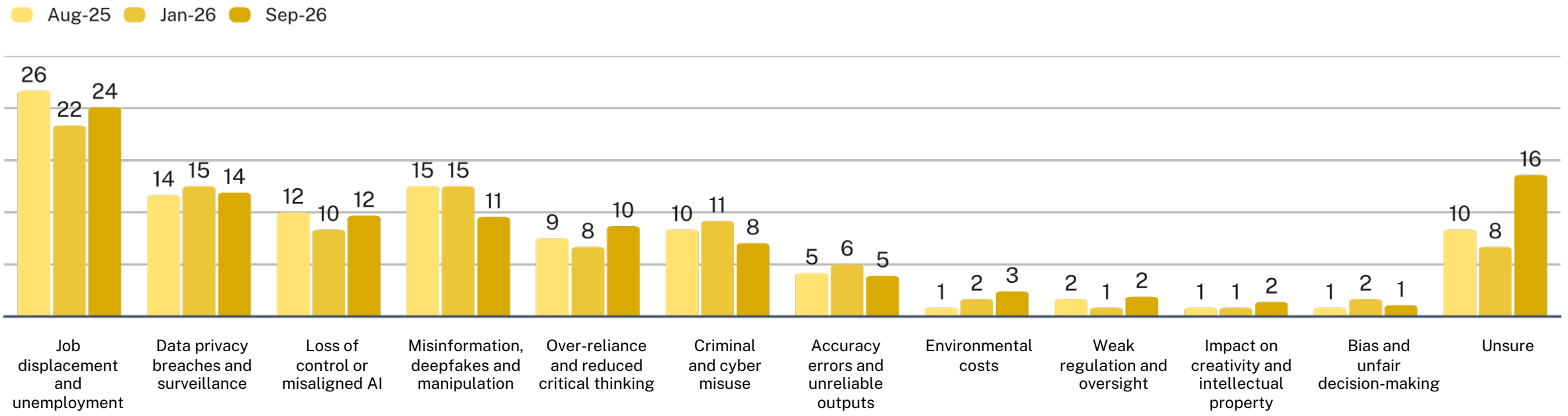
How likely do you think are the following potential benefits of AI? (%)



Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

Perceived risks of artificial intelligence

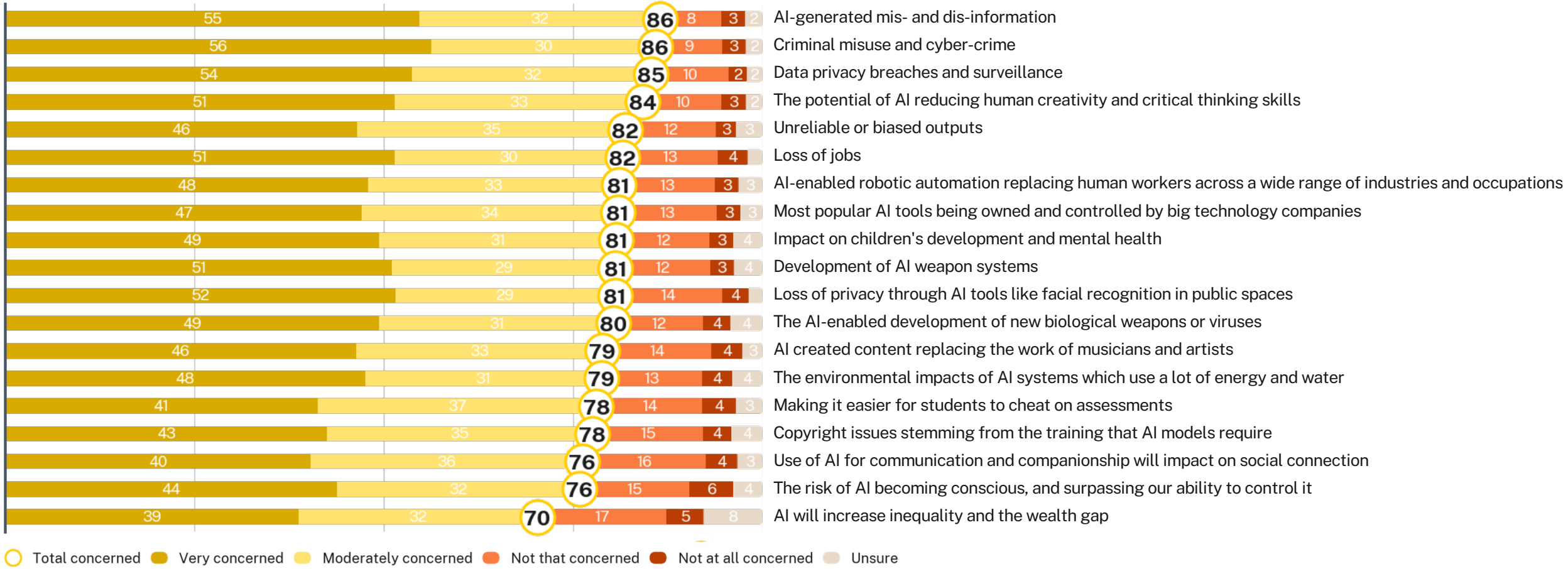
Very briefly, what do you think is likely to be the biggest risk of AI? (%)



Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,306

Concerns about artificial intelligence

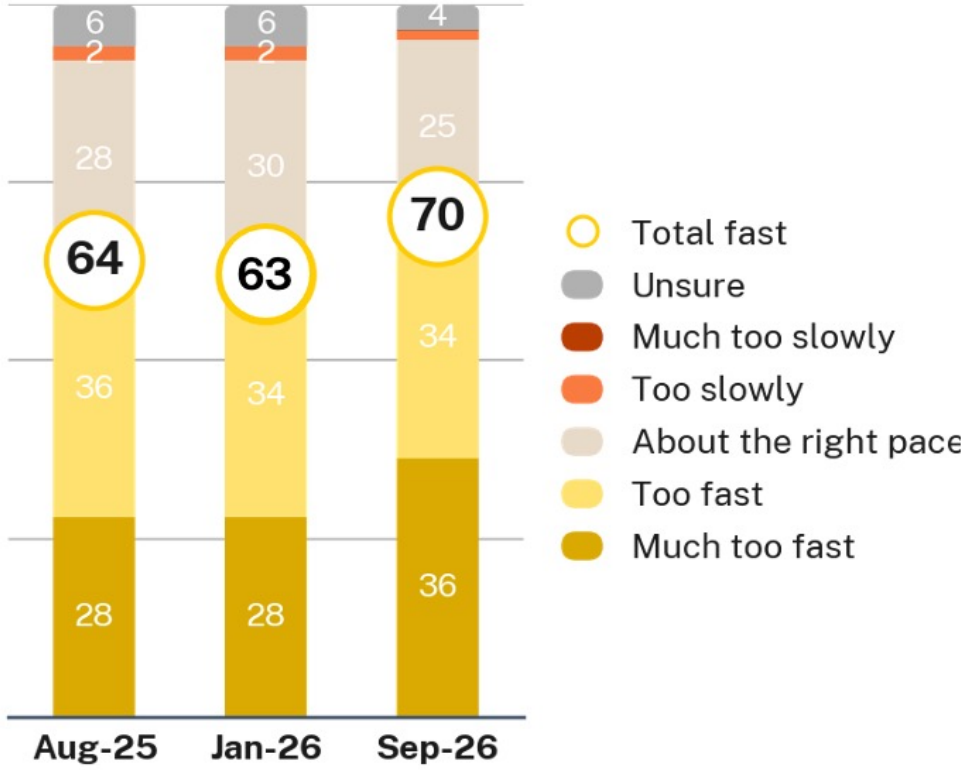
How concerned are you about the following? (%)



Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

Perceived pace of AI adoption

Do you feel that the introduction of AI is moving too fast, too slow, or is going at about the right pace? (%)



Those who don't use AI were more likely to feel it's moving too fast (86%) than those who use it (61%).

Women were more likely to feel the pace is too fast (73%) than men (67%).

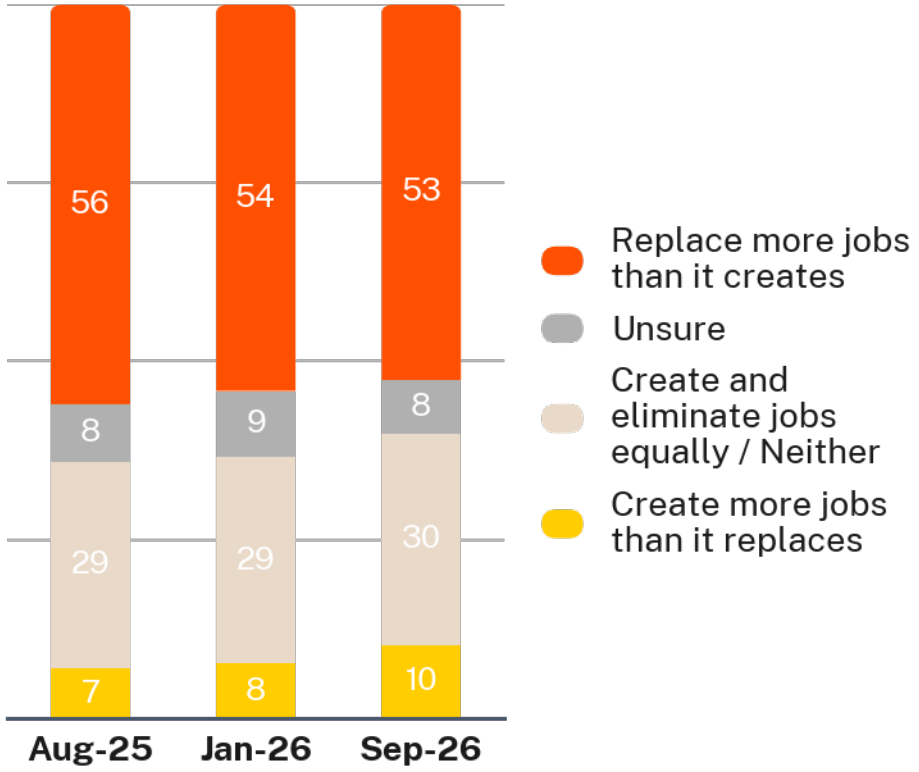
Older respondents were more likely to rate it as too fast:

18-29:	60% too fast
30-44:	61%
45-59:	73%
60+:	84%

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Expected job impact of AI

Overall, do you think that AI will...? (%)



Those who use AI were less likely to believe it will replace more jobs than it creates (42%) than those who don't use it (71%).

Concern for replacement increased with age:

18-29:	33%
30-44:	43%
45-59:	62%
60+:	68%

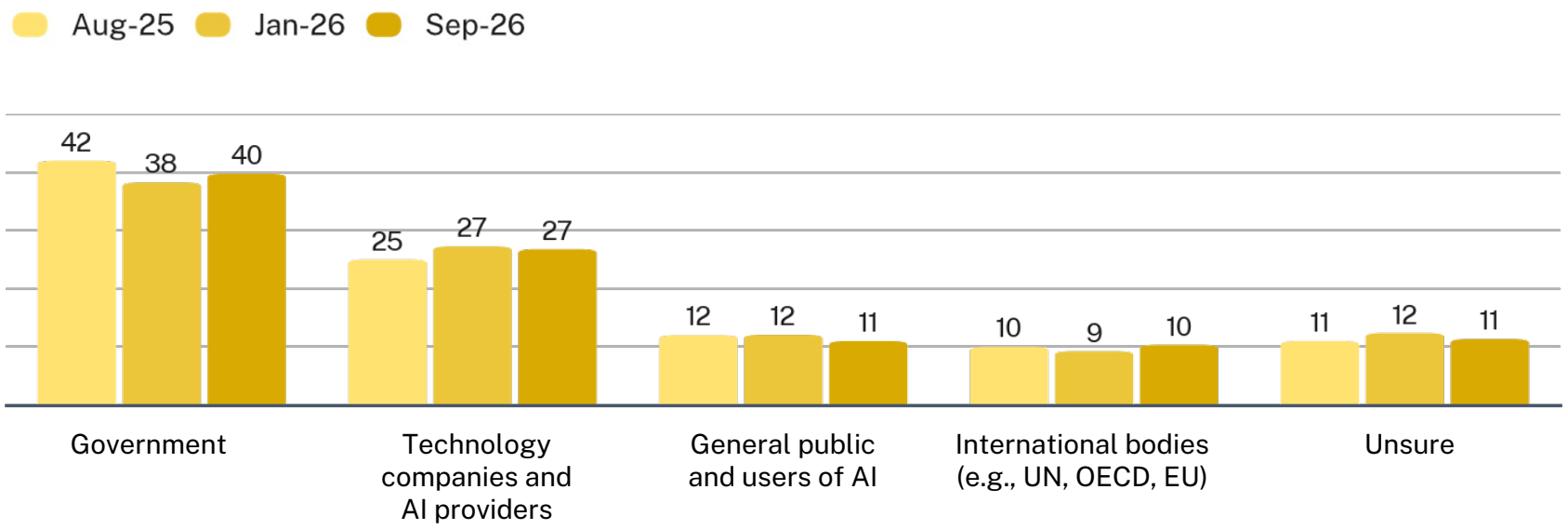
Those working full-time were less concerned (43%) than those not working (63%).

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

AI regulation and governance

Responsibility for managing AI risks

Who should be most responsible for managing the risks of AI? (%)



South Australians were more likely to say general public (17%) or international bodies (14%) while slightly less likely to say Government (35%) or Tech companies (24%).

Older Australians favoured government responsibility:

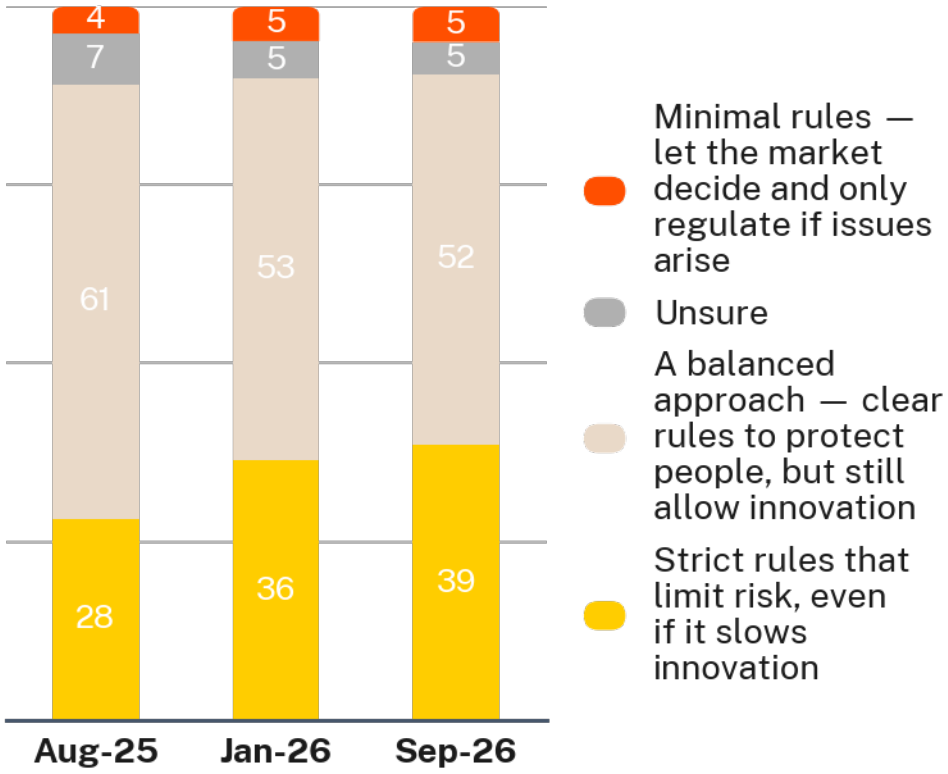
18-29:	24% government
30-44:	35%
45-59:	46%
60+:	50%

Those who do not use AI were more likely to nominate government (44%), while AI users were more likely to nominate technology companies (31%).

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Preferred approach to AI regulation

Out of the following, which is your preferred approach for Australia to take to regulate AI? (%)



Those who don't use AI were more likely to prefer strict rules (62%) than a balanced approach (29%), while AI users reversed that pattern (26% / 65%).

Balanced approach by age:

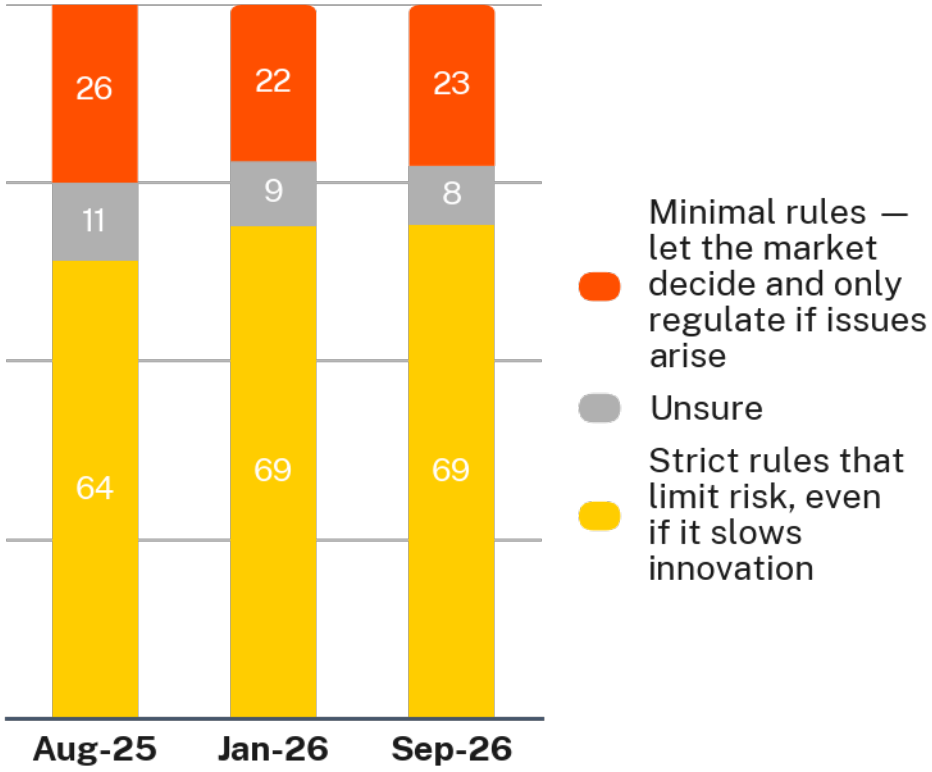
18-29:	60%
30-44:	58%
45-59:	46%
60+:	44%

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Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Preferred approach to AI regulation (strict vs minimal)

Out of the following, which is your preferred approach for Australia to take to regulate AI?
[If balanced] Which way do you lean toward, even if only slightly? (%)



South Australia was slightly more likely to favour minimal regulation (66% strict / 28% minimal).

Older respondents were more likely to prefer strict regulation:

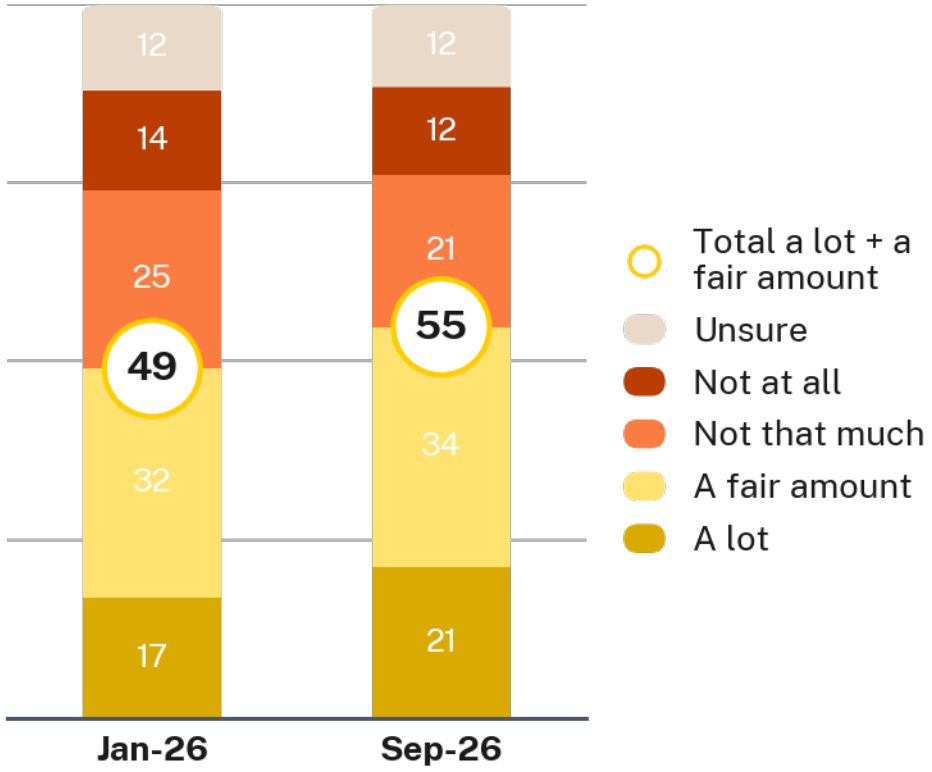
18-29:	55% strict / 38% minimal
30-44:	61% / 29%
45-59:	72% / 18%
60+:	84% / 9%

AI users were less likely to favour strict regulation but a majority still favoured it (61% / 33%)

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308
Note: Answers for respondents who said strict or minimal to the previous question were used for these results.

Importance of AI leadership by country

Some people talk about an "AI race" between countries. How much does it matter which country leads the world in AI? (%)



AI users were more likely to think it matters (63%).

Men were more likely to think it matters (63%) than women (47%).

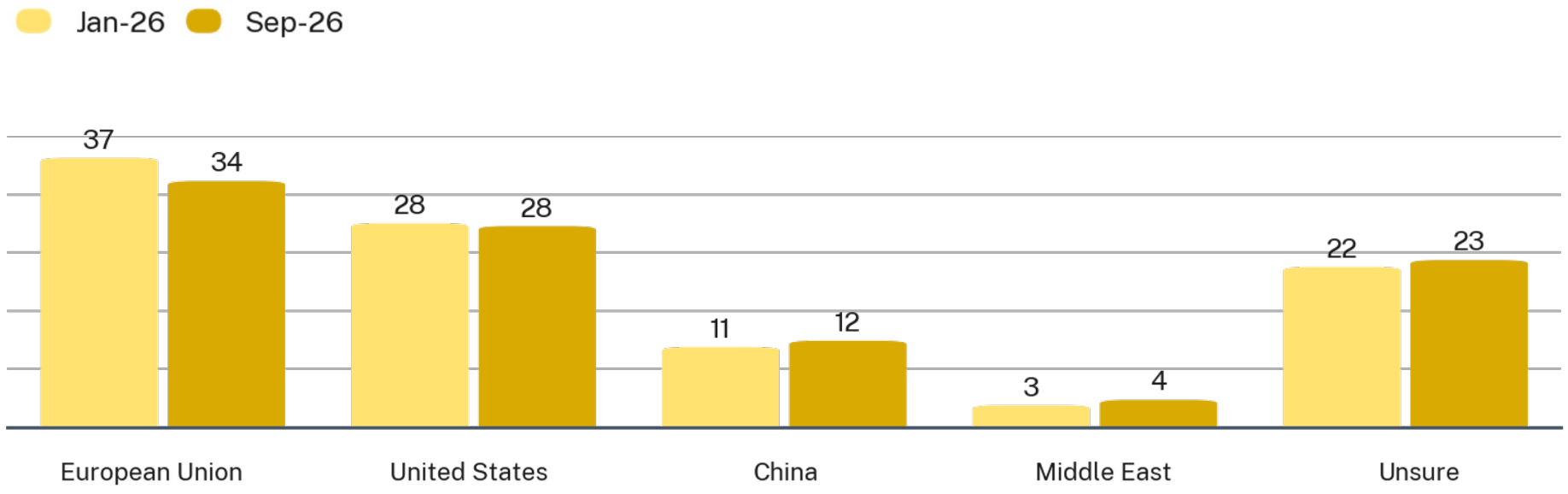
Younger respondents tended to think it matters more.

18-29:	64%
30-44:	54%
45-59:	50%
60+:	53%

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Preferred global AI leadership

And if you had to choose, which one of the following would you prefer to lead the world in AI? (%)



Older Australians strongly preferred the EU:

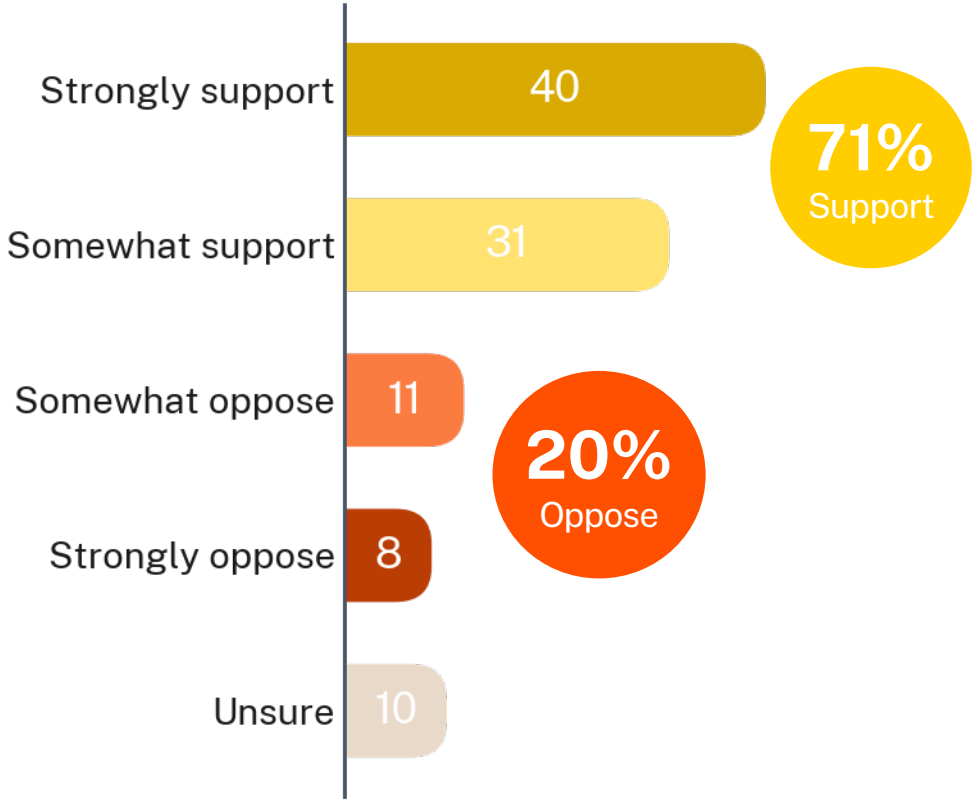
18-29:	23% EU / 22% China
30-44:	27% / 15%
45-59:	36% / 8%
60+:	46% / 4%

Men were more likely to prefer the US (33%) than women (21%).

Base: Australian Adults | Filter: Matters not that much or more | Sep-26: n=1,711

Support for social media licensing requirements

How strongly do you support or oppose requiring large social media platforms to hold a licence to operate in Australia, including minimum standards for AI-driven content and recommendations? (%)



Those who use AI were more likely to support the proposal (76% support / 17% oppose), while non-users were less supportive (64% / 25%).

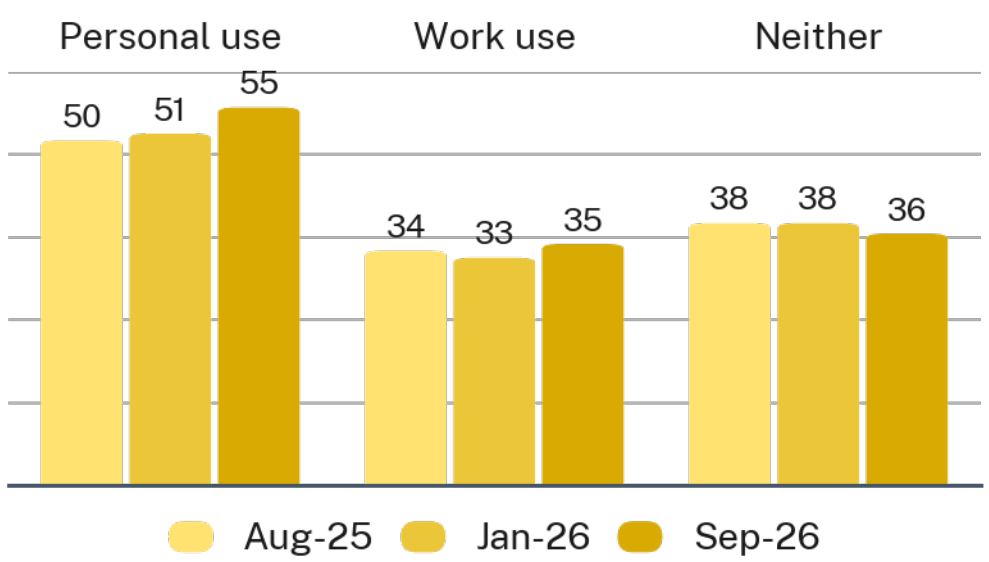
Men were more likely to support the proposal (76%) than women (66%).

Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

Personal use of AI

AI tool usage across contexts

Do you use AI tools for work and/or personal use? (%)



Younger Australians were far more likely to use AI:

18-29:	67% personal / 53% work
30-44:	68% / 51%
45-59:	59% / 34%
60+:	30% / 8%

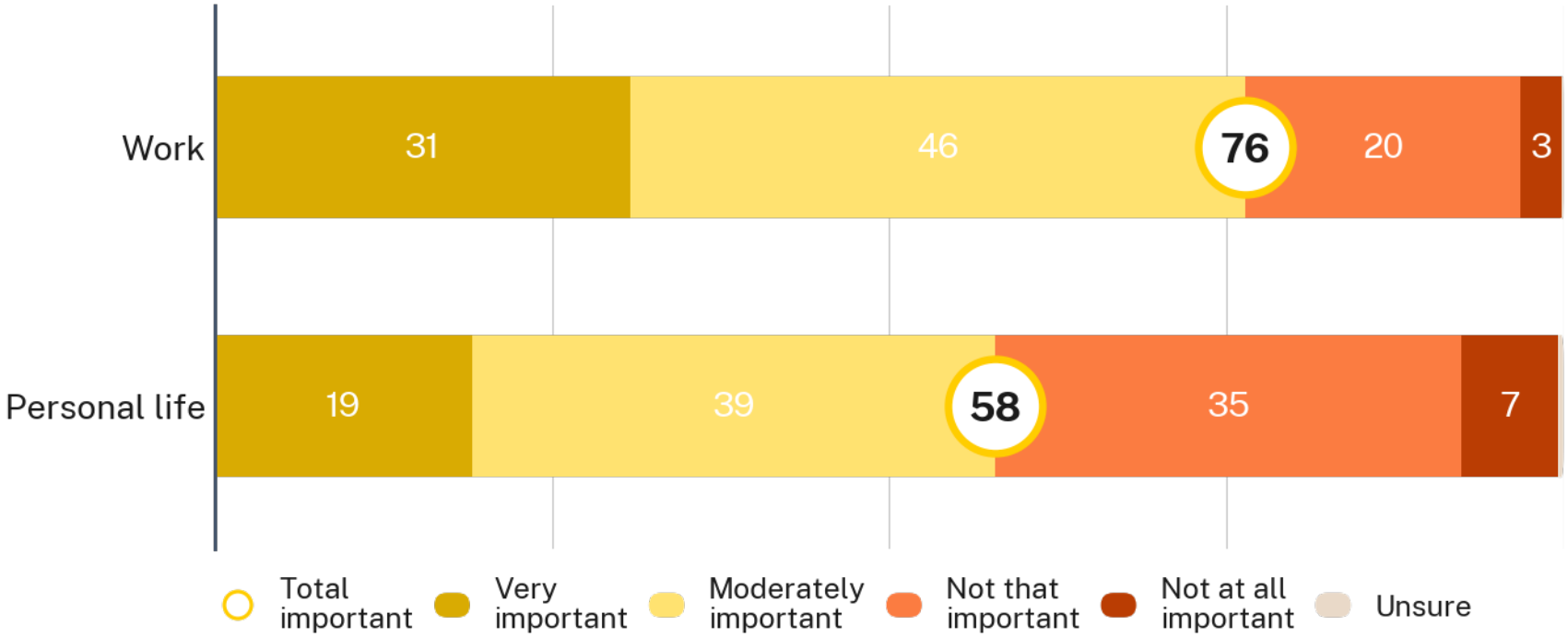
59% of those in full-time work said they use AI for work, rising to 68% among managers & professionals.

Men were more likely to use AI for work (40%) than women (30%).

Base: Australian adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Perceived importance of AI in work and personal life

How important do you think using AI is for your … (%)



Younger respondents consider it more important:

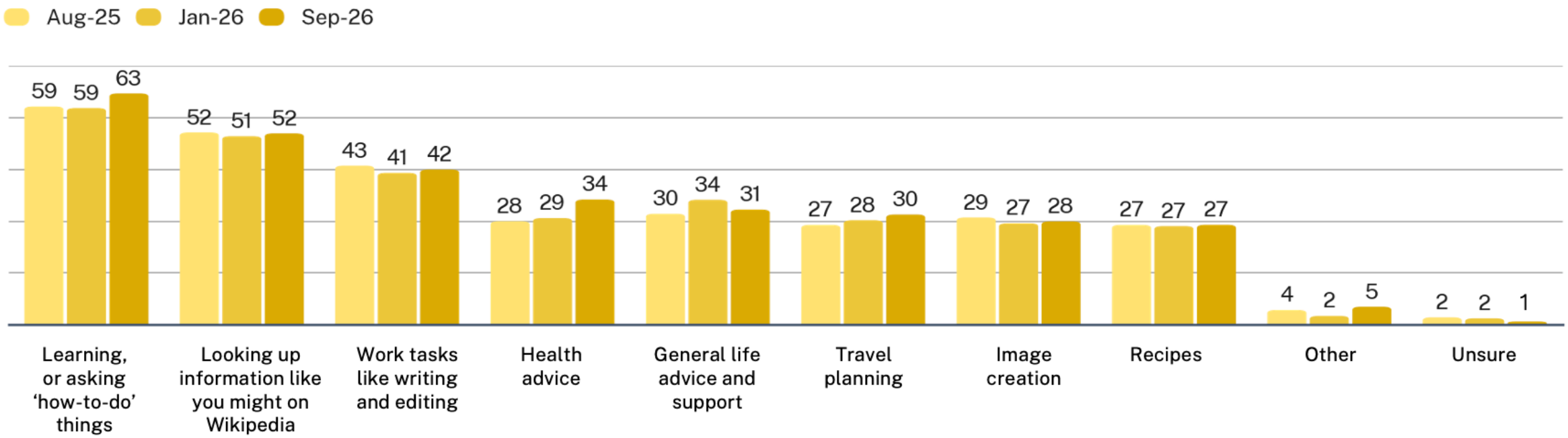
18-29:	68% personal / 79% work
30-44:	62% / 77%
45-59:	51% / 74%
60+:	44% / 71%

Managers and professionals were more likely to see it as important (81%) than those in skilled trades and technical roles (68%).

Bases vary: those who use AI for work or personal use | n=759 Work users, 1237 personal users

Current uses of AI

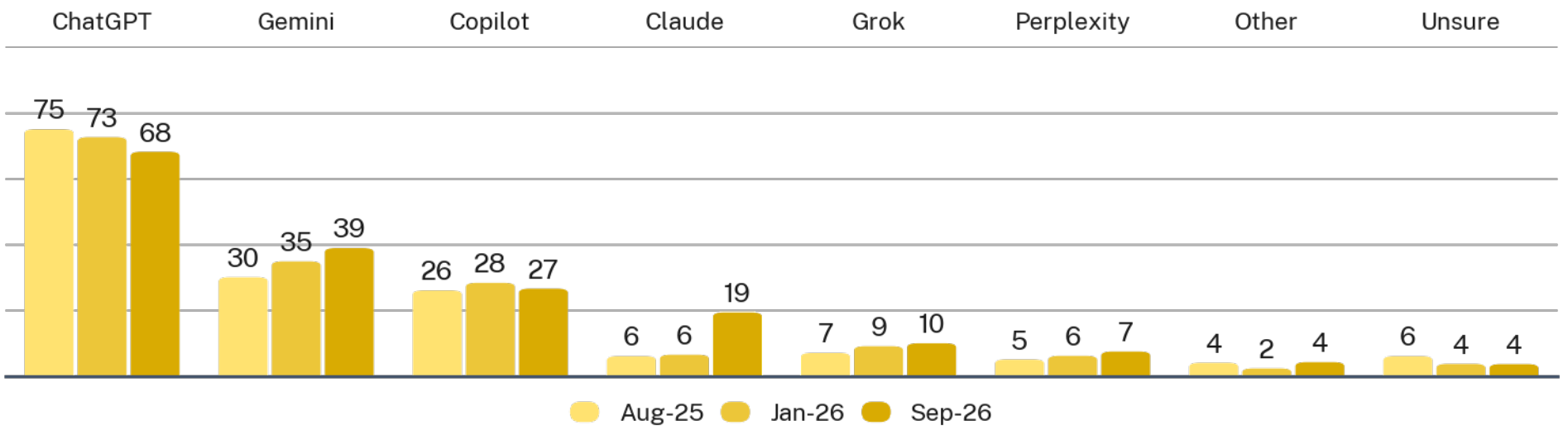
What are you using AI for? Select all that apply (%)



Base: AI users | Sep-26: n=1,390

Regular AI tool usage

What AI tools do you regularly use? (%)

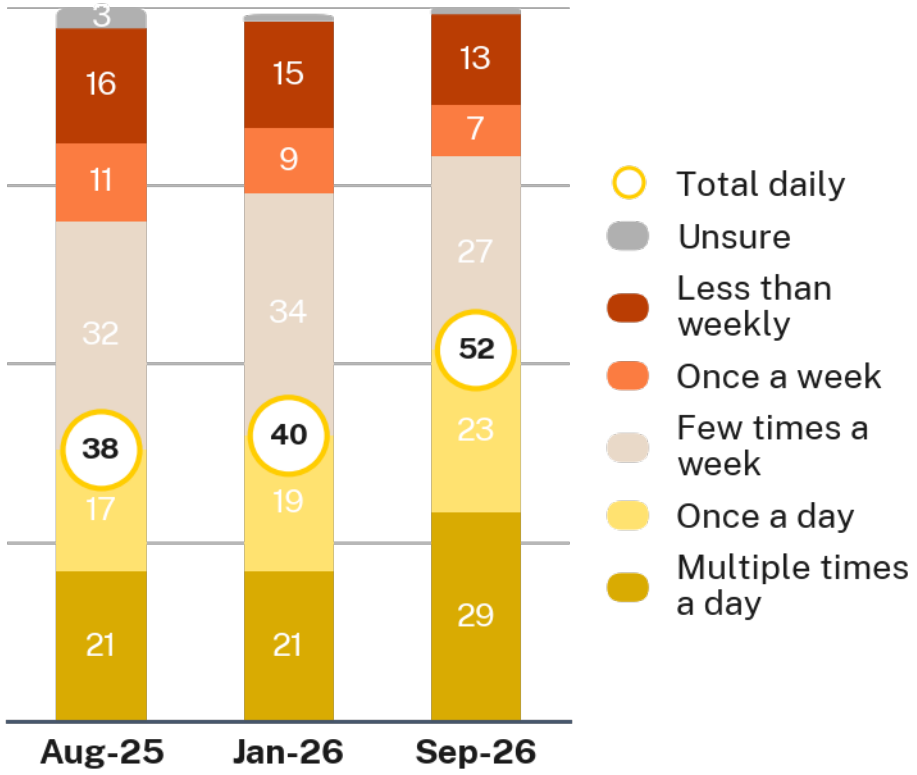


Those who use AI for work were more likely to name ChatGPT (75%), Copilot (33%) and Claude (27%).

Base: AI users | Sep-26: n=1,390

Frequency of AI tool usage

Roughly how often are you currently using AI tools? (%)



Men were more likely to use AI daily (59%) than women (44%).

Daily use by age:

18-29:	60%
30-44:	56%
45-59:	47%
60+:	35%

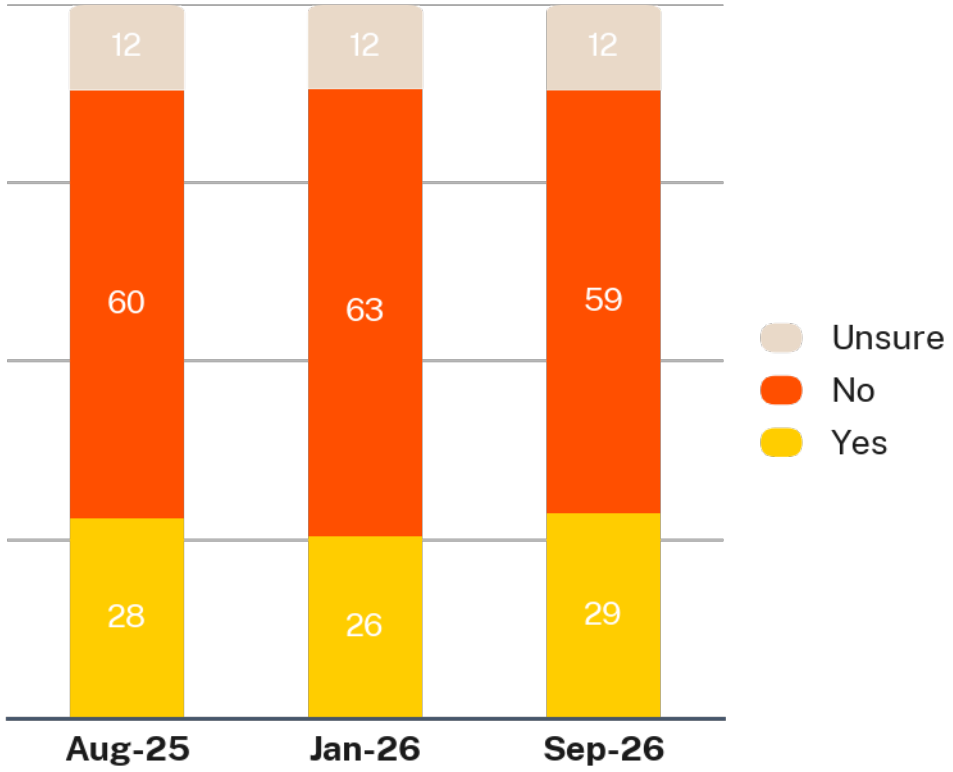
Those who use it for work were more likely (64%) while among those who just use it personally daily usage was only 36%.

City residents were more likely to use AI daily (66%) than those in suburban (46%) or rural areas (40%).

Base: AI users | Sep-26: n=1,390

Perceived job risk from workplace AI

Do you feel that your job will be at risk because of workplace adoption of AI that may be able to perform some or all of your tasks? (%)



Those working from home were more likely concerned:

3 or more days:	42%
1-2 days:	37%
None:	19%

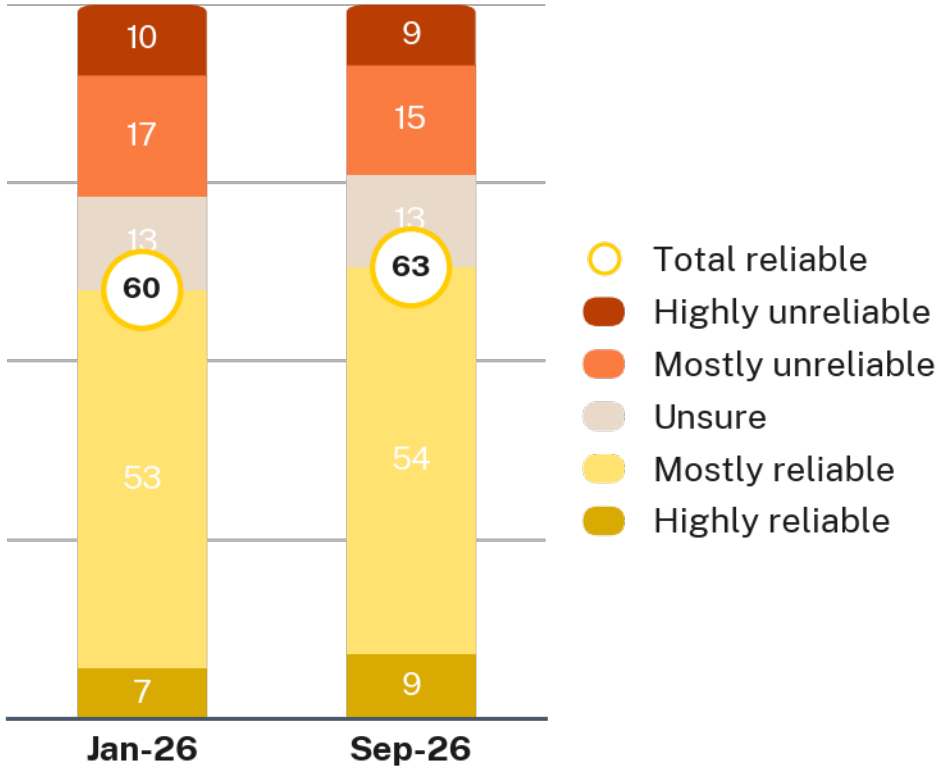
Men were more likely to feel at risk (33%) than women (24%).

Concern declined with age, from 34% among 18-29 year-olds to 18% among those 60+.

Base: Employed | Sep-26: n=1,383

Perceived reliability of AI answers

Overall do you think that answers provided by AI are: (%)



AI users saw answers as more reliable (85%) than non-users (28%).

Perceived reliability by age:

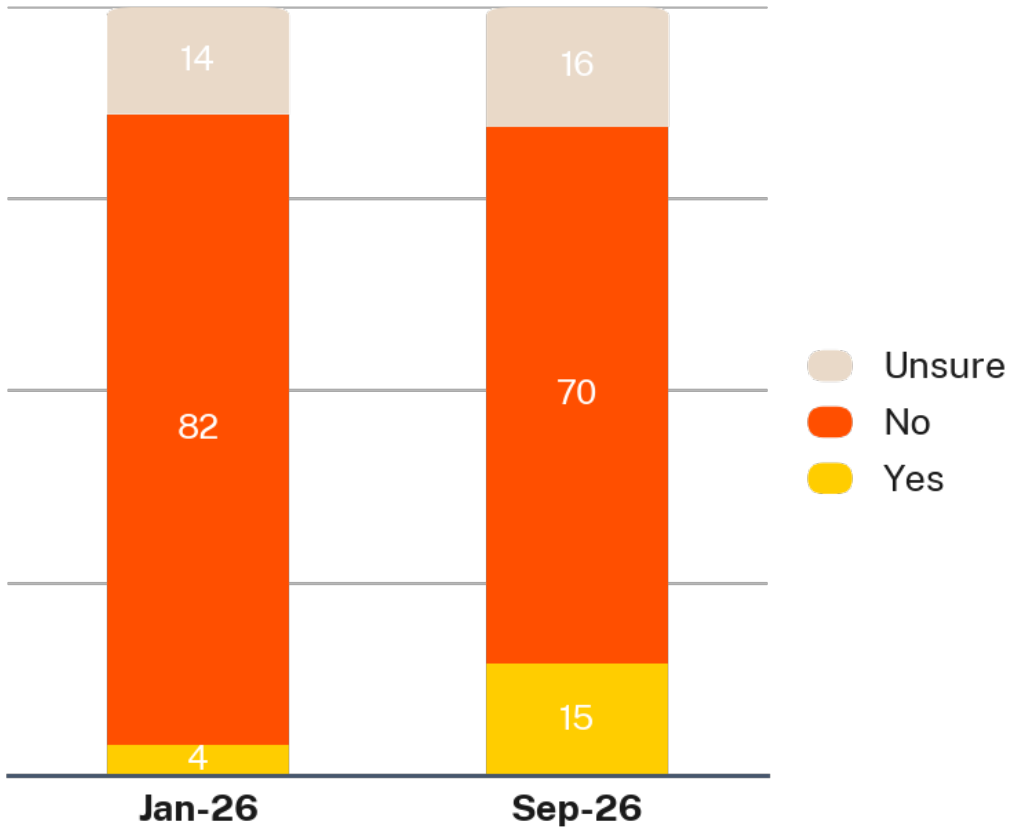
18-29:	74%
30-44:	73%
45-59:	60%
60+:	48%

Men were more likely to see AI as reliable (68%) than women (59%).

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Government policies

Declared awareness of Government AI announcements



In the past few months, have you seen or heard anything about the Australian Government announcing new plans or actions related to AI (artificial intelligence)? (%)

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308 – Base 2: Those who said yes | n=333

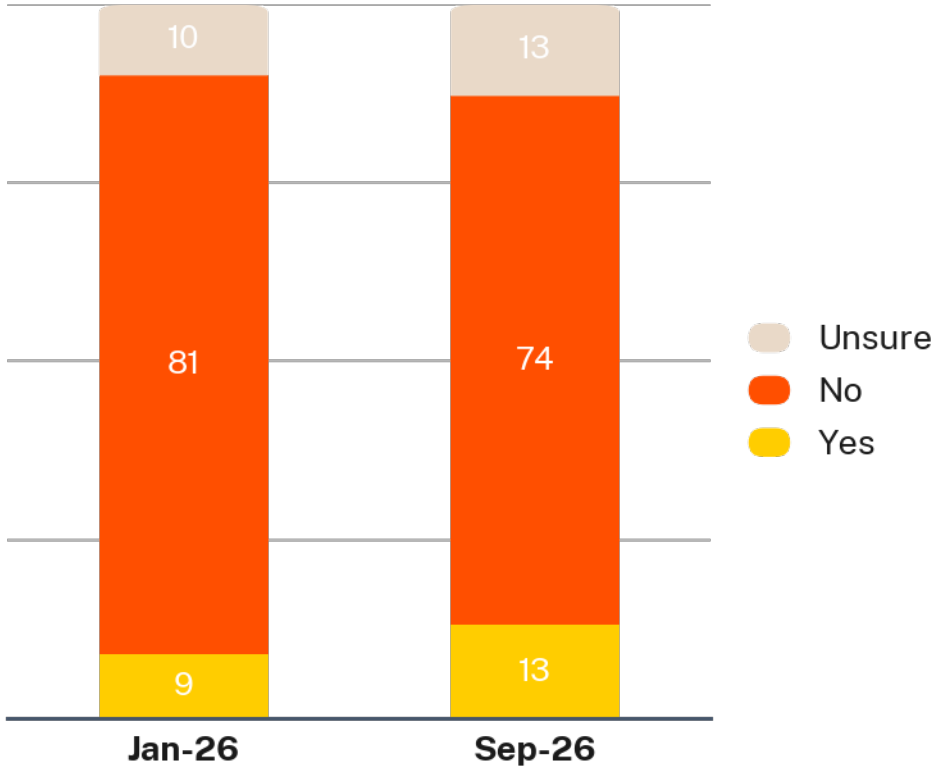
Declared awareness of Government AI announcements

[If yes] What, if anything, do you recall? (%)

Coded theme	%
Regulation and legislation - Regulation, new rules, legislation, laws, controls, stricter rules, governance, safety standards, guidelines, measures, mandatory regulation, introducing laws to control AI use	**27%**
Data centres - Data centres, AI centres, building data centres, new centres being built, data banks, establishing facilities, location of data centres	**17%**
Energy and power requirements - Data centres having to supply own electricity, power requirements, renewable energy, power supply, energy usage, electricity consumption, power shortages	**15%**
Nothing or cannot recall - No, can't recall, don't remember, didn't take much notice	**9%**
Government bodies and oversight - AI department, Office of AI, taskforce, commission, royal commission, government entity to oversee AI, central office within PM and Cabinet	**7%**
Critical or dismissive sentiment - waffle, talkfest, pathetic, lot of talk nothing definite, too late, a disaster in the making	**6%**
Positive or vague sentiment - Good, great, very nice, it's the best, AI is a great help, brings improvement, great new plans, well known brand	**5%**
Leadership and innovation - Australia to be at the forefront of AI, wanting to be a leader in responsible AI, keeping up with the rest of the world, encouraging development	**5%**
Social media and children - Under 16 social media restrictions, banning Facebook for teens	**4%**
Copyright and intellectual property - Copyright, IP rights, protections for creatives, paying for copyright	**3%**
Water usage and resources - Water usage, water requirements, data centres required to provide water	**3%**
Environmental and resource concerns - Environmental impacts, power and water usage concerns	**1%**

Declared awareness - AI Safety Institute or National AI Plan

Before today, have you heard anything about recent announcements from the Australian Government on the Australian AI Safety Institute or National AI Plan? (%)



South Australians were more likely to say they were aware (19%).

Declared awareness by age:

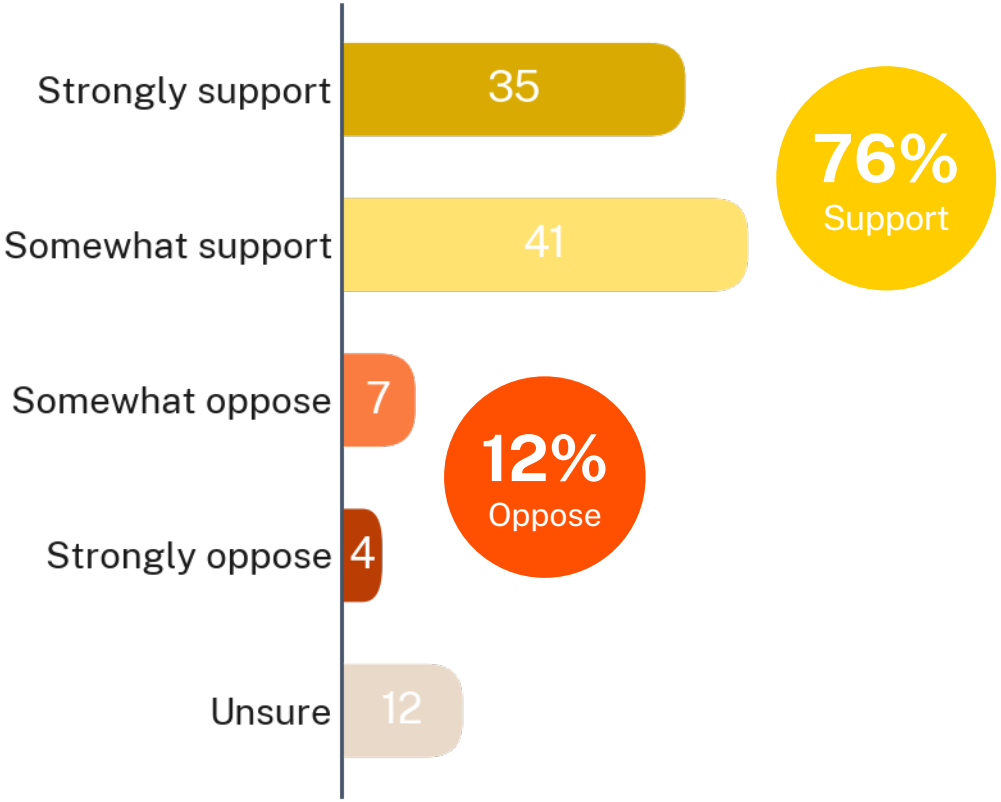
18-29:	24%
30-44:	15%
45-59:	7%
60+:	9%

Men were more likely to say they have heard the announcements (18%) than women (8%).

Base: Australian Adults | Sep-26: n=2,308

Support - AI Safety Institute or National AI Plan

The AI Safety Institute is a new government body to monitor AI risks and help regulators keep people safe. The National AI Plan is a plan to grow Australia's AI industry, build AI skills, and strengthen safety rules. Overall, how strongly do you support or oppose the creation of the Safety Institute and AI Plan? (%)

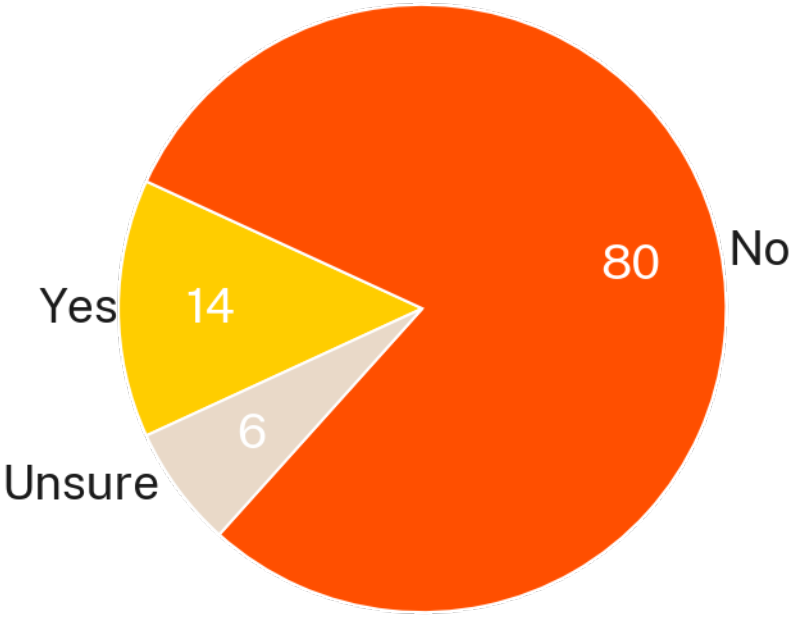


AI users were more supportive (83% support / 9% oppose) than non-users (67% / 16%).

Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

Declared awareness of SA AI Royal Commission proposal

Before today, have you heard anything about the South Australian Government's proposed Royal Commission into Artificial Intelligence? (%)



27% of South Australians had heard of the proposal, well above other states.

Men were more likely to claim they have heard of it (19%) than women (9%).

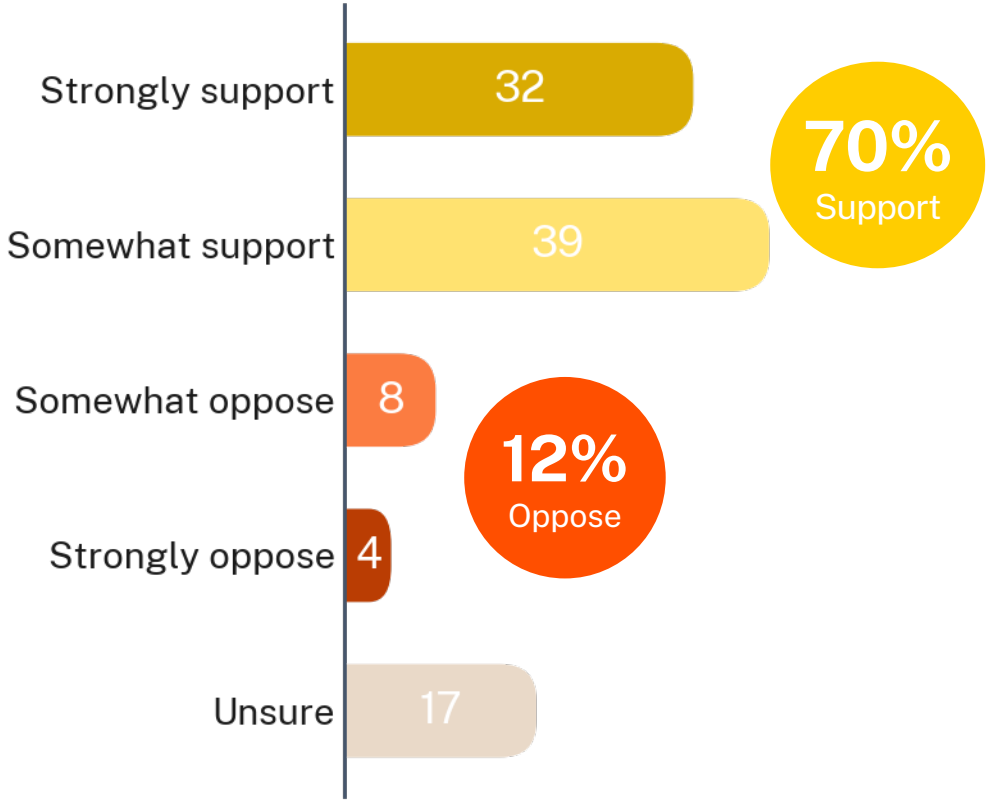
Declared awareness by age:

18-29:	20%
30-44:	17%
45-59:	7%
60+:	11%

AI users were more aware (19%) than non-users (6%).

Support for AI Royal Commission proposal

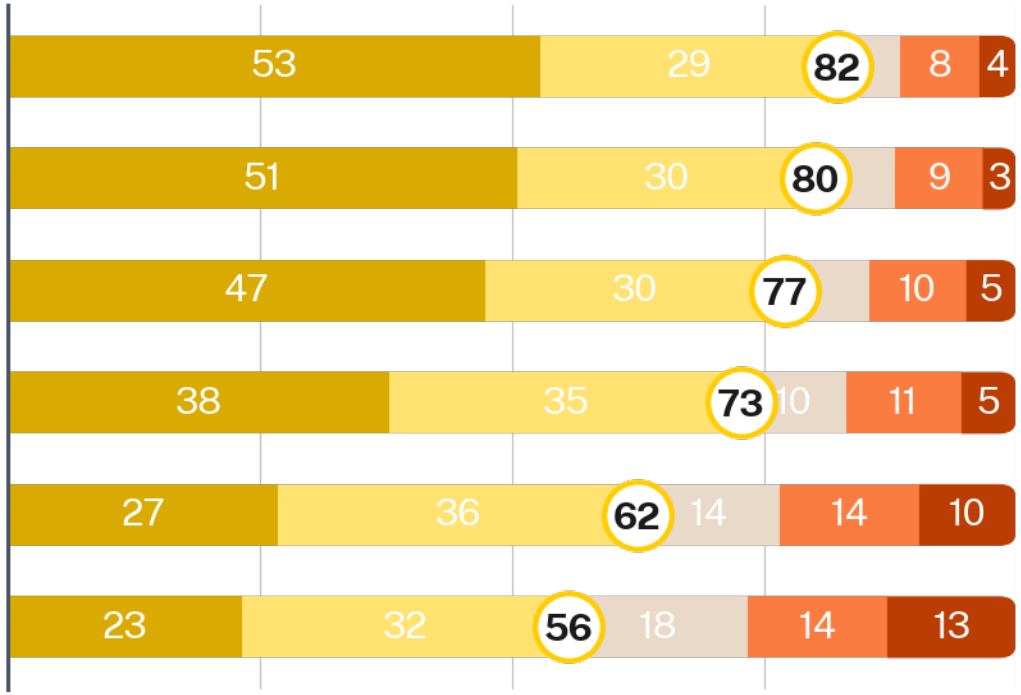
Overall, how strongly do you support or oppose a Royal Commission into Artificial Intelligence? (%)



75% of those who use AI said they were in support, while 12% were opposed.

Support for AI and data centre policies

How much do you support or oppose each of the following? (%)



Setting national standards for AI that companies would be legally required to follow

Requiring large data centres to minimise their water use and pay for any new water infrastructure they need

Requiring large data centres to build enough new renewable generation to put as much energy back into the grid as they take out, and to pay the full cost of connecting to it

Decisions about where large data centres are built should involve the Federal Government, not just state and local government

Setting up a new Office of AI inside the Prime Minister's department to oversee the rules

AI companies should be allowed to train AI on work by Australian writers, artists and journalists, provided they pay for it, but creators should be able to opt-out

Total support | Strongly support | Somewhat support | Unsure | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose

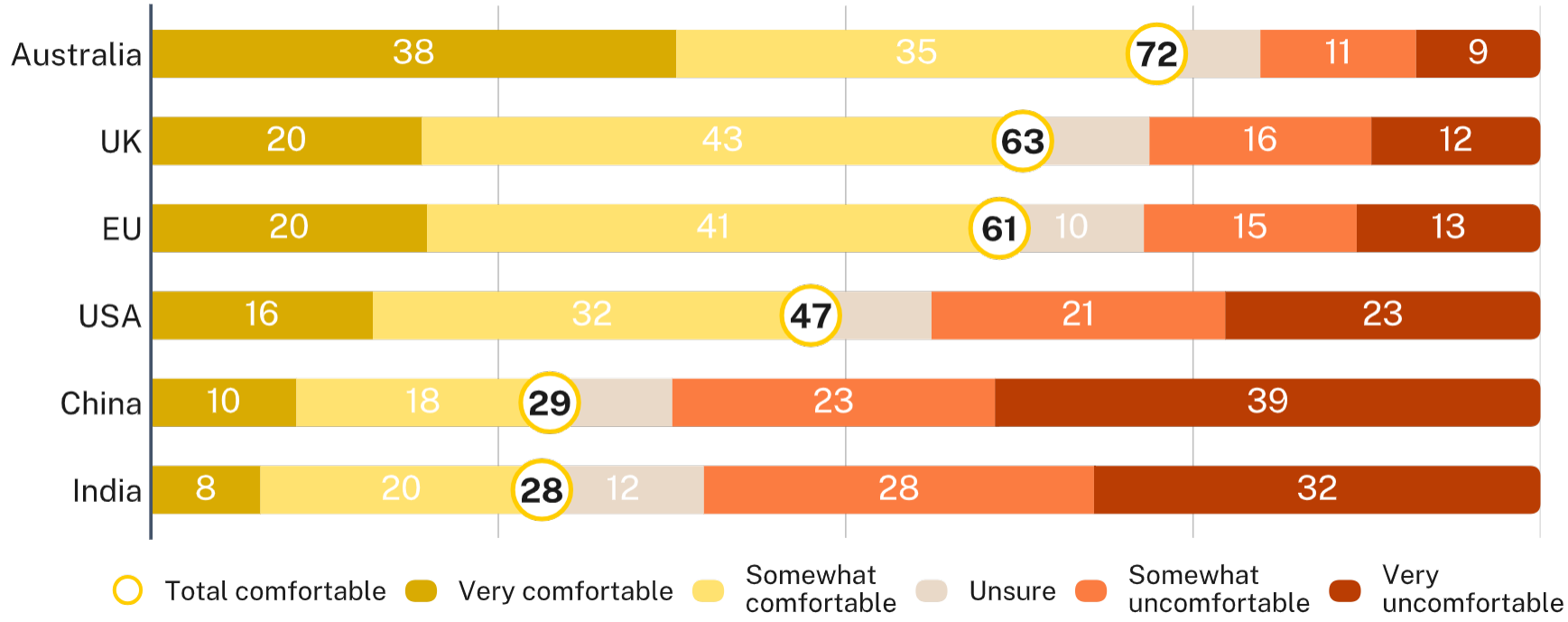
Those aged 60+ were more supportive (77-93%) than younger (under 30) respondents (69-75%).

Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

Trust in AI by country

Comfort with AI models by country of origin

How comfortable would you be using an AI model developed by a company based in each of the following? (%)



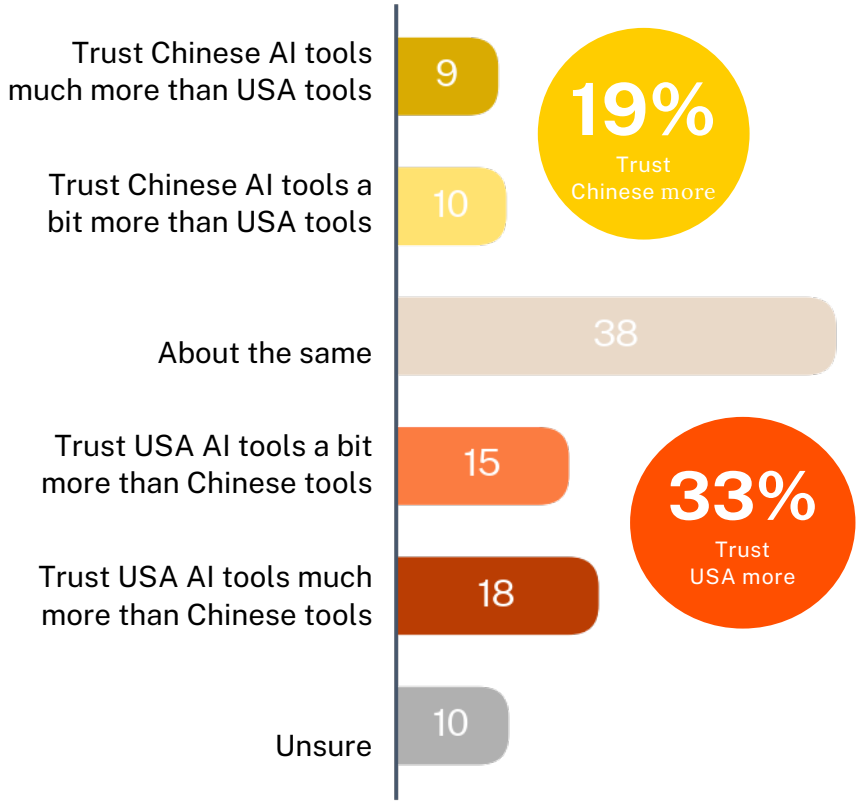
AI users were more comfortable (37-85%) than non-users (11-52%).

Men were more comfortable (34-78%) than women (23-68%).

Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

Relative trust in Chinese versus US AI models

China is building a range of AI models to compete with those from the United States. How much more or less trust would you have in Chinese AI models as compared to those from the United States? (%)



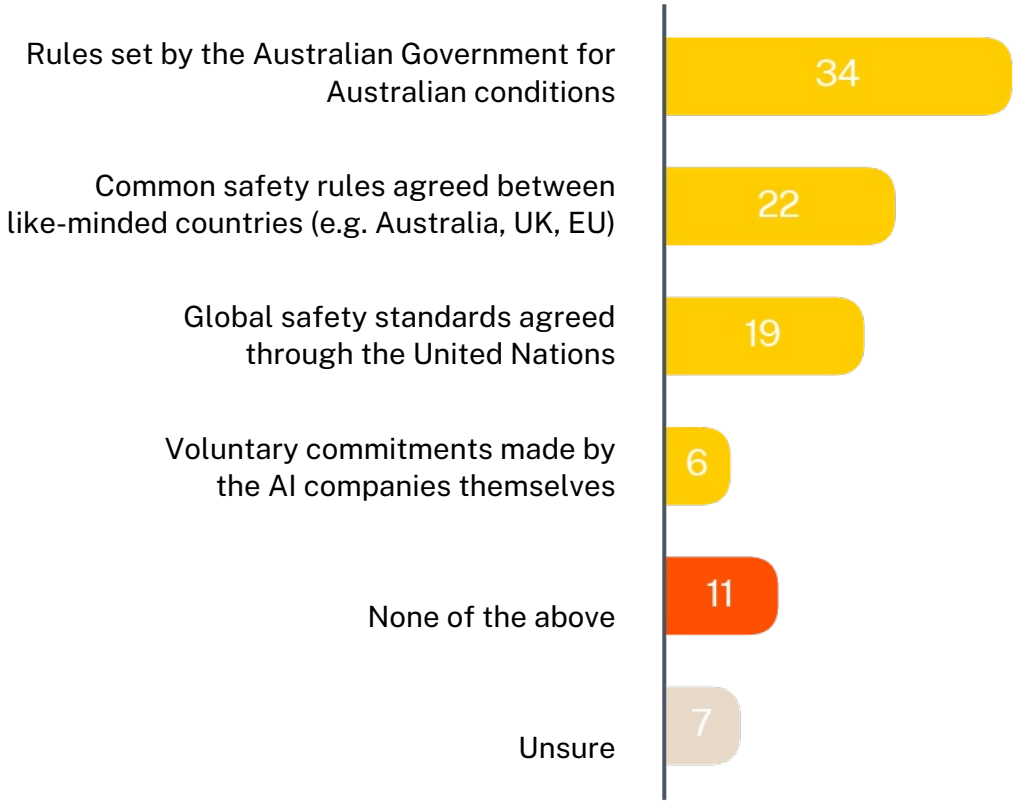
Younger Australians were more trusting of Chinese AI:

18-29:	35% China / 17% USA
30-44:	23% / 26%
45-59:	11% / 38%
60+:	9% / 46%

Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308

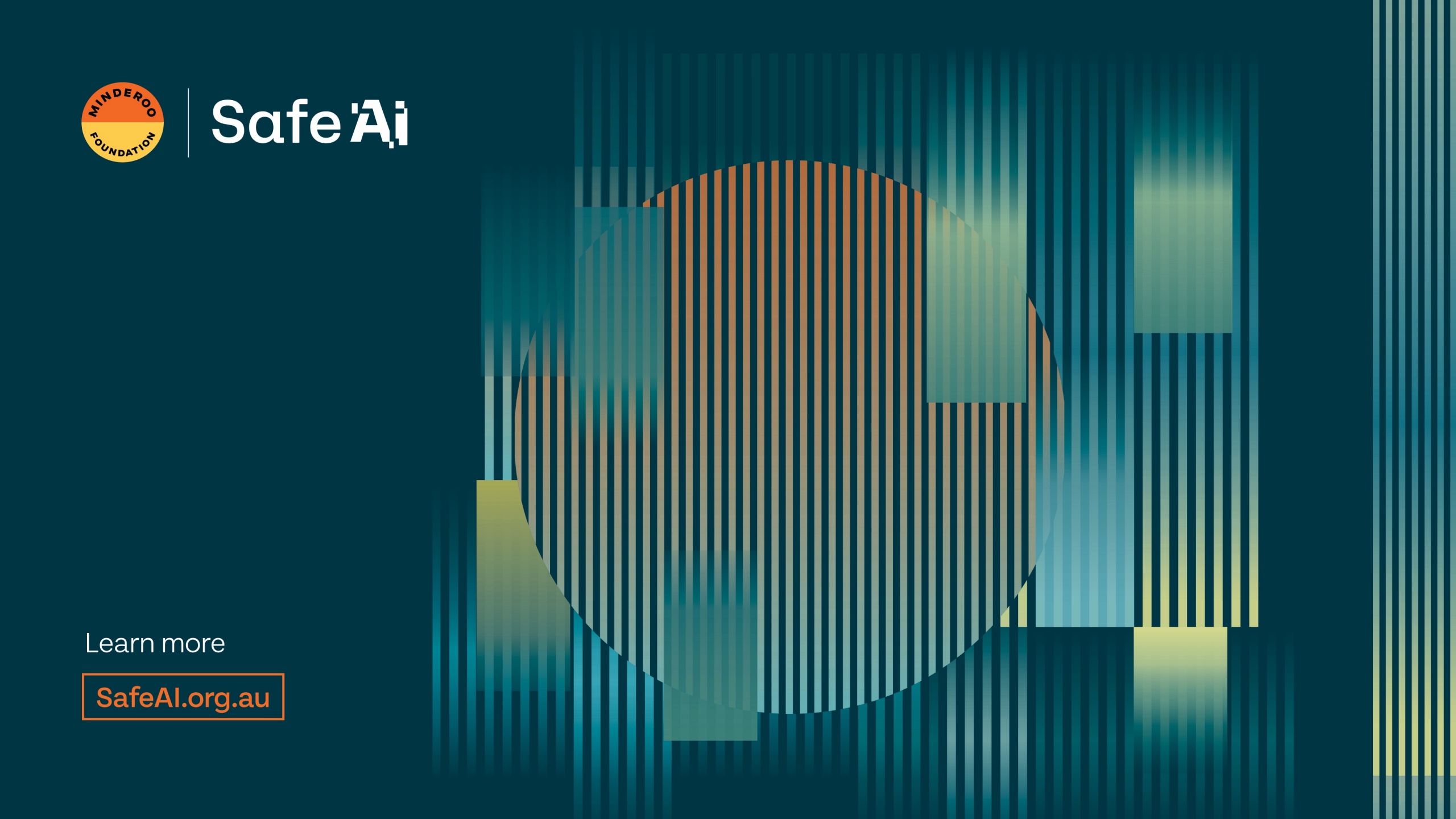
Preferred approaches to ensuring AI safety

Which of the following would give you the most confidence that AI is being used safely in Australia? (%)



Younger respondents were more open to voluntary commitments by AI companies (14% of 18-29s vs 2% of those 60+), while older Australians were more likely to reject all options (16% of 60+ vs 9% of 18-29s).

Base: Australian Adults | n=2,308


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