

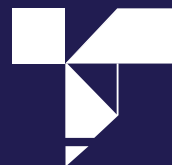
EARNING TRUST

UNLOCKING AI ADOPTION FOR AUSTRALIANS

MAY 2026



POLICY SPOTLIGHT



TECH POLICY
DESIGN INSTITUTE

ABOUT THE TECH POLICY DESIGN INSTITUTE (TPDi)

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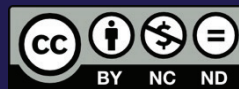


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AUSTRALIAN AI PERSONAS



**TECH
CHAMPION**



**REGULATION-ENABLED
ADOPTER**



**SELF-ASSURED
ADOPTER**



**ENTRENCHED
SCEPTIC**

Learn more about the 4 Australian AI personas, including how they feel about regulation and trust, on page 20.

FOREWORD

It is well established that Australians have low trust in artificial intelligence (AI).¹ This research moves the conversation forward, asking what it would take to increase Australians' trust in AI.

Using a nationally representative survey and focus groups, we tested the hypothesis that well-designed regulation would boost Australians' trust in AI. The answer is resounding: **Australians want the government to act; well-designed regulation would increase their trust and adoption of AI.**

Too often, the AI conversation is framed as a trade-off: move fast and innovate, or slow down and regulate. This framing misses the point.

For most Australians, the issue is not speed – it is trust. Trust that AI will be used responsibly. Trust that there are rules, safeguards and accountability when it matters. And trust that they have genuine choice and agency in how these technologies shape their lives. This trust deficit undermines *discerning* adoption and, if it persists, will likely prevent the benefits of AI from being evenly distributed.

This report is grounded in a simple proposition: trust is an enabling condition for good AI outcomes. **But trust is not a euphemism for mandatory adoption.**

Trust allows individuals to engage with AI where it adds value – and to opt out when they determine it does not. Trust is the basis of the social licence that businesses, government and organisations depend on to leverage the power of these new technologies in innovative and impactful ways.

Without addressing our serious trust deficit, Australia risks drifting into a state of adoption that is at best uneven and constrained. Aside from the possible missed opportunities, this risks fuelling a public disillusionment that undermines the broader social and democratic fabric.

The question is not whether to regulate AI, but how.

This research shows that **a standalone AI Act would not be sufficient to build Australians trust in AI.** They generally favour targeted sector-specific regulatory approaches, or sector-specific regulation *and* an overarching AI Act. When asked what issues were most important to them, **privacy and control of information, jobs and workers' rights, and misinformation were at the top of the list.**

Australia has a narrow but important window to get this right. The choices made now will shape not only how AI is adopted but also how Australians perceive and trust the institutions that govern it.

Done well, this will reinforce a positive cycle: strong governance that builds trust; trust that enables discerning adoption; and well-governed technology that delivers public value and prosperity.

This report delivers the mandate and map for action in this term of parliament – to design and implement the regulation that will earn Australians' trust and shape the future of AI on our terms.

Johanna Weaver

Johanna Weaver
Co-Founder
Tech Policy Design Institute

Zoe Jay Hawkins

Zoe Jay Hawkins
Co-Founder
Tech Policy Design Institute

85%
OF AUSTRALIANS

support government regulation of AI



70%
OF AUSTRALIANS

would be more comfortable with AI being used if they knew there were strong government regulations in place

1%
OF AUSTRALIANS

have 'complete trust' that AI will be used responsibly



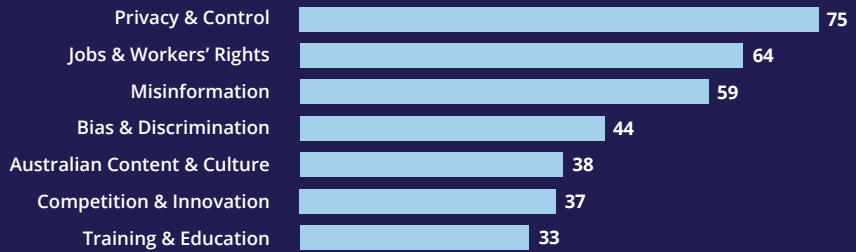
44%
OF AUSTRALIANS

have 'not much' or 'no trust at all' that AI will be used responsibly

49% of women have 'none' or 'not much trust' that AI will be used responsibly, compared to 39% of men



AUSTRALIANS' PRIORITY ISSUES FOR AI REGULATION



GEN Z

has the **most trust** in AI being used responsibly (61% moderate/a lot/complete), and is the group most likely to accept no regulation or industry regulation as enough (16%)

BOOMERS

have the **least trust** in AI being used responsibly (44% have moderate, a lot or complete trust) and is the group most likely to want government regulation of some kind (91%)

OLDER AUSTRALIANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO WANT REGULATION

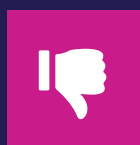


with every year of age increasing regulation demand by 1%



STRONG SECTOR-SPECIFIC LAWS

is Australians' leading preference for government regulation, above general overarching laws

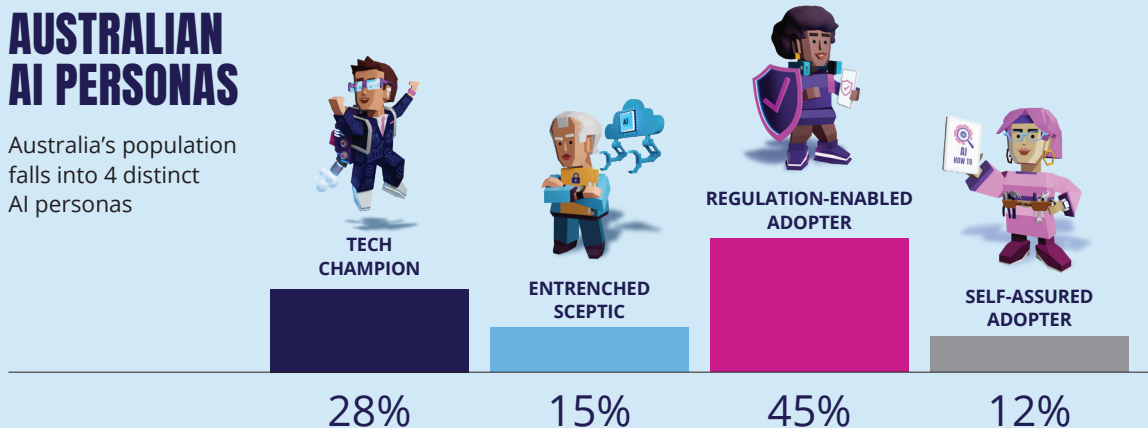


2%
OF AUSTRALIANS

oppose government regulation

AUSTRALIAN AI PERSONAS

Australia's population falls into 4 distinct AI personas



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite mainstream uptake of AI tools and growing integration across everyday services, Australians have low trust in AI. This is well established in existing research: Australia ranks 42nd out of 47 countries for trust in AI,² and nearly half (46%) of Australians say the risks of AI outweigh the benefits.³ Our study found that only 1% of Australians have complete trust that AI will be used responsibly.

As the Australian Government 2025 National AI Plan argues, ‘we cannot seize the innovation and economic opportunities of AI if people do not trust it’.⁴

Australia needs to move beyond quantifying its AI trust problem and identify levers for change.

This foundational policy question demands an evidence-based answer: can well-designed regulation increase public trust in AI – and with it, discerning adoption?

To provide this evidence base, TPDi commissioned a nationally representative survey of Australians and focus groups to examine public attitudes toward AI, trust, and the role of regulation. The findings have clear implications for regulation in Australia’s implementation of the National AI Plan.

Key findings

The mandate is overwhelming. Australians want AI regulation, and that regulation would build trust. Most Australians (85%) support government action on AI regulation, as opposed to leaving industry to self-regulate. Of those surveyed, 70% say that government AI regulation would also make them more comfortable with AI use in Australian society. Only 2% oppose any new regulation. This is not a marginal or contested finding. It is a decisive public mandate to act.

Public demand for regulation is based on knowledge, not ignorance. Demographics such as income, gender and education have no statistically significant effect on support for regulation. What matters is Australians’ awareness of specific AI risks. Exposure to risk information nearly triples the likelihood that someone views regulation as a prerequisite for trust and adoption. The public’s call for action is not based on ignorance. Those who understand AI and its risks are the biggest supporters of regulation.

Context is everything. Responses to case studies reveal that trust in AI and the value of regulation shift dramatically depending on the sector. In law enforcement – where AI can be part of delivering a public good – regulation and trust reinforce each other. Conversely, for ‘consumer-focused’ AI tools (like generative AI), trust and regulation act as substitutes, with practical utility substituting an individuals’ need for regulation, especially for confident users. We call this the ‘public interest – practical utility’ paradox. Australians don’t support standalone one-size-fits-all regulation – like an AI Act. Australians favour either sector-specific laws or a hybrid of sector-specific and an AI Act.

Privacy and control of information, workers’ rights and misinformation are the issues of most concern. When asked in the survey what specific issues AI regulation should address, Australians identified protecting and retaining control over their personal information as their number one priority, with a relative importance index of 75 out of a possible 100. This is followed by protecting Australian jobs and the rights of workers (64) and preventing the spread of AI-generated misinformation (59). AI misuse and illegal activity, deepfakes, fraud, and harmful use of AI, especially regarding children, were other prominent concerns raised in the focus groups.

Australia has 4 distinct AI personas. Building on TPDi's *Tech Policy Philosophies*,⁵ this research reveals 4 segments of the Australian population as distinct AI personas. Aggregate statistics can signal a mandate for action, but they do not explain how to communicate policy effectively across the population. A persona-based approach helps bridge this gap. This research identified 4 distinct population segments:

- **regulation-enabled adopters** (45%) are the persuadable majority – open to AI but waiting for clear safeguards
- **tech champions** (28%) see regulation as an economic enabler
- **entrenched sceptics** (15%) want protection, not AI promotion
- **self-assured adopters** (12%) prefer to navigate AI on their own terms.

This is bigger than AI. How Australians feel about AI regulation reflects what they expect from government. Trust in AI governance is a proxy for trust in democracy. Getting this right matters well beyond the technology itself. This is about shaping Australia's future.

These findings provide a clear mandate and practical direction for policy (Table 1). Government should act with confidence; not only to address risks but to unlock trust and enable safe adoption for Australians.

What the findings reveal government should do

- **Act now, with confidence.** Frame AI regulation as responding to public demand and unlocking adoption. In this term of federal parliament, use the National AI Plan process to follow through on privacy reform, protection of workers' rights, and digital duty of care. Raise public awareness of where relevant regulation is already in place, and fund regulators to enforce existing laws.
- **Take a targeted trust-building approach.** In addition to the topic-specific reforms (like privacy), prioritise sector-specific reforms where regulation has the greatest trust impact: law enforcement, education and healthcare. Calibrate to the specifics of each domain. Clearly signal that every government minister has responsibility to ensure laws within their portfolio are fit for purpose in the AI age.
- **Consider a Coordinated AI Regulation (CAIR) Act.** Not as a single standalone regulatory instrument (like in the EU), but rather to set broad baseline expectations and ensure a coordinated and approach to sector-specific regulation.⁶ This will deliver regulatory consistency and certainty for industry, while helping to build trust, confidence and discerning adoption among Australians.
- **Prioritise AI literacy and inclusion.** Many Australians are already using AI in more ways than they realise, so equipping people with basic understandings of these tools is urgent, but so too is ensuring digitally excluded communities are not left further behind. Literacy efforts should be paired with affordable access and community support. Moving people to a general understanding of AI, including its risks, will also activate further support for regulation, which in turn will build the trust and confidence that underlies discerning adoption.
- **Tailor public messaging to each cohort.** Australia's 4 AI personas will respond to differentiated messages. A broad coalition is achievable – but it requires meeting each group where it is. A persona-based approach helps bridge this gap.
- **Measure progress.** Establish national baseline trust metrics now and undertake longitudinal monitoring. Evidence-based governance requires evidence over time.

The recommendations above reflect the heart of effective tech policy design: grounding decisions in evidence, responding to public expectations, and translating both into practical, actionable policy that delivers trust, adoption, public value and prosperity.

Table 1: Summary of key findings and actions for government

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS	WHAT GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO
Australians are asking for AI regulation The mandate is decisive.	Act now. Treat AI regulation as an enabler of trust and adoption. Progress priority reforms and fund regulators to enforce existing law.
Support is informed, not fearful. Knowledge and understanding drives demand for AI regulation.	Build AI literacy. Equip Australians with practical understanding of AI and its risks.
Three issues dominate. Privacy. Jobs. Misinformation.	Start where it counts. Sequence reforms to address priority harms first and build early trust (privacy, workers' rights, digital duty of care).
Context drives trust. A standalone one-size-fits-all approach (like the EU AI Act) is not sufficient to build Australia's trust in AI. Australians favour sector-specific approaches, or sector-specific approaches <i>and</i> an AI Act with overarching general protections.	Calibrate rules to real-world use in sectors like healthcare, education and law enforcement. Consider a Coordinated AI Regulation (CAIR) Act, not as a standalone solution, but to deliver baseline protections, coordination and consistency across sector-specific regulation.
Australia is not one audience. Four distinct AI personas have different motivations for supporting AI regulation.	Communicate with precision. Tailor messaging to different cohorts.
This is bigger than AI. Trust in AI reflects trust in government.	Lead with legitimacy. Treat AI governance as core to democratic trust and institutional credibility.
Trust must be built and tracked. It will not hold without effort.	Measure what matters. Set baseline trust metrics and track progress over time.

Trust is the lever – pull it with smart, targeted regulation, and Australia can turn AI from a source of concern into a driver of confident adoption and national advantage.

INTRODUCTION

Trust in AI is not a technical question; it is a test for democratic governance – of whether institutions can set credible rules, enforce them, and give people real agency over how technology shapes their lives.

As Australia implements its National AI Plan, understanding how different segments of the Australian population perceive and respond to AI and its regulation is essential to unlock trust and adoption.

Why trust matters

As the Australian Government 2025 National AI Plan argues, ‘we cannot seize the innovation and economic opportunities of AI if people do not trust it’.⁷ It is well established that Australians have low trust in AI. Australia ranks 42nd in a 47-country study on the perceived trustworthiness of AI systems, with only 36% of people willing to trust AI.⁸ National ambitions to ‘capture the opportunities’ and ‘spread the benefits’ will be constrained unless this trust deficit is addressed.

Australians’ hesitancy is not unfounded. Irresponsible development and unbridled adoption of AI can create real risks – from privacy violations and safety failures, to discrimination, misinformation and job disruption.⁹ The policy challenge, therefore, is not simply enabling adoption, but enabling discerning adoption. This requires trust.

Adoption is shaped by trust and confidence – terms that are often used interchangeably but are distinct.

- **Adoption** refers to whether individuals and organisations move beyond experimentation to meaningfully use AI in practice, including the uptake and integration of AI into processes and decision-making to deliver measurable value. Adoption is not uniform: it can be unconscious (unknowing), blind (unquestioning use), conditional (dependent on safeguards such as regulation), or discerning (informed, selective use based on trust, supported by training, and guided by established governance practices).¹⁰
- **Confidence** relates to expectations of capability and reliability. It asks whether a technology will work as intended – whether it is useful, usable and delivers value in practice. Established technology adoption research shows that individuals are more likely to adopt technologies they perceive as useful and easy to use, highlighting the role of confidence in driving technology uptake.¹¹ Confidence is also a product of whether an individual feels equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to use AI technologies.
- **Trust** (this report’s focus) relates to expectations of responsible governance and accountability. It asks whether institutions and organisations will use this technology in good faith, in ways that are responsible and aligned with public interest. Research shows that public trust is strongly influenced by the quality of governance systems, including clear rules and oversight, highlighting the role of regulation in enabling adoption of new technologies.¹²

Both confidence and trust are essential ingredients to drive adoption. Australians need to know the technology is useful, reliable and convenient (confidence), need to be comfortable that they can use it safely (trust), and can then make an informed choice whether to adopt (agency). Trust is a system-level condition, shaping whether Australians are willing to engage with the benefits of AI. This report therefore focuses on trust as the foundational architecture for enabling discerning adoption.

Digital inclusion is an important part of the adoption challenge. Australians who face barriers to digital access, affordability, confidence, language support or accessibility are less likely to benefit from AI and may experience its risks differently.¹³ Trust in AI therefore cannot be separated from, and only amplifies the importance of, ongoing digital inclusion efforts.

Regulation has a history of building trust and enabling adoption.

Regulation is often framed as an inhibitor to adoption. Yet, history shows that well-designed regulation can enable, rather than constrain, adoption. In sectors such as food and vehicle safety, pharmaceuticals and aviation, clear rules and accountability frameworks have helped build public trust, create a level playing field and unlock widespread use. AI is no different.

Unlike many of these earlier technologies, however, AI harms are often less immediate, less visible and often less physical. Risks such as privacy loss, bias or manipulation may be harder for users to detect. This makes AI literacy and public awareness especially important to building informed trust and discerning adoption.

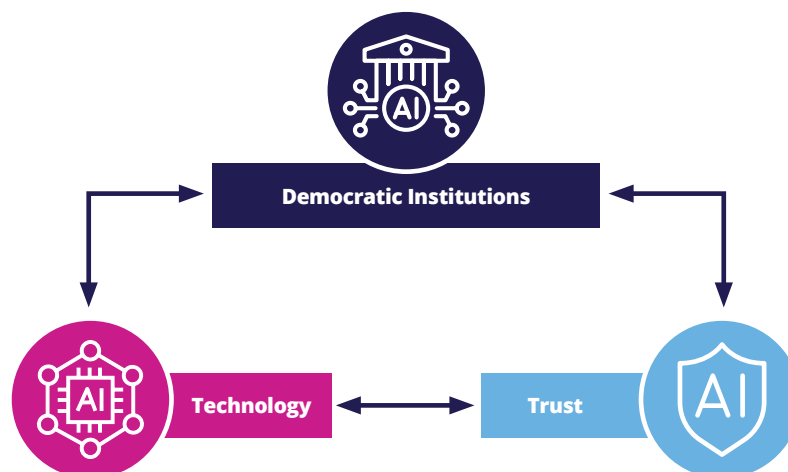
Trust is not a euphemism for mandatory adoption.

The goal is not universal use of AI, but discerning adoption. Individuals should be able to adopt AI where it adds value – and opt out where they deem it does not. Without trust, that choice is not meaningful. The goal is for Australians to trust that AI will be deployed responsibly and to have sufficient levels of AI literacy to make their own informed choices.

Increasing trust is important for democracy.

Trust in AI governance is a litmus test for the health of a democracy. It reflects not only how Australians perceive the technology but also their trust in the institutions deploying and governing it.¹⁴ Democracy, trust and technology form a reinforcing cycle (Figure 1). Effective governance builds trust. Trust enables adoption. And well-governed technology can strengthen democratic institutions. When this cycle breaks down, the reverse is also true. Policy choices determine whether this is a vicious or virtuous cycle.

Figure 1: A reinforcing cycle



Research methodology

This report is based on a national survey of 2,340 Australians alongside 3 focus groups to explore public attitudes toward AI, trust, and the role of regulation in its adoption.

The study examines general perceptions of AI and its regulation, and its application in 4 key sectors: healthcare, education, law enforcement and creative industries. It also explores perceptions about regulation and the role of government. TPDi designed this study and analysed its findings. The field research was conducted by The Insight Centre in November 2025.

The research examines a critical question: does well-designed regulation increase Australians' trust in AI?

- Survey data from 2,340 Australians (nationally representative sample) with a margin of error of ± 2.12 and a confidence level of 95%.
- Three focus group discussions exploring nuanced perspectives.
- General questions about approaches and priorities for AI regulation.
- Sectoral analysis across education, healthcare, law enforcement and creative industries.
- Experimental design: control group versus information-treatment group (exposed to risk factors).
- Persona development based on clustering analysis.

As with most online panel surveys and focus group recruitment methods, this research is more likely to capture Australians with reliable digital access and sufficient confidence to participate in online research. People experiencing higher levels of digital exclusion may therefore be underrepresented, despite demographic quotas across age, gender, geography, socioeconomic status and education.

This means the findings most directly reflect the attitude of digitally connected Australians. However, these insights remain highly policy relevant as this cohort make up approximately 80% of the Australian population according to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index.¹⁵ The research also provides important insights into how a general understanding of AI shapes trust, confidence and willingness to adopt. These findings help identify policy levers that can support broader inclusion over time, noting that these findings only amplify the importance of ongoing digital inclusion efforts.

More information on the research methodology is available on request.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF AI AND ITS REGULATION

'I'm quite comfortable with [AI]. I don't think I use it to its full capacity but am always keen to learn to use it more so.'

Gen Y/X and Workers Focus Group

'It feels a bit dystopian.'

Gen Z and Students Focus Group

'Remember we had a Royal Commission into banking because they couldn't be trusted to regulate themselves ... Strong regulations at the start will get a better end result.'

Baby Boomers and Retirees Focus Group

'I didn't realise until I read the examples that I've actually been using AI ... unwittingly I've been using AI.'

Baby Boomers and Retirees Focus Group

'AI makes life easier.'

Gen X and Workers Focus Group

'It definitely needs to be regulated.'

Gen Z and Students Focus Group

'I would have concerns about the AI companies themselves setting their own terms about what constitutes as safe as opposed to unsafe.'

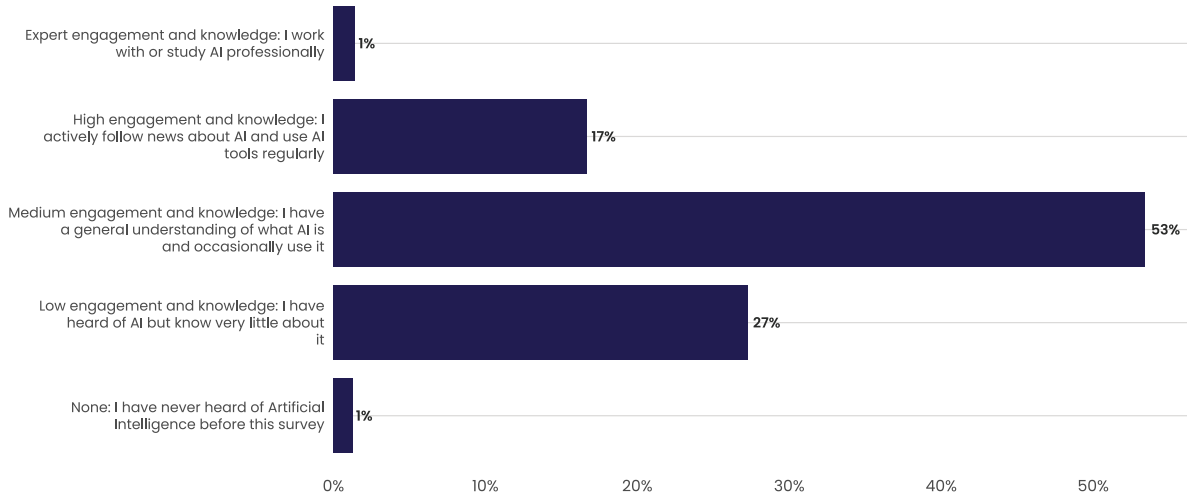
Gen Y/X and Workers Focus Group



Australians' knowledge of AI

Most Australians (53%) report a general level of knowledge of and engagement with AI, while 17% report levels of high engagement involving actively following developments and using AI tools regularly. However, 27% have low engagement and knowledge of AI. Just 1% of Australians are experts working professionally with AI – while another 1% had never even heard of AI (Figure 2).

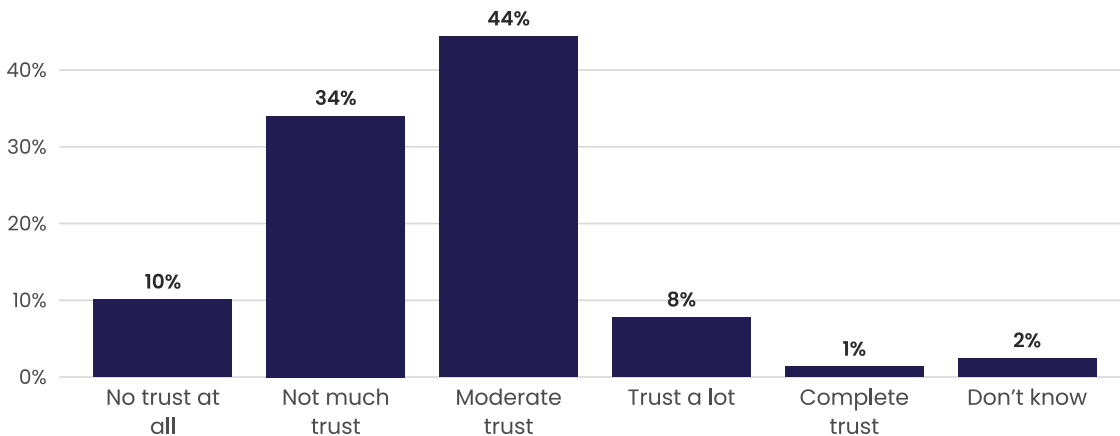
Figure 2: Engagement with and knowledge of AI



Australians have concerns about AI

Nearly half of Australians (44%) have 'not much trust' or 'no trust at all' that AI will be used responsibly. While another 44% have moderate trust. Only 1% of Australians have complete trust that AI will be used responsibly (Figure 3).

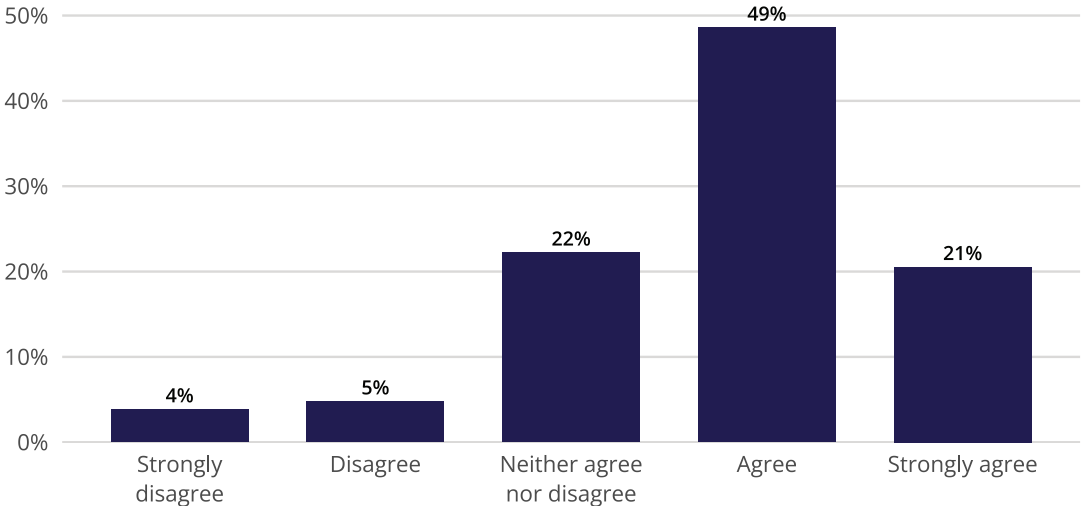
Figure 3: Levels of trust in AI



Regulation increases Australians' comfort to adopt AI

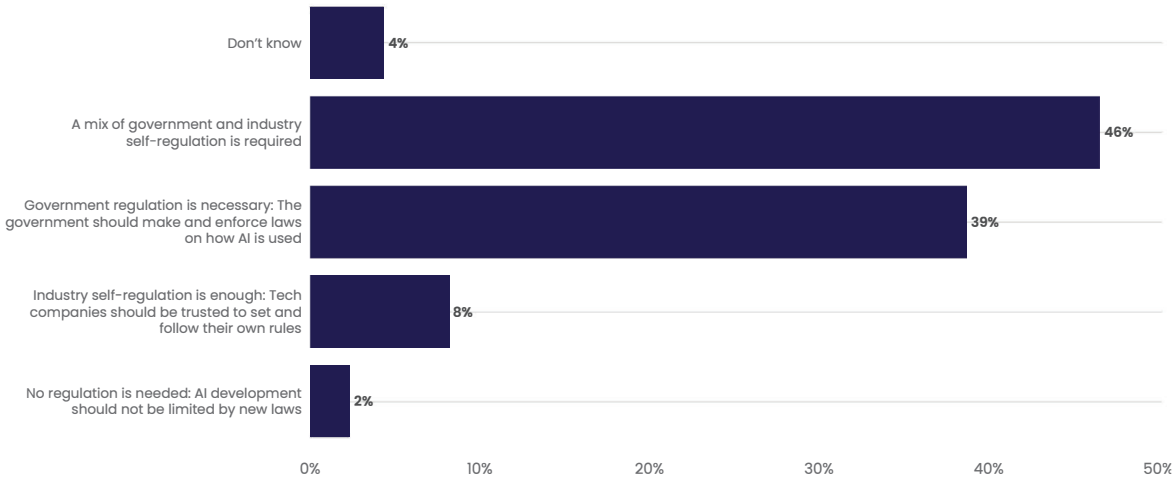
Most Australians say strong government oversight is a prerequisite for their trust in AI. A combined 70% of respondents agree (49%) or strongly agree (21%) that they would be more comfortable with AI being used in Australian society if they knew there were strong government regulations in place (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Comfort with AI if supported by strong government regulation



Australians strongly favour AI regulation with 85% in favour of government action, with 39% saying government regulation is necessary and 46% preferring a mix of government regulation and industry self-regulation. Only 8% believe industry self-regulation is enough, while 2% oppose the need for any new regulation altogether (Figure 5).

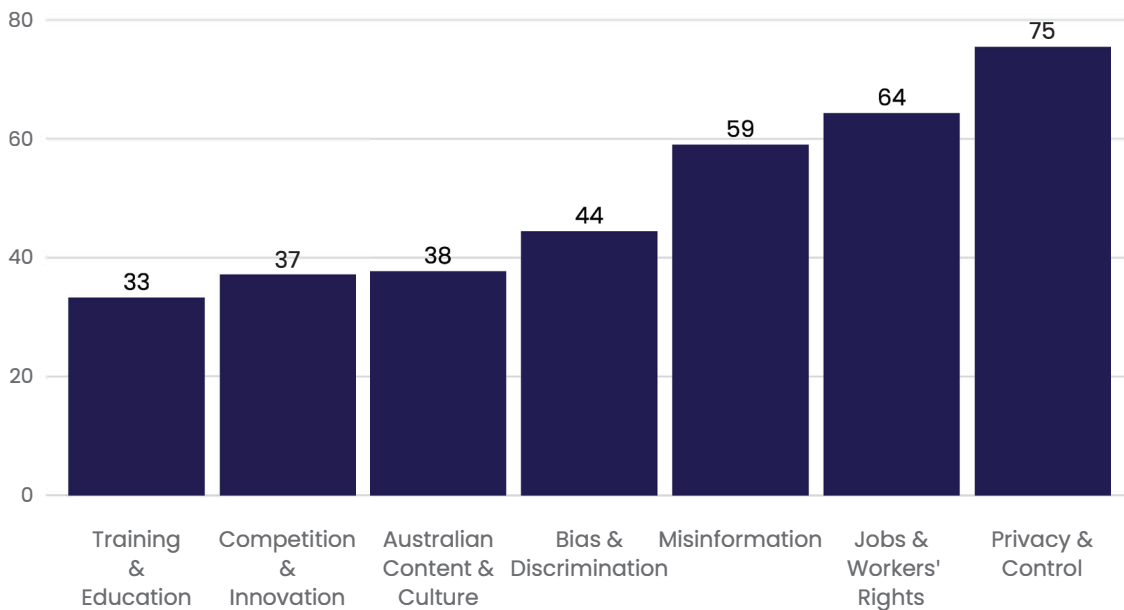
Figure 5: Levels of support for different approaches to AI regulation



When asked what specific issues AI regulation should address, Australians identified enhancing privacy and control as their number one priority, with a relative importance index of 75 out of a possible 100. This is followed by jobs and workers’ rights (64), while online safety related concerns such as misinformation (59) and bias and discrimination (44) came third and fourth. Comparatively lower priority was given to Australian content and culture (38), and competition and innovation (37), while training and education was ranked the lowest at 33.

Australians ranked privacy and control (75) as twice as important as competition and innovation (37), suggesting that Australians are more concerned with being protected from AI’s data privacy and security risks than they are with the country’s speed of AI development (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Priority issues for regulation (Weighted mean score (0-100))



Priority issues for AI regulation organically identified in the focus groups included AI misuse and illegal activity (such as deepfakes), data security and privacy, and job displacement. This includes online safety related concerns. For example, AI use for confusing and conning people or enabling fraud, and serious concerns about AI being used harmfully, especially regarding children (including people’s photos being manipulated and spread online often referred to as ‘deepfakes’). This risk of generative AI producing incorrect or inaccurate information was also a persistent organic concern in the focus groups.

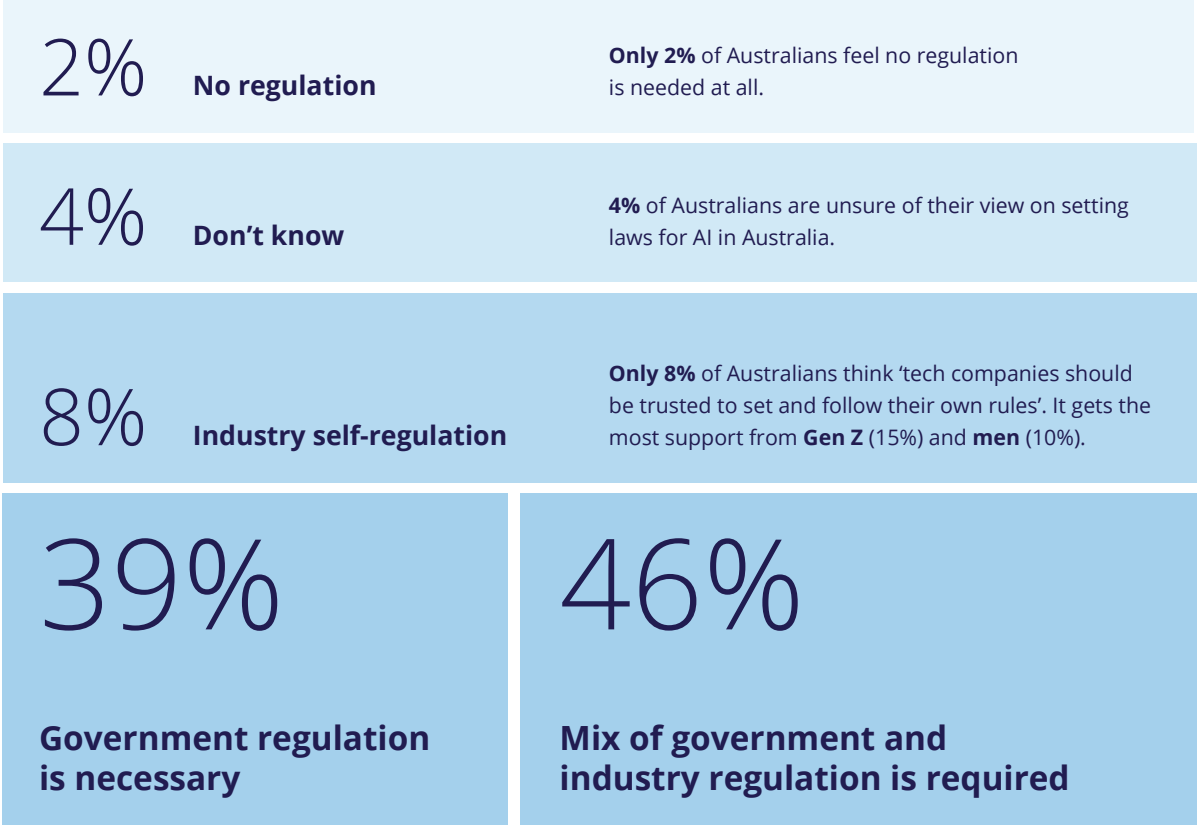
‘If somebody hacks into the system, the information can be misused. But that’s the same with anything. It happens with Medicare. It doesn’t matter what you’ve got. When you’re online, you’re exposed to being hacked anyway.’

Baby Boomers and Retirees Focus Group



KEY FINDING: Most Australians (85%) want some form of government AI regulation (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Australian views on setting laws for AI



SECTOR-SPECIFIC CASE STUDIES

Respondents were taken through sector-specific scenarios that explore their trust and comfort with the use of AI in different areas of life. To explore the impact of context and education, only half the respondents were shown risk information relevant to the scenario. See Appendix 1 for information on how this risk information was provided, and how this influenced respondents' answers.



Law enforcement

A real threat to public safety has been made during a football grand final game. Real-time use of AI facial recognition by police remains illegal in Australia. However, police use AI to analyse live camera feeds for checking objects instead of people's faces (looking for suspicious bags, etc.). A number of suspicious bags are identified and seized by the police.

Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas: *After the event, the football stadium provides the police with copies of all recordings. Police use AI facial recognition when reviewing the replay footage. A number of suspects are identified and arrested. The AI has found more suspicious objects with some people because of the bias in how it was trained.*

How comfortable would you be with this AI system being used in this scenario?

Now, imagine the government has put laws in place to regulate or limit how police use AI, such as strict limits on what data can be analysed and how long it can be stored. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this scenario?



Creative Industries

AI tools now let anyone create professional-looking images, music and written articles just by typing in a brief description of what they want to show or write. Australian small businesses are adopting it quickly because it is much cheaper and quicker than hiring a person.

Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas: *The AI was built by copying millions of creations from Australian artists and writers without asking their permission or paying them. Because the AI is so cheap to use, it becomes much harder for human creators to find paid work.*

How comfortable are you with AI tools like this being widely used in Australia?

Now, imagine the government has put rules in place to regulate how AI is used, including that creatives must agree and be paid for their work that is used to train AI. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this scenario?



Healthcare

Imagine your local doctor's office offers a new AI system for its patients. Before you see the doctor, the AI looks at your medical history and symptoms to give the doctor an initial assessment of what might be wrong. The information (with your name removed) is passed on to researchers to help develop new and more effective treatments for your medical condition (like new medicines, or better ways to treat and diagnose your condition).

Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas: *As part of its service, the AI company keeps your health information (with your name removed) and also sells it to private insurance and pharmaceutical companies. This would allow them to target people like you with products or advertising and could then be used to decide the future cost of private health insurance for people like you.*

How comfortable would you be with this AI system being used as part of your healthcare?

Now, imagine the government has put laws in place to regulate how this kind of AI is used, such as strict laws that allow you to opt out of AI services. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this healthcare scenario?



Education

Imagine Australian schools begin using a new AI platform that creates a personal learning plan for every student. It tracks how each student studies, what topics they struggle with, and how they learn best. Using this information, it tailors lessons for each student. Students at schools that implement this system are more engaged, and get higher marks.

Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas: *This information is saved in a permanent 'learning profile' for each student as they grow up. When a student applies for university, or a job, the profile is shared with universities or employers and could be used to decide whether to accept a student for a course or hire someone for a job.*

How comfortable would you be with this AI system being used in Australia's education system?

Now, imagine the government has put laws in place to regulate how this kind of AI is used, such as strict laws that allow you to request your data is deleted when you finish school. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this education scenario?

Variations across sectors

Trust in AI varies significantly by sector. Unsurprisingly, Australians are more comfortable with AI in some contexts than others. While regulation increases trust across the board, the strength of this trust relationship varies by sector. See Appendix 1 for detailed findings for each scenario and Table 2 for a summary of insights.

Table 2: Summary of case study findings

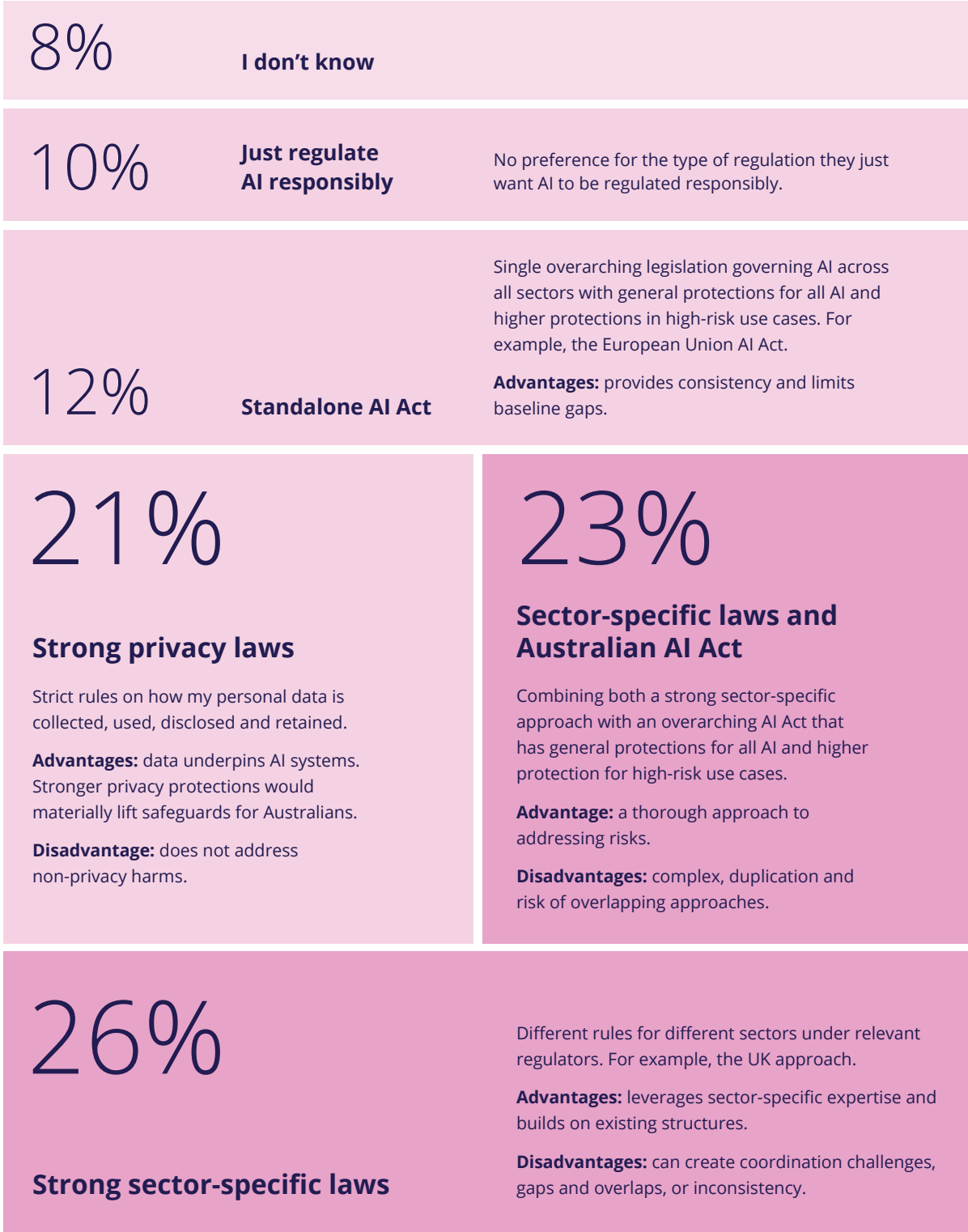
INSIGHT	LAW ENFORCEMENT	CREATIVE INDUSTRIES	HEALTHCARE	EDUCATION
Current comfort	Most Australians (74%) are neutral, comfortable or very comfortable with AI being used in law enforcement for clearly defined public safety purposes.	Australians are least comfortable with AI use in creative industries (with 53% reporting uncomfortable or very uncomfortable).	Australians have mixed comfort levels with the risks and benefits of AI in healthcare (48% neutral, comfortable or very comfortable; 49% uncomfortable or very uncomfortable).	Many Australians are comfortable with AI use in education, with 62% neutral, comfortable or very comfortable.
Comfort increase through regulation	Government regulation would make 66% of Australians more comfortable with AI use in law enforcement.	Government regulation would make 55% of Australians more comfortable with AI in the creative industries.	Government regulation would make 59% of Australians more comfortable with AI use in healthcare.	Government regulation would make 63% of Australians more comfortable with AI use in education.
Comfort decrease through risk information	Comfort levels drop 13% when risk information is received in the law enforcement scenario.	Australians exposed to risk information are twice as likely to be very uncomfortable with AI use on creative industries.	When warned about privacy risks, even users who were highly comfortable with the technology demanded strict laws in a healthcare setting.	Receiving risk information has notable impact in this education use case (40% comfortable drops to 23% comfortable).
Views on regulation	Overall, 85% of Australians want to see some kind of government regulation of AI.			
Specific preference of regulatory approach	Leading preference is strong sector-specific laws and an Australian AI Act (24%) , followed by 23% with a preference for privacy reform, and 20% preferring sector-specific laws.	Leading preference is strong laws specific to AI and copyright – but split between those who prioritise payment of creatives (35%) and those who prioritise innovation (20%).	Leading preference is for strong sector-specific laws (28%) , followed by a tie between strong sector-specific laws <i>and</i> an Australian AI Act (23%) and privacy (23%).	Leading preference is strong sector-specific laws (29%) , followed by strong sector-specific laws <i>and</i> an Australian AI Act (22%) and privacy (19%).

Australians' preferred approach to AI regulation

Across the 4 sector-specific scenarios, Australians were asked what kind of regulation would most increase their comfort with AI being used in each scenario.

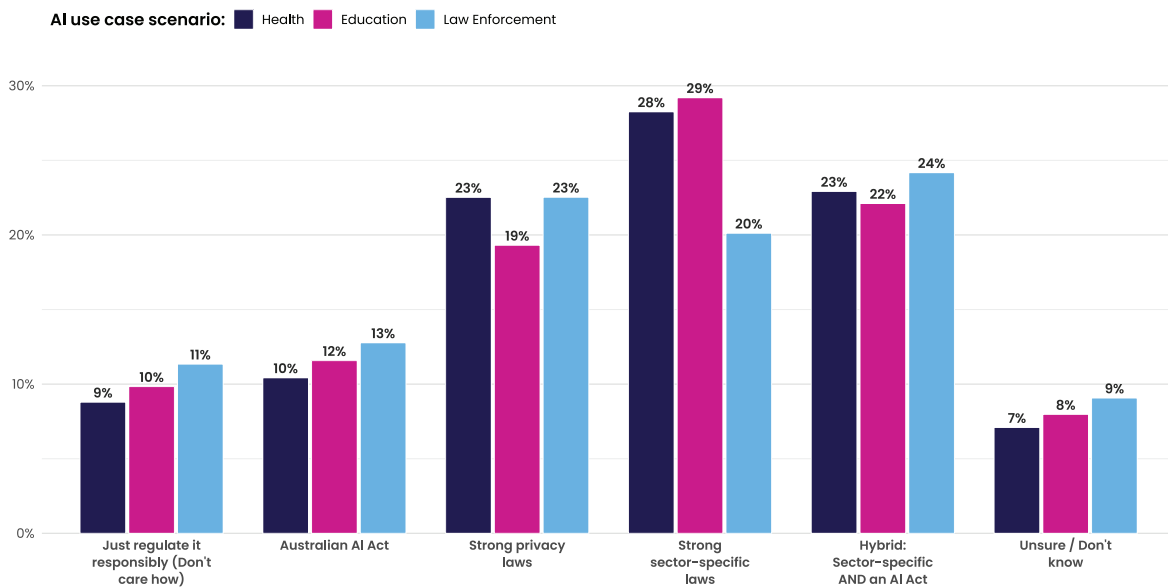
KEY FINDING: 49% of Australians favour either sector-specific laws or a hybrid of sector-specific and an AI Act (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Australian views on setting sector-specific laws



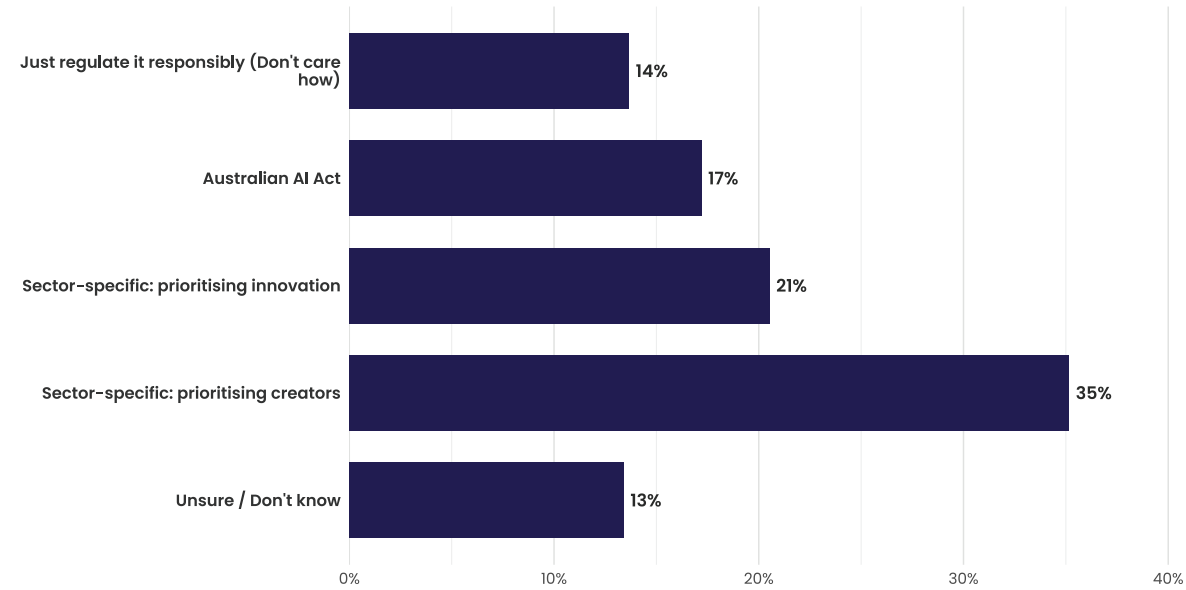
While Australians' preferred regulatory approach varies slightly across sectors, strong sector-specific laws stand out as their leading preference overall (Figure 9). Strong sector-specific laws are preferred in education (29%) and healthcare (28%). Having both strong sector-specific laws and an Australian AI Act is the leading preference in a law enforcement context (24%). Strong privacy laws are also favoured in healthcare (23%) and law enforcement (23%). A standalone Australian AI Act gets comparatively less support across the scenarios with 10%, 12% and 13% in healthcare, education and law enforcement, respectively. This indicates an AI act alone is not sufficient to build Australians' trust. Combined, the 'strong sector-specific laws', hybrid 'sector-specific and AI Act', and 'just regulate it responsibly' responses receive strong support: health (60%), education (61%), law enforcement (54%).

Figure 9: Regulatory preferences across healthcare, education and law enforcement sectors



The same preference for sector-specific approaches shines through in the creative industries scenario, where respondents were given additional regulatory options (Figure 10). The 2 leading preferences are both sector-specific approaches: targeted rules related to AI and copyright that either focus on payment for creators (35%) or prioritising innovation (21%). Preference for an Australian AI Act is lower at 17%, not much higher than respondents who indicated no preference (14%) or that they did not know (13%).

Figure 10: Regulatory preferences for the creative sector



TPDi proposal

Given the overwhelming support from Australians for sector-specific laws, or sector-specific laws *and* an AI Act, TPDi proposes the following model for policymakers' consideration.¹⁶

Sector-specific laws and Coordinated AI Regulation (CAIR) Act

Combine a strong sector-specific AI regulatory approach with a Coordinated AI Regulation (CAIR) Act that establishes whole-of-government coordination and sets baseline expectations, while leaving high-risk use cases to be governed by context specific sectoral laws and regulators (including but not limited to privacy).

Advantage: This approach ensures baseline protections across the economy while enabling targeted, context-aware regulation where risks are most acute. This approach ensures AI regulation is embedded throughout existing legal frameworks, rather than layered superficially over the top. It delivers consistency and certainty for business, while building trust, confidence and discerning adoption among Australians. It also avoids the pitfalls of a one-size-fits-all model like the EU AI Act by placing responsibility for risk management with the subject matter experts best equipped to manage it.

THE PUBLIC INTEREST - PRACTICAL UTILITY PARADOX

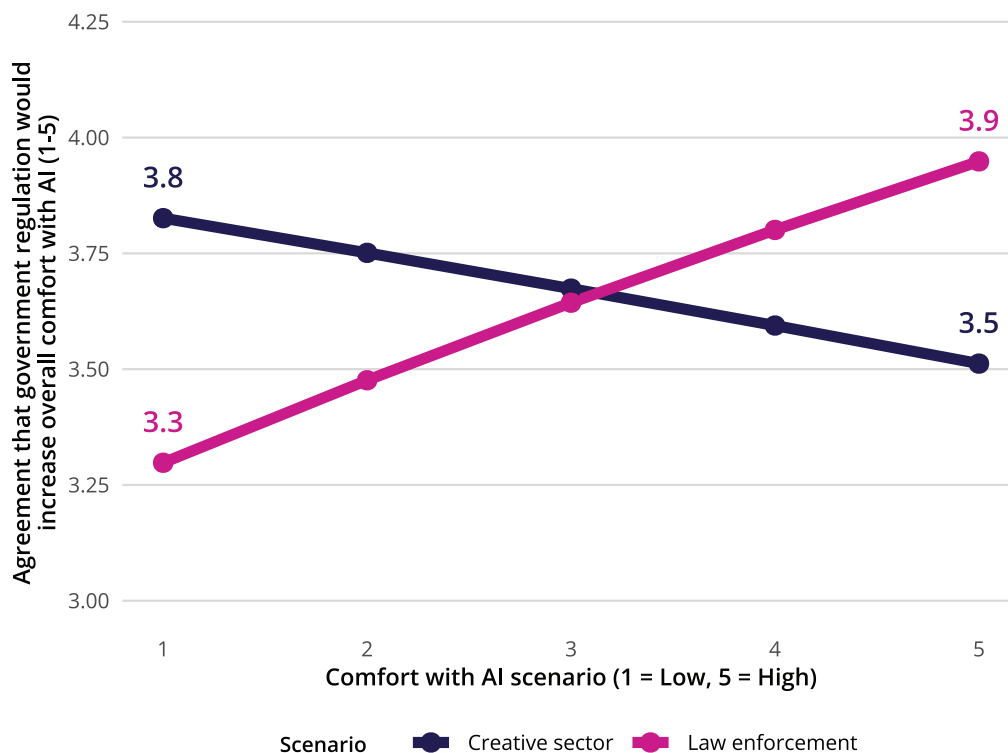
Australians do not view all AI scenarios through the same lens. The relationship between scenario comfort and regulatory demand flips depending on the sector.

For AI in 'public good' contexts (for example, law enforcement, education), trust and regulation are complements. As comfort with the use of AI increases in these scenarios, so does the conditional acceptance of AI when regulated by government. Among the 4 scenarios tested, comfort with AI in law enforcement was the strongest positive driver of conditional acceptance. Australians are willing to accept AI use for public good but trust in its deployment is conditional. The public treats strong regulation as a non-negotiable prerequisite for accepting AI in policing. For every step increase in comfort in the use case, the likelihood of expressing stronger agreement for regulation **rises by 40%**.

Conversely, for consumer-focused AI tools, trust and regulation act as substitutes. Most Australians (54%) are not comfortable with the creative industries scenario, and 55% say government regulation would make them more comfortable. However, in this scenario, utility acts as a substitute for requiring regulation. Australians who are comfortable with these tools being used by individuals and small businesses are significantly less likely to feel that government intervention would increase their comfort. For every step increase in comfort, the likelihood of expressing stronger agreement for regulation **drops by 15%**. Users who see practical value in these tools may view government intervention as a hindrance to the benefits Australian users and small businesses receive or are more comfortable with the risk because of the perceived practical utility.

We call this inverse relationship the public interest – practical utility paradox. This variation across sectors highlights the value of a sector-specific approach, which can calibrate regulatory intervention to the unique comfort–trust–regulation dynamics of each sector (Figure 11).

Figure 11: A demonstration of the public interest – practical utility paradox



KNOWLEDGE DRIVES DEMAND

AI literacy increases demand for regulation

Public demand for regulation is not driven by ignorance or fear of the unknown. On the contrary, it is those with a functional understanding of AI who are most likely to view regulation as a necessity. Respondents with a general understanding were **39% more likely** to express stronger agreement for regulation than those with no knowledge. Those who understand AI best (including those shown additional information about AI risk during the survey) are the most unified in viewing regulation as a non-negotiable condition for trust.

When Australians better understand the risks posed by AI systems, they are more likely to support regulatory intervention. Moving from low knowledge to a general understanding is the single strongest driver of regulatory demand. Awareness of specific risks (for example, data selling, bias) of AI **nearly triples** the likelihood an individual will view government regulation as an enabling prerequisite (conditional adoption). Analysis confirmed this effect holds true even when comparing groups with identical age and education profiles.

This means that public communication and education can mobilise support for good governance and that transparent public discourse about risks can be used to increase mandate for regulatory action. Abstract debates about AI safety are less effective at engaging the public than specific examples of harm. Highlighting potential risks creates immediate political salience.

While 71% of Australians report having a medium, high or professional level of knowledge and engagement with AI, focus groups reveal many individuals primarily associate AI with generative AI and were surprised to learn they already use AI extensively in map navigation and content recommendations. There is likely wider spread unconscious AI adoption (as opposed to discerning adoption), and perhaps a lower level of genuine AI literacy, than self-reported.

AI regulation cuts across socioeconomic divides

Demographic profiles play a surprisingly small role in shaping an individual's AI policy preferences. Factors such as income, university education and gender had no statistically significant impact on the intensity of demand for regulation.

AI regulation is a broad-spectrum issue. It cuts across traditional socioeconomic divides, meaning policy messaging does not need to be segmented by class or gender to be effective, but it should take into account the 4 AI personas identified in this report.

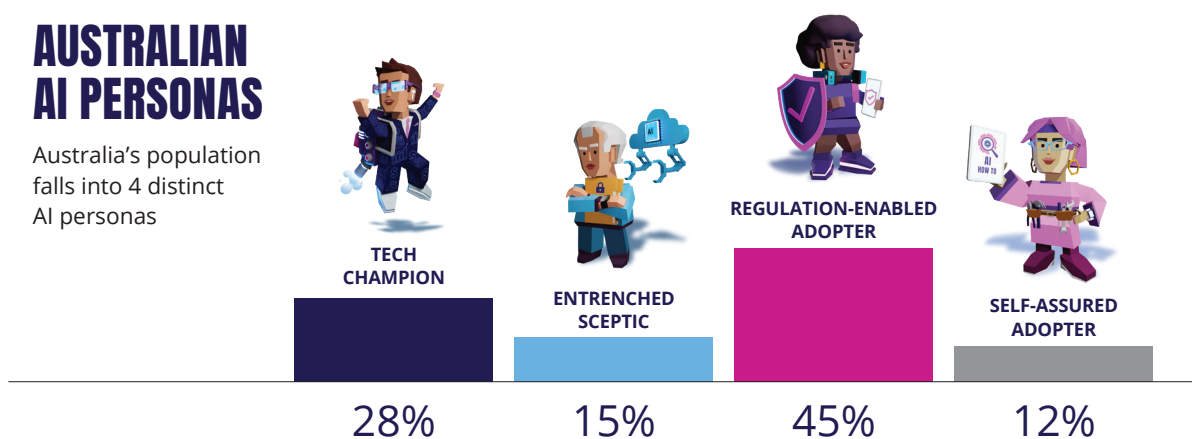
Older Australians are consistently more likely to demand regulation. For every year of age, the likelihood of expressing stronger agreement increases by approximately 1%. Currently, the strongest political mandate for AI regulation comes from older cohorts. This suggests a generational divide in expectations of governance. Older cohorts, socialised in an era of regulated media, may view government oversight as a standard baseline for public safety. Younger cohorts may view digital risk through a lens of personal responsibility.

AUSTRALIAN AI PERSONAS

Australians are not a monolith in how they understand, trust and engage with technology, and AI is no different. TPDI's 2025 *Tech Policy Philosophies* research presented 15 distinct ways of thinking about the relationship between technology and society: from techno-solutionists to regulatory pragmatists.¹⁷ It is easier to impactfully navigate tech policy debates if we understand the priorities and motivations of different points of view.

Building on that work, this research leverages survey and focus group data to reveal 4 Australian AI personas (Figure 12).

Figure 12: The 4 Australian AI personas



The 4 personas convert statistical insights into more relatable profiles of everyday Australians. These segments provide a more granular understanding of how Australians evaluate AI, and critically, how they view the role of regulation in building trust and enabling adoption.

For policymakers, this distinction matters. Aggregate statistics can signal a mandate for action, but they do not explain how to design or communicate policy in a way that is effective across the population. A persona-based approach helps bridge this gap by:

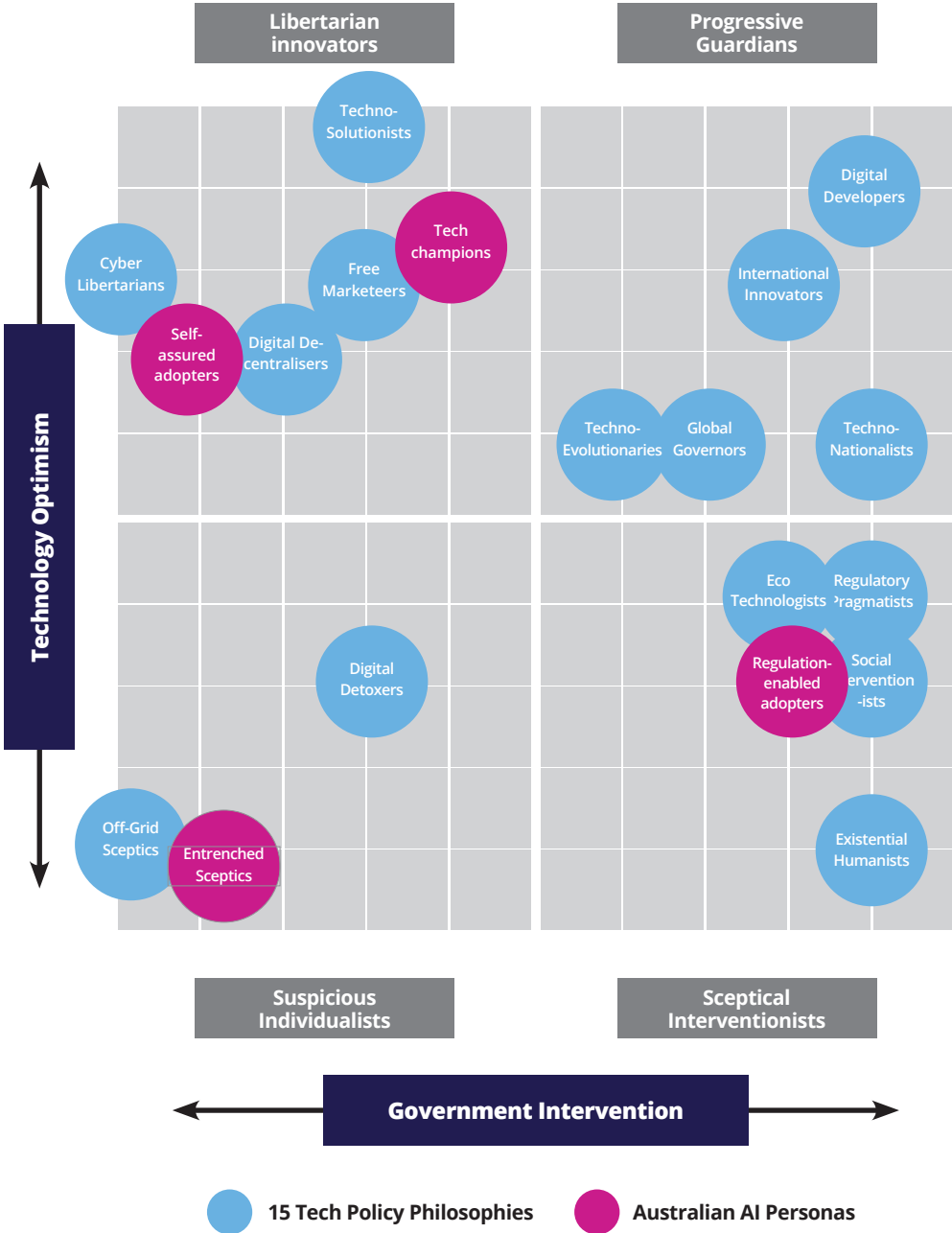
- 1. Enabling more targeted policy communication.** Different segments respond to different framings of regulation – whether as protection or enablement. Each persona's tech policy philosophy provides practical insights for communication strategies.
- 2. Revealing coalition-building opportunities.** While motivations differ, there is substantial overlap in support for well-designed regulation across multiple personas.
- 3. Surfacing potential points of resistance,** allowing policymakers to anticipate and address concerns.

The following section brings each persona to life. These are attitudinal and behavioural groups based on quantitative segmentation results. Each persona's demographic descriptors are based on the relevant segment's demographic profile. Leveraging survey and focus group data, this section provides a key quote, overview, demographic insights, and an interview with the persona. The profiles are illustrated with de-identified excerpts from focus group participants

whose views align with each segment, and the demographic statistics are drawn from the Latent Class Analysis. We have also mapped with which *Tech Policy Philosophies* each persona would most closely identify (Figure 13). Personas do not reflect any specific individual research participant. More information on persona methodology is available on request.

These profiles offer data-driven, yet accessible, insights into the underlying patterns that shape how Australians think about AI. Taken together, these personas provide a practical tool for policy design.

Figure 13: Mapping the 4 Australian AI personas against TPDI's 2025 *Tech Policy Philosophies*



Australian AI persona 1: Tech champions

Rowan represents the 28% of Australians who are informed optimists who view regulation as an enabler of growth.



Figure 14: Rowan, the tech champion

'AI is improving and growing every day, and the future is only going to get better and better.' *Rowan*

Overview

Tech champions like Rowan represent the 'knowledge class' of the AI transition. These are high-information adopters who combine personal familiarity with AI with a high baseline of trust.

Crucially, their demand for government regulation does not stem from fear; rather, they view policy as a necessary framework to stabilise the market and unlock future potential.

Unlike other segments that prioritise safety protections, **this group treats regulation as an economic lever.** They disproportionately prioritise policy interventions that foster competition, innovation and workforce training.

They view the government's role as setting the 'rules of the road' to ensure the technology creates value for the next generation. Furthermore, they do not regard government as the only source of effective regulation, with this segment showing stronger support for industry self-regulation.

Demographic profile: Tech champions (28%)

This segment represents the upscale early adopter: skewing toward the most professionally established and economically advantaged sectors of the population. Key distinguishing features include:

Highly educated	+26% more likely to hold a postgraduate degree
Affluent	Over-represented in the top household income quintile (+26%)
Gendered skew	+18% more likely to be men
Younger cohorts	More likely to be Gen Z (+11%) or Gen Y (+10%)
Employed	+9% more likely to be in the workforce

Interview with Rowan

Age	I'm in my 30s
Education	I have a finance degree and an MBA [Master of Business]
Salary	I earn good money
Sector	FinTech
What do you think about AI?	<p>I stay on top of new technologies and use AI daily for personal and work tasks. I trust AI because I understand AI. When I talk about government regulation, I don't have a lot of concerns about safety or privacy – I see policy as essential for creating strength and unlocking AI's long-term potential.</p> <p>For me, regulation is all about economics. I care most about policies that promote and foster competition and innovation. And to do this well, we need to keep building the talent pipeline and training the sharpest people who can push the frontier and keep the whole ecosystem growing.</p> <p>I see the government's role as setting the basic rules so that AI can deliver value for the future, and while that is happening, industry has space to disrupt and continue pushing the technology forward.</p> <p>If you're not convinced, think about it from a small business perspective. Labour costs are skyrocketing, and AI can take on repetitive tasks to free up time and resources so that hardworking small and medium enterprises (SME) and solopreneurs can stay in business. And this is the same efficiency we want to see at every scale through policy and regulation – promoting and fostering growth to free us up to innovate and scale at speed.</p>
What are your AI preferences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Regulation and policy that fosters competition, innovation and workforce training. ■ To leverage new technology that creates value for me and the next generation. ■ Space for industry self-regulation.
What's your Tech Policy Philosophy?	<p>I'm probably closest to a Techno-Solutionist – I see technology as how we solve big challenges, and I think like a Free Marketeer when it comes to competition driving innovation. That said, I'm not anti-regulation; government frameworks set the rules of the road to unlock long-term value. I also resonate with Techno-Evolutionaries because tech companies are clearly an important partner in modern governance.</p>

Australian AI persona 2: Entrenched sceptics

Christos represents the 15% of Australians who are disengaged sceptics seeking protection from a technology they distrust.



Figure 15: Christos, the entrenched sceptic

'Without regulation AI will be a catastrophe, but I'm not convinced any government can regulate it effectively.' *Christos*

Overview

Entrenched sceptics like Christos are defined by a disconnect from the AI transition. This group exhibits a strong resistance to AI, combining the lowest levels of engagement and knowledge with the deepest lack of trust. Unlike the 'persuadable' middle, this segment's hesitation is rigid; they do not believe that government intervention will make AI safe enough for them to use.

For this group, the priority for regulation is purely defensive. They do not view regulation as a mechanism that will improve the technology, but as a means to protect them from it. Consequently, they overwhelmingly prioritise privacy, seeking to retain control over their personal information rather than enabling economic opportunities that they feel excluded from.

Demographic profile: Entrenched sceptics (15%)

They represent the economically vulnerable, disproportionately composed of older Australians who have left the workforce and those with lower formal educational attainment. Key distinguishing features include:

Lower level of education	+24% more likely to have finished education at Year 11 or below
Economically vulnerable	Heavily over-represented in the lowest household income quintile (+31%)
Older cohorts	More likely to be Baby Boomer + (+14%) or Gen X (+10%)
Workforce detached	Highly likely to be out of the labour market (+22% not in workforce; +20% retired)

Interview with Christos

Age	I'm 67 years young
Education	High school
Salary	I'm a retiree enjoying a quieter pace of life and I have to watch my budget carefully
Sector	I formerly spent my career doing hands-on, honest work as a tradie
What do you think about AI?	<p>I feel pretty disconnected from all the talk about AI. I've tried it once or twice, but I don't really understand it. Most importantly though I do not trust it. And I don't think there's much anyone could say to convince me otherwise.</p> <p>Regulation is supposed to be about protecting me and my information, not promoting or expanding the technology. But I simply don't believe that any amount of government regulation will make AI safe enough for me to want to use it. Or for me to support organisations that have access to my data using it.</p> <p>My main concern is privacy. I want control over my personal information, and I'm not interested in the supposed economic benefits of AI – which aren't going to help people like me anyway.</p> <p>It's just becoming too easy to confuse and con people with AI. And that's what I don't like about it. It's a new technology that's open to scammers and to all sorts of bad actors.</p>
What are your AI preferences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Protection from harm. ■ Data privacy and for my personal information to be secure. ■ Control over my data and how it's used.
What's your Tech Policy Philosophy?	I relate most to the Off-Grid Sceptic and Digital Detoxer view. I just don't trust the technology or the systems behind it. I can see why Social Interventionists want strong protections, especially around privacy and harm, but I'm not convinced regulation will actually make it safe. At the end of the day, I'd rather keep my distance than rely on something I don't trust.

Australian AI persona 3: Regulation-enabled adopters

Khloe represents the 45% of Australians who form the pragmatic middle seeking safety assurance.



Figure 16: Khloe, the regulation-enabled adopter

'I'm open to using AI, but I want to know the guardrails are there before I take that step and dive in further.' *Khloe*

Overview

Regulation-enabled adopters represent the crucial persuadable middle of the AI transition. Sitting between enthusiasts and sceptics, they hold moderate levels of comfort and trust that reflect the average Australian experience. Their defining characteristic is their responsiveness to regulation; unlike the sceptics, their hesitation is not permanent.

They exhibit a high belief that government regulation would increase their adoption of AI, bridging the gap between caution and confidence.

For this segment, the priority of regulation is protective rather than economic. They are significantly less driven by aims to enable 'competition and innovation' or 'workforce training'. Instead, their focus is on the immediate safety of the user experience. They are willing to adopt, but only once they are assured that the necessary guardrails are in place.

Demographic profile: Regulation enabled-adopters (45%)

Unlike the other segments which occupy specific socioeconomic niches, this group is much more representative of the broad spectrum of Australian society. Key distinguishing features include:

Broadly representative	Their age, education, income and location profile align with the national averages
-------------------------------	--

Interview with Khloe

Age	I'm in my mid-20s
Education	I have a bachelor degree
Salary	I'm not making a great salary yet, but it's average for my age
Sector	I work in comms and marketing
What do you think about AI?	<p>I am definitely a bit on the fence when it comes to AI. I'm not an enthusiast, but I'm not a sceptic either. I feel pretty comfortable with it, and I've dabbled with it for work and personal stuff, but security is what raises some questions for me.</p> <p>Regulation is definitely something that can convince me to jump on the AI train fully. If the government puts solid rules in place, I'd feel much more confident about adopting it.</p> <p>For me, regulation is human first – it has to be about protection. I really don't see it from the economics perspective, or fostering competition, innovation and the workforce. What matters most is safety. I want to be sure that when I use this tech, or when it's used in the background of different products and services, that it is secure and trustworthy and I am protected.</p> <p>A metaphor I like to use is medication. Too much can be harmful, and the consequences depend on how it's used. And that's why we have regulation and guardrails in place.</p>
What are your AI preferences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government regulation that focuses on protection and security – not economics. ▪ Transparent rules, oversight, and assurance that AI won't put me at risk. ▪ A secure experience when using AI.
What's your Tech Policy Philosophy?	<p>I sit somewhere between a Regulatory Pragmatist and an Intentional Innovator. I think we should use and adapt existing rules to make AI safe but also be really deliberate about how it's developed and used. For me, regulation is what gives me the confidence to adopt. It's about knowing the guardrails are actually there.</p>

Australian AI persona 4: Self-assured adopter

Jessica represents the 12% of Australians who are self-assured users focused on capability over compliance.



Figure 17: Jessica, the self-assured adopter
 'AI is here to stay, so you might as well get on the bandwagon or get left behind.' *Jessica*

Overview

Self-assured adopters represent the confident and independent segment of the AI transition. With higher-than-average levels of trust and comfort, they are able to navigate AI with relative ease. Unlike the Regulation-enabled adopters segment, they reject the idea that government regulation is needed to make them feel safe. They are independent users who view AI more as a tool to be mastered, not a risk to be managed. If they do regard regulation as needed, they are more likely to believe that industry regulation is enough.

Their policy priorities reveal a distinction between personal and systemic risks. While they are indifferent to individual safety concerns like misinformation and privacy – likely feeling more capable of managing these risks themselves as confident users – they are concerned with the structural impact of AI on society. They place a much higher emphasis on workforce training as the single most critical role for government. They are also more likely to prioritise the protection of Australian cultural content (+27%), workers’ rights (+24%) and the prevention of bias (+12%).

This suggests that while they don’t need the government to hold their hand, they do expect it to ensure a playing field for AI that is fair, inclusive and distinctly Australian.

Demographic profile: Self-assured adopters (12%)	
This segment strongly represents the place of Gen Y in Australia’s socioeconomic structure. They do not hold the ‘elite’ status of Tech champions, reflecting more modest levels of education and household income. Key distinguishing features include:	
Millennial skew	Heavily dominated by Gen Y (+30%)
Middle income	Significant under-representation in the top household income quintile (-40%), placing them firmly in the middle class
Moderate education	Less likely to hold postgraduate qualifications (-19%)

Interview with Jessica

Age	I'm an elder millennial – just on the other side of 40
Education	I have an Arts degree
Salary	I suppose I'm middle class
Sector	I work in admin
What do you think about AI?	<p>I'm pretty confident when it comes to AI. I trust myself to navigate it, prompt it well, and make the right calls, so I don't really need the government to step in for me.</p> <p>Though I do see the need for regulation, I'm more comfortable with industry-led rules than government intervention.</p> <p>I'm really not worried about being protected from risks like misinformation or privacy breaches – I can handle that myself and don't need the government to hold my hand. But I do have some concerns about the overall impact of AI on society – things like protection of cultural content, workers' rights and bias.</p> <p>What matters most to me is the practical support that helps people use AI effectively. I care about workforce training and education, and I want opportunities to upskill and take full advantage of AI, not to be shielded from it. To me, that is the place for government, to ensure we get the advantages.</p> <p>We need to view AI as a tool to be mastered, not a risk to be managed – that's just technological evolution. When things do go wrong, it's usually people misusing the technology, and that's why we need training and education.</p>
What are your AI preferences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Workforce training, education and upskilling opportunities to fully harness the potential of AI. ■ To navigate and use AI independently without heavy-handed regulation. ■ Industry-driven regulation with government focusing on workforce training.
What's your Tech Policy Philosophy?	<p>I lean toward a Cyber Libertarian and Free Marketeer mindset. I'm comfortable navigating AI myself and don't need heavy government intervention. But I don't think that means no role for government; I see value in the Digital Developer and Regulatory Pragmatist approach: making sure people have the skills, access and opportunities to benefit. For me, it's less about regulating use and more about enabling people to keep up.</p>

CONCLUSION

Australia does not have an AI adoption problem. It has a trust problem.

This research is consistent and clear: Australians are already engaging with AI, but often without confidence and too often without trust. This creates a fragile foundation for AI adoption, one that risks constraining long-term value and eroding public confidence in the institutions responsible for governing these technologies.

The evidence also provides a clear path forward. Australians are not asking government to slow down AI. They are asking government to step up and regulate AI. Support for regulation is not marginal, nor is it driven by fear or misunderstanding. It is informed, widespread and pragmatic. For most Australians, regulation is not a barrier to innovation, it is a precondition for trust and for discerning adoption.

This reframes the policy challenge. The question is not whether to regulate AI but how to do so in a way that builds trust, enables adoption and reflects the diversity of public expectations.

Three implications follow.

First, regulation should be seen as enabling infrastructure. Just as in sectors such as aviation, healthcare and food safety, clear rules and accountability frameworks create the conditions for safe participation and broad-based uptake. AI is no different. Well-designed governance does not constrain innovation, it underwrites it.

Second, a one-size-fits-all approach will fall short. Trust in AI varies significantly across sectors and across the population. Australians' expectations differ depending on the context, and their responses to policy interventions are shaped by distinct perspectives and motivations. Effective governance needs to be calibrated, sector by sector, and communicated in ways that resonate across different segments of the population.

Third, trust in AI governance reflects trust in democratic institutions more broadly. The choices made now will shape not only how AI is deployed, but how Australians perceive the legitimacy and capability of the systems that govern it.

Australia has a narrow window to act while this trust can be built to underpin the AI transition. The public mandate is clear. The policy tools are available. And the opportunity is significant: to demonstrate and communicate that effective governance and technological progress are not in tension but mutually reinforcing.

The task is now to translate this mandate into action – in this term of government.

Done well, Australia can establish a virtuous cycle, where strong governance builds trust, trust enables adoption, and well-governed technology delivers lasting public value and prosperity for all Australians.

APPENDIXES



APPENDIX 1: SECTORAL FINDINGS



Sector 1: Healthcare

Participants were presented with the following scenario and questions:

Imagine your local doctor's office offers a new AI system for its patients. Before you see the doctor, the AI looks at your medical history and symptoms to give the doctor an initial assessment of what might be wrong. The information (with your name removed) is passed on to researchers to help develop new and more effective treatments for your medical condition (like new medicines, or better ways to treat and diagnose your condition).

[Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas] As part of its service, the AI company keeps your health information (with your name removed) and also sells it to private insurance and pharmaceutical companies. This would allow them to target people like you with products or advertising and could then be used to decide the future cost of private health insurance for people like you.

Questions

1. How comfortable would you be with this AI system being used as part of your healthcare?
2. Now, imagine the government has put laws in place to regulate how this kind of AI is used, such as strict laws that allow you to opt out of AI services. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this healthcare scenario?
3. From the list below, which approach to regulation would most increase your comfort in AI being used in this healthcare scenario?
 - I don't care how the government regulates AI; I just want it to be regulated and used responsibly in medical settings
 - Strong privacy laws: strict rules on how my personal data is collected, used, disclosed and retained
 - Strong sector-specific laws: my health information is sensitive, for example, I want the option to opt out (to ask my doctor not to use AI, share my data with researchers, and/or or use my data for advertising purposes)
 - An 'Australian AI Act': a single law that applies general, light touch rules for all AI, and stricter rules with more protections for high-risk settings, including in the health sector
 - Strong sector-specific laws AND an Australian AI Act (ensuring both specific and general protections)
 - Unsure/Don't know
 - Something else

Focus groups

Australians' level of comfort with AI use in the healthcare sector is mixed, with comfort levels dropping further when risk statements are shown. Yet focus group discussions revealed a majority of positive reactions.

- Support is driven by the belief that the medical system is overwhelmed and under-resourced. Approach is viewed positively if AI can help ease long wait times, particularly for specialist appointments, and improve access to care.
- To increase comfort, participants want to be able to opt out.
- Comfort would also increase if doctors do not rely solely on AI and if AI systems are not used to generate diagnoses on behalf of clinicians.
- There are concerns that AI could lead to more generalised, one-size-fits-all care, diminishing personalised treatment. Participants worry about quality of care if doctors become over-reliant on or delegate too much of their work to AI.
- Other concerns include data privacy, security and misuse.

'There's no such thing as too much medical information.'

Baby Boomers and Retirees Focus Group

'Our medical system is already backed up and if AI is going to help with that and for better care, I think that's fine.'

Gen Z and Students Focus Group

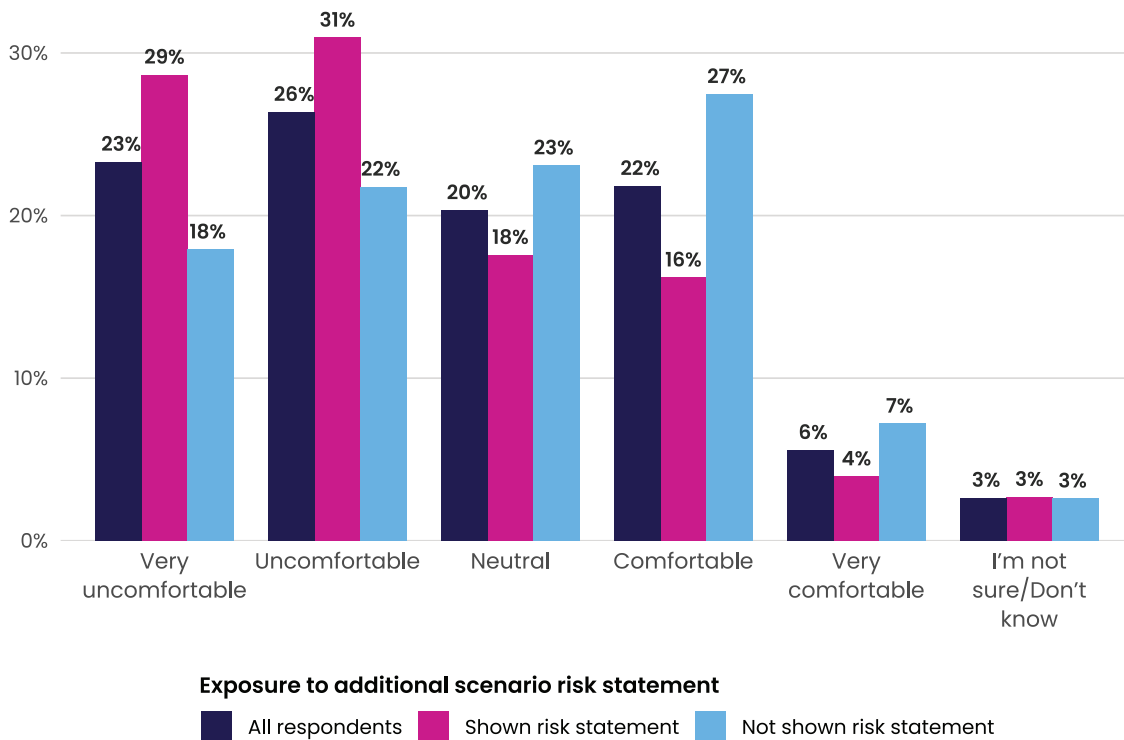


Survey responses

Healthcare is the only sector where the provision of risk information fundamentally changed the driver of demand for overall regulation of AI. When warned about privacy risks (such as selling patient data), even users who are highly comfortable with the technology demand strict laws. In healthcare, ‘trust’ is not enough. The public views regulation as a necessary safety net that must exist regardless of their confidence in the technology itself.

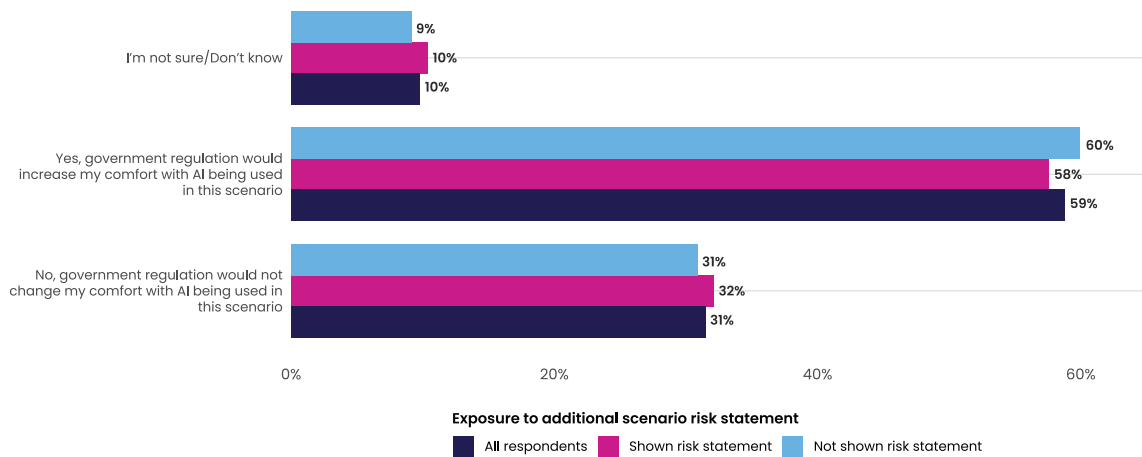
Australians’ comfort with AI use in healthcare is mixed. Those not shown risk statements report higher comfort levels (23% very comfortable, 27% comfortable) with AI being used in healthcare scenarios compared to those shown risk statements, who are notably more cautious. Conversely, discomfort is more pronounced among the risk-informed group, with higher levels of very uncomfortable (29% versus 18%) and uncomfortable (31% versus 22%) responses (Figure A1).

Figure A1: Comfort with AI use in the healthcare scenario



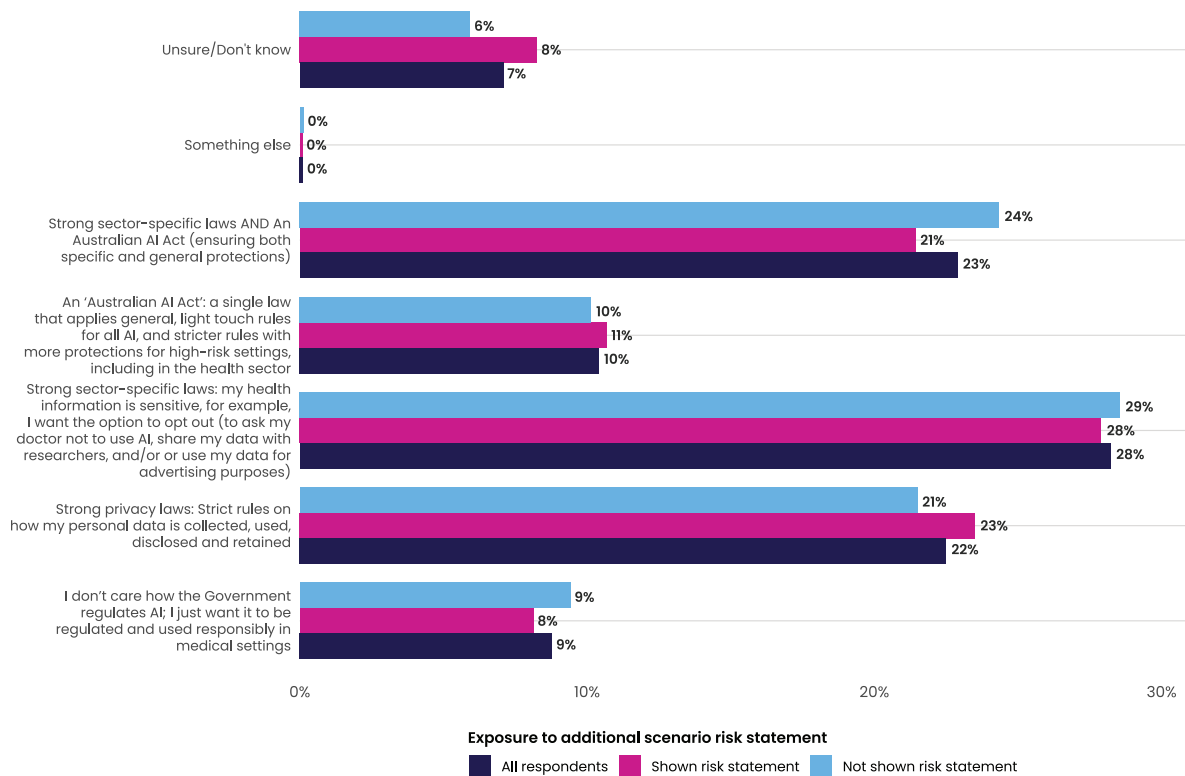
The majority of Australians (59%) say government regulation would increase their comfort with AI use in healthcare – with a minimal difference between those shown risk statements (58%) and those not (60%). However, 31% of Australians remain firm that government regulation wouldn’t change their comfort levels (Figure A2).

Figure A2: Regulation as an indicator of comfort with AI in the healthcare scenario



When asked which regulatory approach would most increase comfort with AI in healthcare, Australians prioritise sector-specific measures, with minimal differences between those shown or not shown risk statements. In the healthcare scenario, 28% of respondents favour strong sector-specific laws, with an additional 23% wanting strong sector-specific laws AND an Australian AI Act. Just 10% of Australians view a standalone AI Act as sufficient, while 22% prioritise stronger privacy laws and 9% of Australians simply want any government regulation that will ensure responsible use of AI in healthcare settings. About 7% indicate unsure or don't know (Figure A3).

Figure A3: Preferred regulation approaches in the healthcare scenario





Sector 2: Education

Participants were presented with the following scenario and questions:

Imagine Australian schools begin using a new AI platform that creates a personal learning plan for every student. It tracks how each student studies, what topics they struggle with, and how they learn best. Using this information, it tailors lessons for each student. Students at schools that implement this system are more engaged and get higher marks.

[Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas] This information is saved in a permanent 'learning profile' for each student as they grow up. When a student applies for university, or a job, the profile is shared with universities or employers and could be used to decide whether to accept a student for a course or hire someone for a job.

Questions

1. How comfortable would you be with this AI system being used in Australia's education system?
2. Now, imagine the government has put laws in place to regulate how this kind of AI is used, such as strict laws that allow you to request your data is deleted when you finish school. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this education scenario?
3. Which one of the following regulations would most increase your comfort with AI in this scenario?
 - I don't care how the government regulates AI in this scenario; I just want it to be regulated and used responsibly in schools
 - Strong privacy laws: strict rules on how my personal data is collected, used, disclosed and retained
 - Strong sector-specific laws: kids need a higher degree of protection, including a right to delete the data when they finish year 12, a ban on targeted advertising, and anti-discrimination protections
 - An 'Australian AI Act': a single law that applies general, light touch rules for all AI, and stricter rules with more protections for high-risk settings, including in education
 - Strong sector-specific laws AND an Australian AI Act (ensuring both specific and general protections)
 - Unsure/Don't know
 - Something else

Focus groups

This scenario received a majority of positive reactions in the focus groups.

- Most appreciate AI due to it alleviating educators' high workloads and pressures. Participants suggest it would be unrealistic for educators to provide individualised attention to each student.
- Most are comfortable with AI use in this scenario if it's supporting or assisting teachers who have oversight of the program.
- Positive overall response to AI helping teachers simplify their work (for example, lesson planning and marking) rather than directly teaching students (which would be a concern to participants).

'I think if it makes the life of teachers a lot easier and cuts down on the work that they need to do for class prep and prepping for each student and if that gives them more time to focus on the actual classwork and it's improving our education system, I'm all for it.'

Baby Boomers and Retirees Focus Group

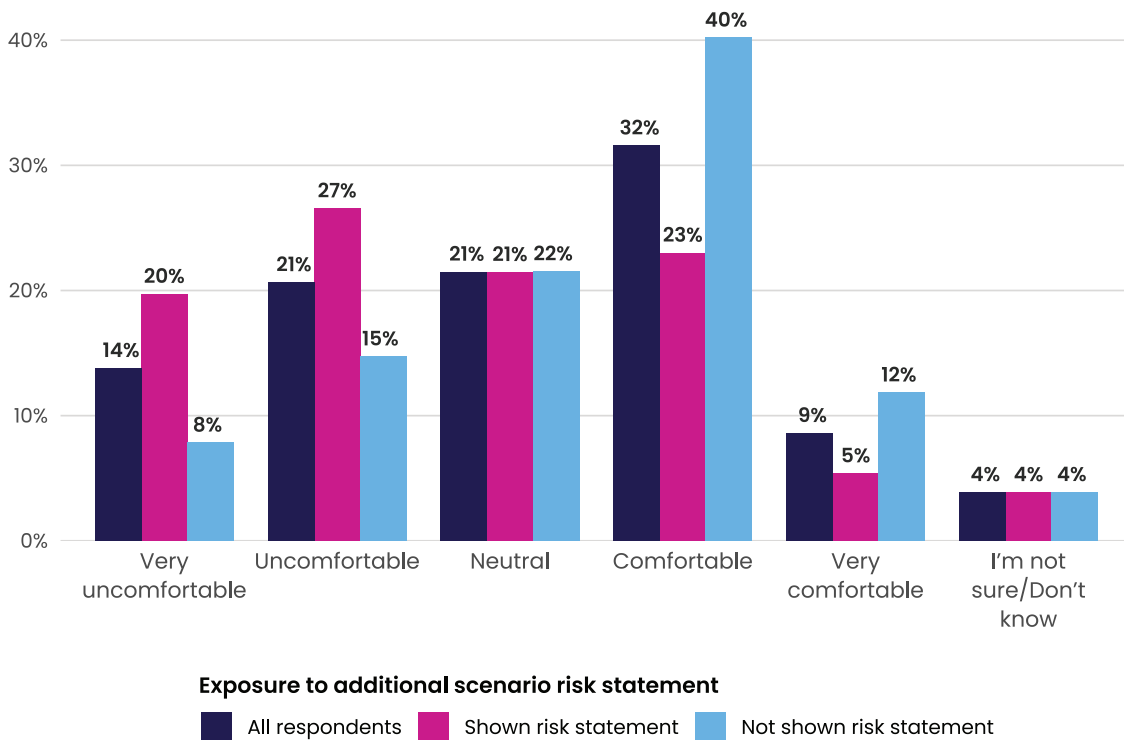
'It's actually not their brain that's passing their assignment. It's AI that's passing it for them ... these are future doctors ... It's not a good thing.'

Baby Boomers and Retirees Focus Group

Survey responses

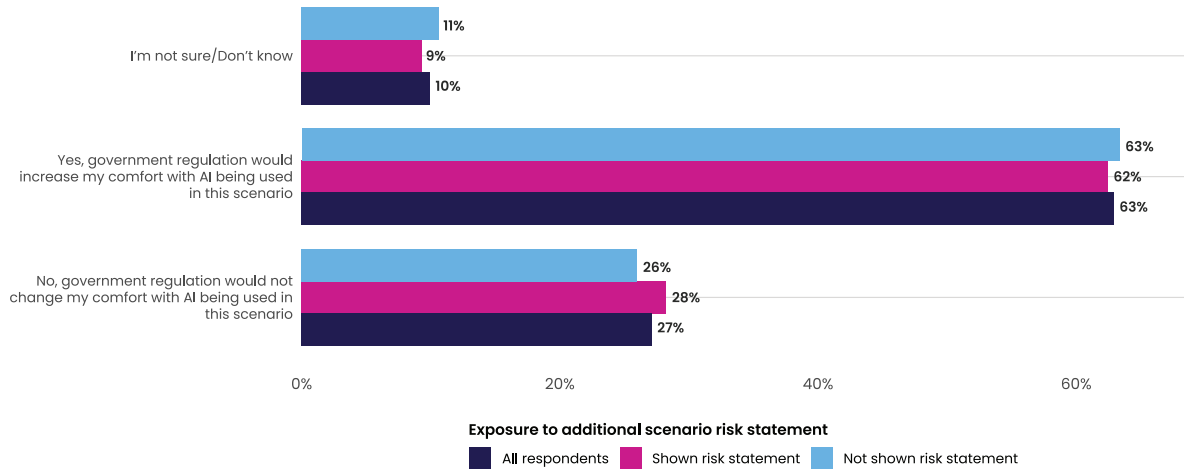
Australians' comfort with AI in the education system is mixed. Among those not shown risk statements, 40% report being comfortable and 12% very comfortable. However, for those shown risk statements, comfortable responses drop significantly to 23% and very comfortable to only 5%. Conversely, levels of discomfort are higher among the risk-informed group. Those shown risk statements report higher levels of being very uncomfortable (20% versus 8%) and uncomfortable (27% versus 15%) compared to those who were not shown risk assessments (Figure A4).

Figure A4: Comfort with AI use in the education scenario



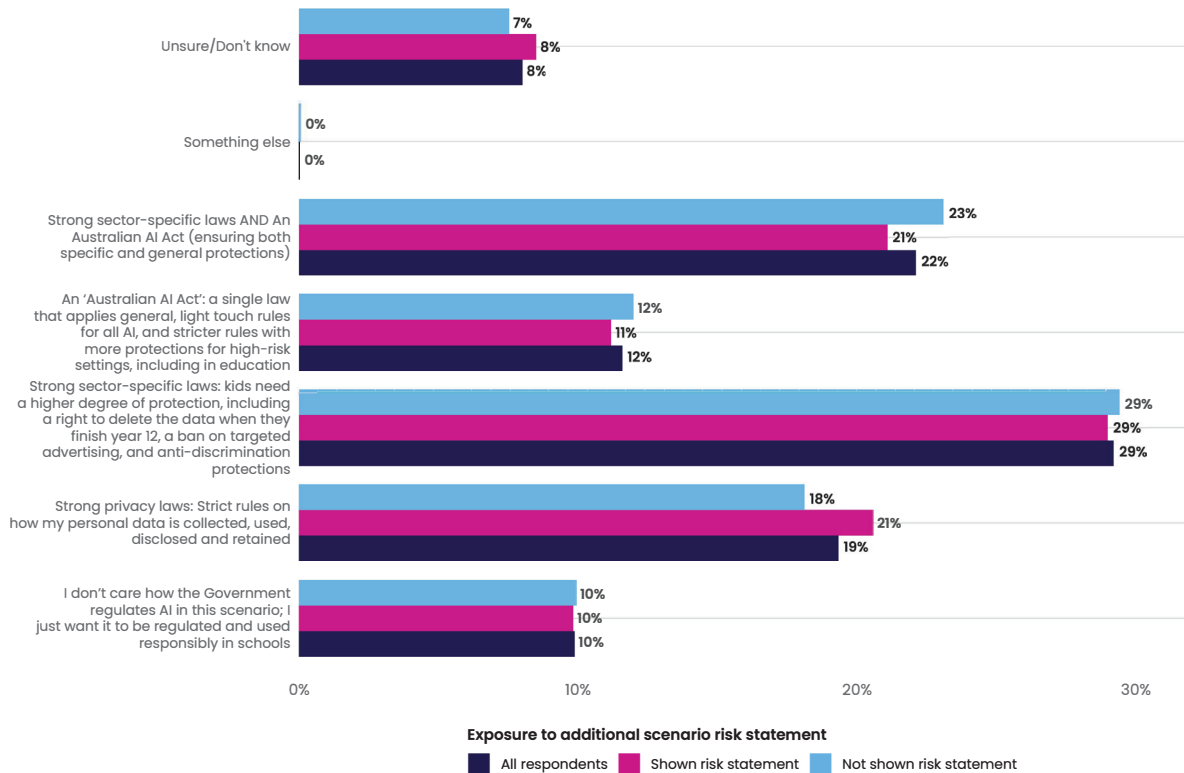
A clear majority of Australians (63%) believe that government regulation would increase their comfort with AI being used in education scenarios. This sentiment remains consistent regardless of risk exposure, with 62% of those shown risk statements and 63% of those not shown risk statements reporting that regulation would increase their comfort. However, almost one third of Australians (27%) state that government regulation would not change their comfort level (starting from a base of uncomfortable or very uncomfortable), while approximately 10% are unsure (Figure A5).

Figure A5: Regulation as an indicator of comfort with AI in the education scenario



When asked which approach to regulation would most increase their comfort, 10% of Australians say they don't care, they just want regulation. While 19% favour stronger privacy laws. The biggest cohort was 29% of Australians showing a strong preference for targeted, sector-specific protections. A further 22% support a dual approach, including both sector-specific laws and a broader Australian AI Act. Only 12% believe an Australian AI Act on its own would be the most effective way to increase their comfort in this scenario. About 8% are unsure (Figure A6).

Figure A6: Preferred regulation approaches in the education scenario





Sector 3: Law enforcement

Participants were presented with the following scenario and questions:

A real threat to public safety has been made during a football grand final game. Real-time use of AI facial recognition by police remains illegal in Australia. However, police use AI to analyse live camera feeds for checking objects instead of people's faces, (looking for suspicious bags, etc.). A number of suspicious bags are identified and seized by the police.

[Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas] After the event, the football stadium provides the police with copies of all recordings. Police use AI facial recognition when reviewing the replay footage. A number of suspects are identified and arrested. The AI has found more suspicious objects with some people because of the bias in how it was trained.

Questions

1. How comfortable would you be with this AI system being used in this scenario?
2. Now, imagine the government has put laws in place to regulate or limit how police use AI, such as strict limits on what data can be analysed and how long it can be stored. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this scenario?
3. Which one of the following regulations would most increase your comfort with AI in this scenario?
 - I don't care how the government regulates AI; I just want it to be regulated and used responsibly by the police
 - Strong privacy laws: strict rules on how my personal data is collected, used, disclosed and retained
 - Strong sector-specific laws: the power of police should be regulated, including specific limits on AI use by police, and someone to independently check that the police are following the rules
 - An 'Australian AI Act': a single law that applies general, light touch protections for all AI, and stricter rules with more protections for high-risk settings, including in policing
 - Strong sector-specific laws AND an Australian AI Act (ensuring both specific and general protections)
 - Unsure/Don't know
 - Something else

Focus groups

The use of AI in this law enforcement scenario received the highest positive response across all 4 tested scenarios in the focus groups.

- Participants show strong support for safety and protection of the public, and would feel comforted knowing AI could support identification of weapons, etc.
- Participants are mostly uncritical of the scenario overall; the only concerns relate to the use of facial recognition in the process. These concerns aligned with more general concerns about data privacy, security and misuse.
- Overall, participants see this scenario as a useful approach to public safety and are comfortable with it as long as personal information is protected.

This suggests that Australians are willing to accept AI in law enforcement provided there is a 'human in the loop' and clear legal protections.



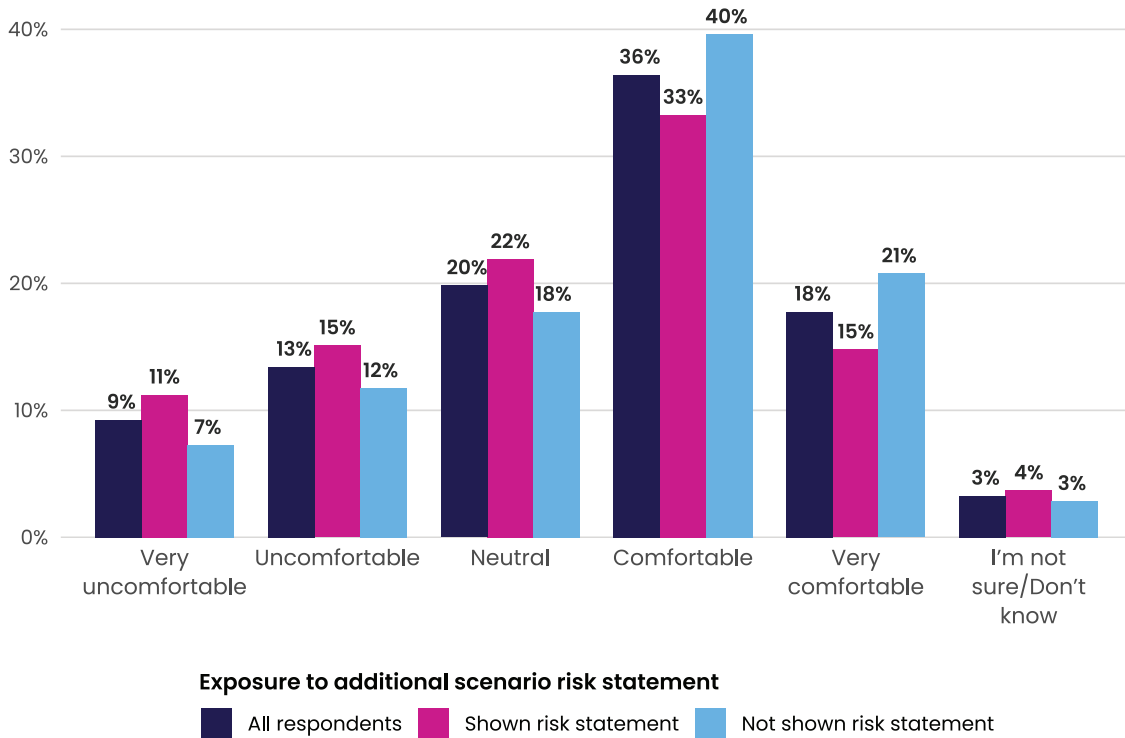
'I've got no objection at all because I've got nothing to hide anyway.'

Baby Boomers and Retirees Focus Group

Survey responses

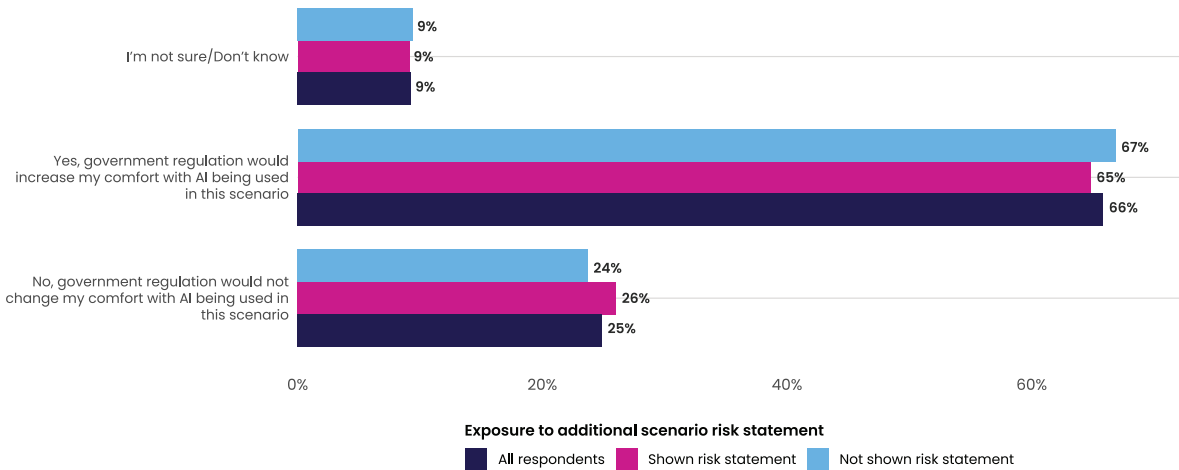
Australians' comfort with AI use in law enforcement is higher compared to the other scenarios. For the law enforcement scenario, 36% of Australians are comfortable and 18% very comfortable with AI being used. For those shown risk statements, comfort drops marginally. Likewise, those shown risk statements report marginally higher levels of being very uncomfortable (7% versus 11%) and uncomfortable (15% versus 12%) compared to those who were not shown risk assessments (Figure A7).

Figure A7: Comfort with AI use in the law enforcement scenario



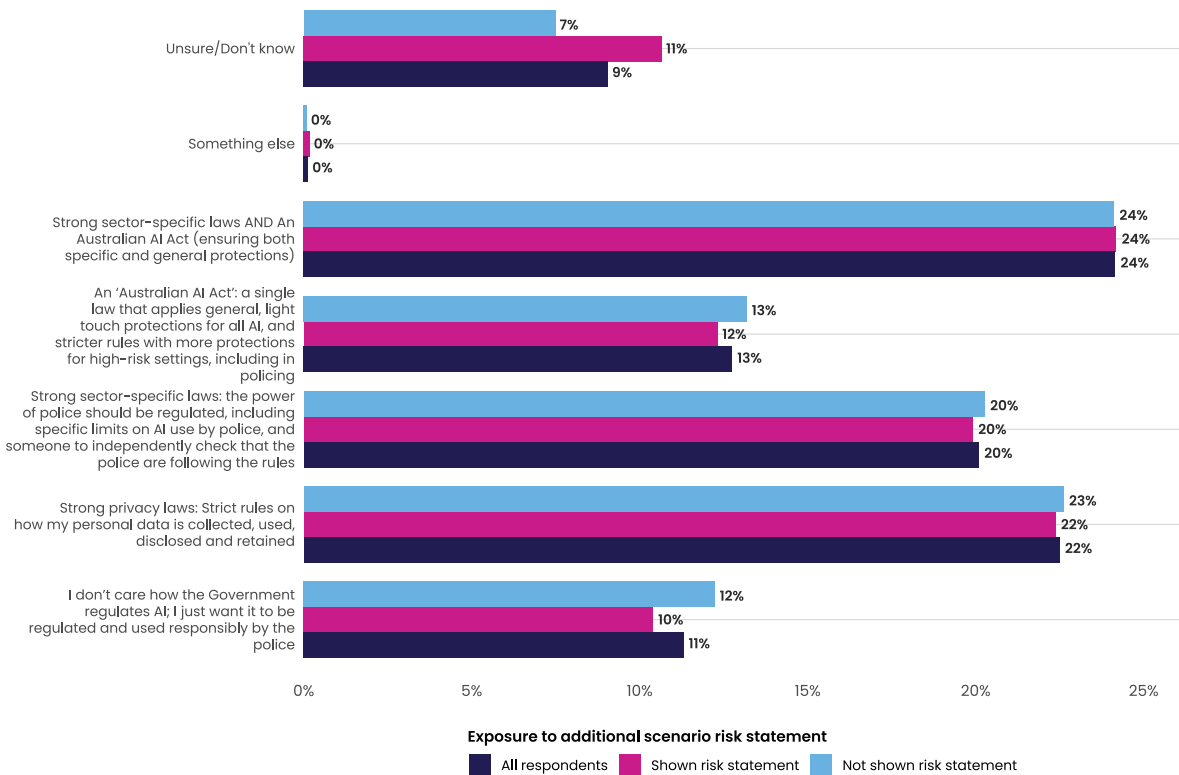
A clear majority of Australians (66%) believe that government regulation would increase their comfort with AI being used in law enforcement scenarios. This sentiment remains consistent regardless of risk assessment exposure, with 65% of those shown risk statements and 67% of those not shown risk statements reporting that regulation would increase their comfort. Meanwhile, 25% of Australians overall say that government regulation would not change their comfort levels regarding AI being used in law enforcement (Figure A8).

Figure A8: Regulation as an indicator of comfort with AI in the law enforcement scenario



When asked which approach to regulation would most increase their comfort, 11% indicate they don't have a preferred regulatory model. In this scenario, 24% of Australians support a dual approach, including both strong sector-specific laws and a broader Australian AI Act. This is followed closely by 22% who favour strong privacy laws with strict rules on data collection and disclosure, and 20% who prefer strong sector-specific laws that limit police power and include independent oversight. Only 13% believe an Australian AI Act on its own would be the most effective way to increase their comfort in this scenario. About 9% are unsure (Figure A9).

Figure A9: Preferred regulation approaches in the law enforcement scenario





Sector 4: Creative industries

Participants were presented with the following scenario and questions:

AI tools now let anyone create professional-looking images, music and written articles just by typing in a brief description of what they want to show or write. Australian small businesses are adopting it quickly because it is much cheaper and quicker than hiring a person.

[Risk shown to half respondents evenly across all quotas] The AI was built by copying millions of creations from Australian artists and writers without asking their permission or paying them. Because the AI is so cheap to use, it becomes much harder for human creators to find paid work.

Questions

1. How comfortable are you with AI tools like this being widely used in Australia?
2. Now, imagine the government has put rules in place to regulate how AI is used, including that creatives must agree and be paid for their work that is used to train AI. Would this make you more comfortable with AI being used in this scenario?
3. Which one of the following regulations would most increase your comfort with AI being used in this scenario?
 - I don't care how the government regulates AI in this scenario; I just want it to be regulated and used responsibly
 - Strong laws specific to AI and copyright: but innovation and economic growth should be the priority, not payments to the people that create the content
 - Strong laws specific to AI and copyright: but payment to people who create the content should be the priority, not just innovation and economic growth
 - An 'Australian AI Act': a single law that applies general, light touch rules for all AI, including with respect to copyright
 - Unsure/Don't know
 - Something else

Focus groups

This scenario received a mix of positive, negative and ambivalent reactions in the focus groups.

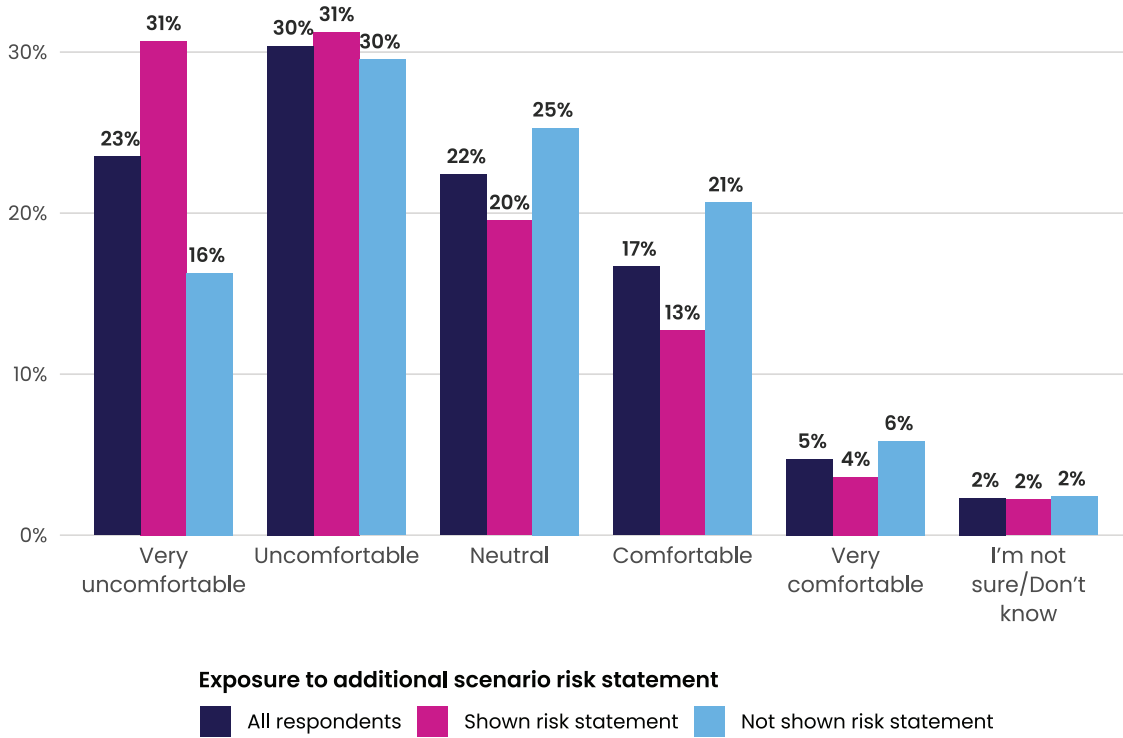
- Concerns about job displacement, though some understand its value when a business (specifically a small business) can't afford to hire people.
- Broader concerns about the consumption and creation of creative work; for example, some question whether they would listen to an artist whose song is made by AI, while others worry about loss of creative skills.
- Using AI as a helping tool but not relying on it would increase comfort (for example, not displacing jobs but having human oversight of AI as part of a job role).



Survey responses

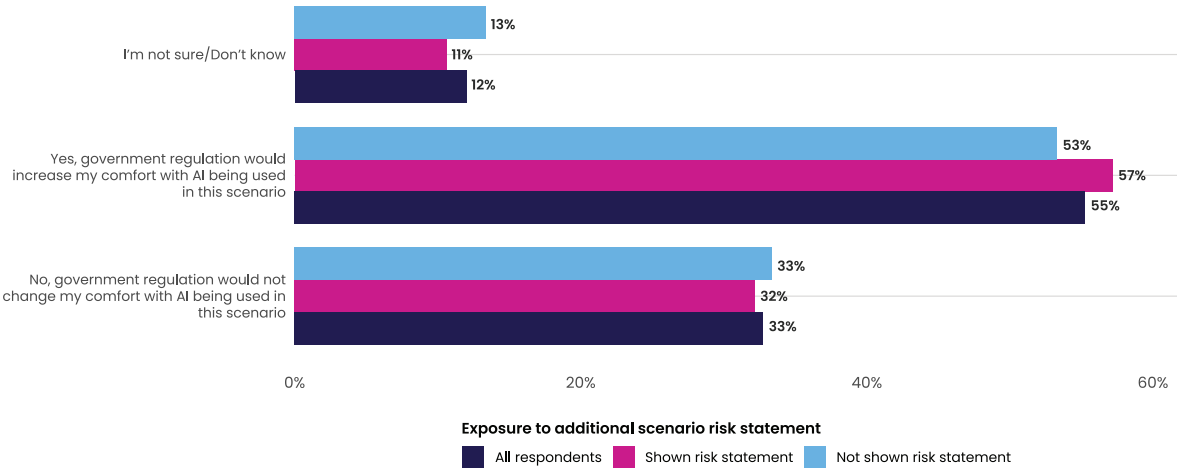
Australians' comfort with AI in the creative industries is notably lower than in education and law enforcement. Among those not shown risk statements, 21% report being comfortable and 6% very comfortable. However, for those shown risk statements, comfortable responses drop to 13% and very comfortable to just 4%. Discomfort is widespread; 31% of those informed of risks report being very uncomfortable, and another 31% feel uncomfortable, compared to 16% and 30%, respectively, among those who were not shown risk assessments (Figure A10).

Figure A10: Comfort with AI use in the creative industries scenario



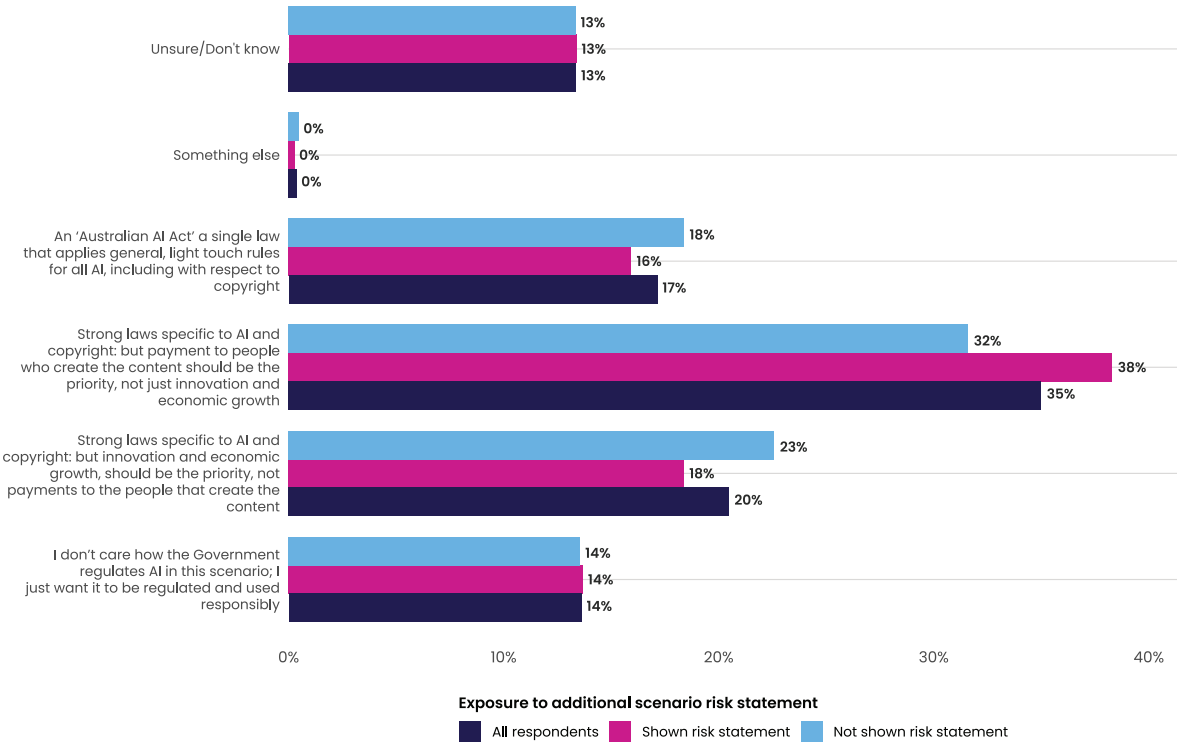
A slight majority of Australians (55%) believe that government regulation would increase their comfort with AI being used in creative scenarios. This sentiment remains relatively stable regardless of risk exposure, with 57% of those shown risk statements and 53% of those not shown risk statements reporting that regulation would increase their comfort. In this scenario, 33% of respondents overall state that government regulation would not change their comfort levels (Figure A11).

Figure A11: Regulation as an indicator of comfort with AI in the creative industries scenario



When asked which regulatory approach would most increase their comfort, 35% of respondents support strong laws specific to AI and copyright where payment to content creators is the priority. An additional 20% support strong AI and copyright laws that prioritise innovation and economic growth. In this scenario, 17% of Australians believe a general Australian AI Act would be the most effective way to increase comfort in this sector, while 13% are unsure and 14% don't care how the government regulates AI as long as it is and it's used responsibly (Figure A12).

Figure A12: Preferred regulation approaches in the creative industries scenario



APPENDIX 2: DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

Table A1: Ordinal logistic regression predicting agreement with statement reflecting comfort with AI if strong government regulations in place

DRIVER	EFFECT ON DEMAND	CERTAINTY (95% CI)	SIGNIFICANCE
Risk awareness	2.69	1.40 – 5.20	High (p < 0.05)
Law enforcement scenario comfort (per step)	1.40	1.25 – 1.56	High (p < 0.05)
Creative sector scenario comfort (per step)	0.85	0.75 – 0.96	High (p < 0.05)
Age (per year)	1.01	1.01 – 1.02	High (p < 0.05)
Gender: women/non-binary (versus men)	1.17	0.98 – 1.39	Not significant
Education: university (versus non-uni)	1.14	0.94 – 1.39	Not significant
Income: \$50,001 to \$90,000	0.98	0.77 – 1.25	Not significant
Income: \$90,001 to \$115,000	1.06	0.79 – 1.41	Not significant
Income: \$115,001 to \$142,000	1.19	0.88 – 1.60	Not significant
Income: \$142,001 to \$215,000	0.95	0.71 – 1.27	Not significant
Income: more than \$215,001	1.28	0.85 – 1.91	Not significant
CALD background (versus non-CALD)	0.94	0.71 – 1.24	Not significant
AI knowledge: medium (versus low/none)	1.39	1.12 – 1.72	High (p < 0.05)
AI knowledge: high/expert (versus low/none)	1.36	1.02 – 1.83	High (p < 0.05)
Interaction: risk x healthcare	0.82	0.69 – 0.97	High (p < 0.05)
Interaction: risk x education	0.92	0.77 – 1.10	Not significant
Interaction: risk x policing	1.08	0.92 – 1.26	Not significant
Interaction: risk x creative	0.95	0.80 – 1.12	Not significant

Demographic distributions

Figure A13: Engagement with and knowledge of AI by demographic groups

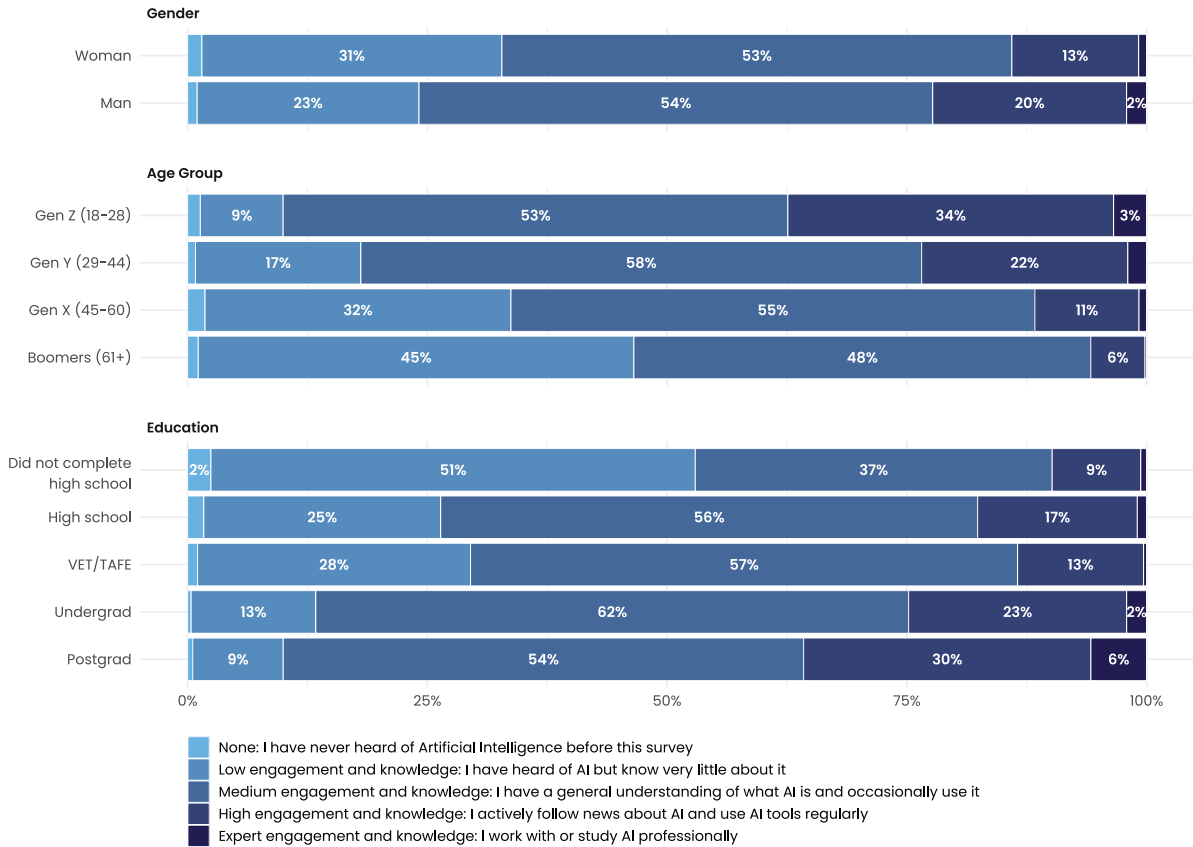


Figure A14: Trust in AI by demographic groups

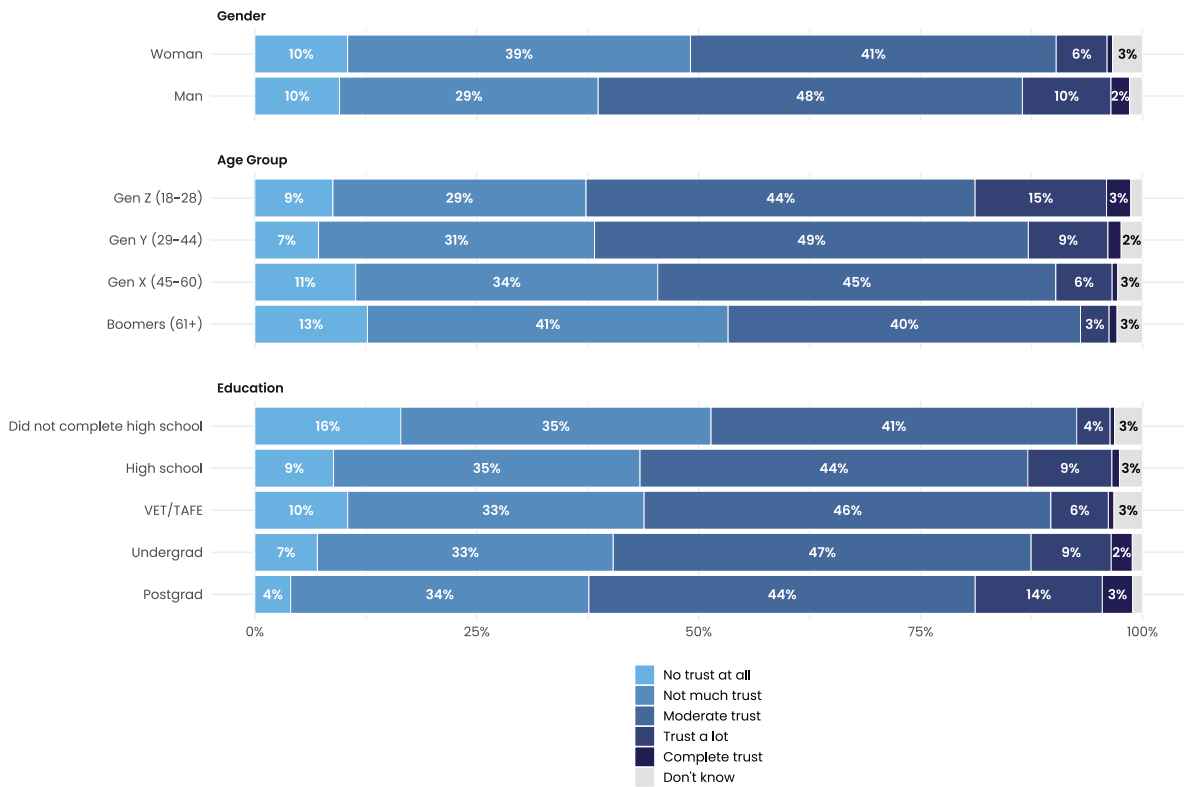
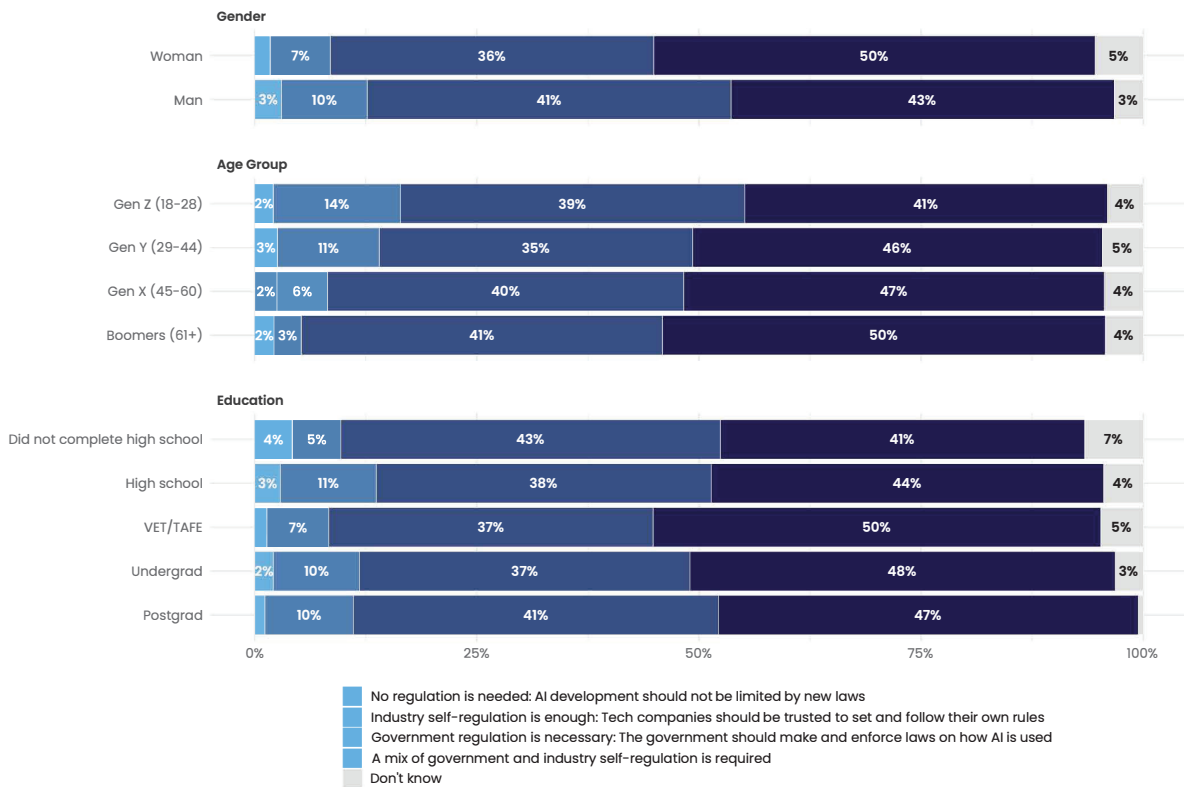


Figure A15: AI regulation views by demographic groups



ENDNOTES

- 1 This report adopts the definition of artificial intelligence from the *International AI Safety Report* (2024), p219: 'Artificial intelligence (AI): The field of computer science focused on creating systems or machines capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning, reasoning, problem-solving, natural language processing, and decision-making.'
- 2 N Gillespie, S Lockey S, T Ward, A Macdade and G Hased, *Trust, use and attitudes towards artificial intelligence: A global study 2025*, The University of Melbourne and KPMG, 2025.
- 3 Minderoo Foundation, *Australian attitudes towards AI regulation*, SafeAI website, February 2026. <https://www.safeai.org.au/research-insights>
- 4 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *National AI Plan*, Australian Government, 2025. <https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/national-ai-plan>
- 5 ZJ Hawkins and J Weaver, *Navigating the Tech Policy Ecosystem: A Taxonomy and Map*, Tech Policy Design Institute, 2025, Canberra. <https://techpolicy.au/philosophies>
- 6 TPDi has previously identified the need to strengthen coordination across Australia's AI innovation and governance ecosystem, see for example, Hawkins ZJ and Weaver J (2025) *Tetris for Australia's Future: Aligning our National AI Priorities*, Tech Policy Design Institute. The Ministerial AI Taskforce proposed in that report provide a practical model for the Coordinated AI Regulation (CAIR) Act. The CAIR Act could also take inspiration from Australia's Model Workplace Health and Safety Laws and Model Codes of Practice, or Australia's Basic Online Safety Expectations.
- 7 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *National AI Plan*, Australian Government, 2025. <https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/national-ai-plan>
- 8 N Gillespie, S Lockey S, T Ward, A Macdade and G Hased, *Trust, use and attitudes towards artificial intelligence: A global study 2025*, The University of Melbourne and KPMG, 2025.
- 9 Y Bengio (Chair), *International AI safety report 2026*, (DSIT 2026/001, 2026), 2026. <https://internationalaisafetyreport.org/publication/international-ai-safety-report-2026>; J King and C Meinhardt, *Rethinking privacy in the AI era: Policy provocations for a data-centric world*, Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, 22 February 2024. <https://hai.stanford.edu/policy/white-paper-rethinking-privacy-ai-era-policy-provocations-data-centric-world>; Senate Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI), *Report*, November 2024. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Adopting_Artificial_Intelligence_AI/AdoptingAI/Report
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- 11 FD Davis, 'Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology', *MIS Quarterly*, 1989, 13(3):319–340. <https://doi.org/10.2307/249008>
- 12 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Trust and public policy: How better governance can help rebuild public trust*, OECD Publishing, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268920-en>
- 13 J Thomas, A McCosker, S Parkinson, K Hegarty, D Featherstone, J Kennedy, L Ormond-Parker, K Morrison, H Rea and L Ganley, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index*, ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology and Telstra, 2025, Melbourne. https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ADII-Report-2025_V6-Remediated.pdf.
- 14 McKinnon, *McKinnon Index: 2025 Key Findings*, McKinnon, November 2025. <https://mckinnon.co/index>
- 15 Thomas et al., *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide*.
- 16 See above n6.
- 17 ZJ Hawkins and J Weaver, *Navigating the Tech Policy Ecosystem: A Taxonomy and Map*, Tech Policy Design Institute, 2025, Canberra. <https://techpolicy.au/philosophies>



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