



The Human-Centered Benefits of AI: Reality vs. Perception

Written by Ford Copple | October 2026

Three Key Takeaways

1. AI is already improving everyday life in ways Americans rarely see. From healthcare and education to business, AI is producing practical benefits for communities.
2. AI's value extends far beyond the tools that dominate public attention. Groundbreaking tools are expanding access to care, accelerating discovery, strengthening small businesses, and opening new possibilities for learning.
3. AI policy should protect against real risks without cutting off real benefits. A balanced approach can promote responsible innovation while preserving the opportunities AI creates for human flourishing.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is no longer a distant or speculative technology. It is already woven into Americans' daily lives, shaping how people work, learn, communicate, shop, find information, and manage everyday tasks.

Yet AI's rapid rise has left many Americans uneasy. To some, the boom feels sudden, untested, and haphazard, fueling calls for bans, moratoriums, and heavy-handed regulation.

AI deserves serious scrutiny. Like any powerful new technology, it raises legitimate questions about ethics,

privacy, safety, work, and education. But public debate often overlooks the ways AI is already improving lives.

Because AI is used across so many fields, many Americans understandably associate it with the tools they encounter most often. This report looks beyond those familiar examples to highlight an important set of AI-powered advances that receive far less attention.

From lifesaving medical research to practical tools that help local businesses operate more efficiently, AI is already producing meaningful, real-world benefits.

Government

AI's role in government extends beyond greater efficiency, lower costs, and leaner bureaucracy. It can also help public institutions serve citizens in more responsive and practical ways.

From tools that make local government more accessible to systems that monitor food safety across vast supply chains, AI is showing how technology can strengthen core government functions while improving public access and trust.

1. **Helping citizens stay informed and engaged in local government:** AI notation is allowing citizens to [engage](#) more with local government and track important legislation by turning hours of recorded meetings into easily digestible briefings.

- 2. Protecting families from unsafe and contaminated food:** The European Union is leveraging a new [AI tool](#) to strengthen systems for identifying food fraud, food contamination, and foodborne illness outbreaks across the union.

Healthcare

Few fields show AI's practical promise more clearly than health care. By analyzing vast amounts of data quickly and precisely, AI can accelerate research, improve patient care, and help health systems better serve underserved populations.

Utah's health care community is emerging as a national leader, showing how responsible AI innovation can advance discovery and improve patient outcomes.

- 1. Expanding dental care for people who might otherwise go without:** Individuals experiencing homelessness or financial hardship are often overlooked by our current healthcare system. [Dentacor](#) addresses this gap by using AI tools in its mobile dental hygiene units to increase its capacity and lower costs while maintaining safety.
- 2. Helping detect tumors and cancerous cells earlier:** Traditional cell labeling from imaging is an arduous process, often performed by medical students. A new AI tool named [CellSAM](#) revolutionizes this process by quickly and reliably identifying and labeling cells from large datasets, promising to spot tumors and cancerous cells before they cause harm.
- 3. Making vaccines less costly to produce:** Researchers at [MIT](#) have used AI to optimize the production of industrial yeasts used for protein production. These proteins are essential for vaccine manufacturing and promise to greatly reduce production costs, benefiting patients.

- 4. Helping doctors catch dangerous asthma warning signs sooner:** A new Intermountain Health [AI trial](#) improved outcomes and reduced costs for patients with chronic lung conditions, such as asthma. The tool helps doctors monitor patient data between appointments so early warning signs are not missed.

When speaking about her past asthma scares, Jill Bailey, a patient in the [Intermountain trial](#), said that she was glad she “made it through all those times to see technology help us live.”

Religion

For many faith traditions, translating sacred texts into new languages is essential to preserving belief, expanding access, and reaching new communities. Historically, that work has taken years and required deep linguistic and cultural expertise.

AI is beginning to change that. New translation tools can accelerate the process while improving accuracy and cultural understanding, potentially making important religious texts accessible to more people in more languages than ever before.

- 1. Helping more people access Scripture in their own language sooner:** AI is helping Bible translators produce first drafts of Scripture in new languages faster than ever. Tools like [Scripture Forge](#) give Christian organizations a valuable starting point for the careful, demanding work of translation.

- 2. Making Scripture translations more accurate and culturally meaningful:** Speed matters for many Bible translators, but accuracy and cultural meaning are essential. [AvodahConnect](#) uses custom AI translation tools to help Christian organizations produce Scripture translations that are faithful, clear, and culturally attuned.

Archaeology

Archaeologists have always used new technologies to uncover the ancient world. AI is now expanding that toolkit, helping researchers decipher damaged texts, enhance images, and locate previously unknown sites and artifacts.

As these tools improve, they are opening new windows into the past and revealing knowledge that would otherwise remain lost.

- 1. Recovering ancient Greek texts once thought lost or unreadable:** Google DeepMind has developed an [AI tool](#) named Ithaca that can identify, translate, date, and locate ancient Greek artifacts. It can also help restore damaged inscriptions once thought unreadable.
- 2. Discovering hidden archaeological sites without disturbing the landscape:** A recent [public challenge](#) invited participants to use AI to identify potential archaeological sites in the Amazon. Drawing on open-source maps and LiDAR data, the winning team discovered 67 previously unknown potential sites hidden beneath the jungle canopy.
- 3. Helping scholars recover the meaning of damaged ancient Latin texts:** In addition to their Ithaca tool for Greek artifacts, Google DeepMind has also developed [Aeneas](#), which locating Latin artifacts with damage or missing elements.

- 4. Revealing writings buried and unreadable for nearly 2,000 years:** In 1752, archaeologists discovered a cache of carbonized scrolls in Herculaneum, the ancient Roman town buried by Mount Vesuvius. Despite the damage, AI is [successfully revealing](#) the text of the charred scrolls through X-rays of the many compressed layers.

AI tools allowed archaeologists to [discover](#) 67 new potential ancient sites previously hidden in the deep jungles of the Amazon.

Space Exploration

Space exploration is once again capturing the country's imagination, and AI is helping push its boundaries even farther. From autonomous rovers to intelligent satellites, AI is enabling scientists to navigate distant worlds, analyze vast streams of data, and make discoveries that would have been impossible only a generation ago.

As America looks again toward the moon and beyond, AI is becoming a powerful tool for expanding what humanity can explore, understand, and discover.

- 1. Enabling humanity to explore farther into space with less risk:** NASA is currently testing new deep-space [probes](#) that can operate independently thanks to artificial intelligence. The ships can react more quickly to unexpected scenarios and transmit higher-quality data back to Earth.
- 2. Expanding how much of Mars scientists can reach and study:** A new NASA-designed [Mars rover](#) uses AI to chart its own course across the planet's rugged terrain. By quickly processing thousands of data points, the system identifies the most efficient path to help the rover reach its destination.

- 3. Giving scientists earlier insight into potentially catastrophic weather:** Earth-orbiting weather satellites help NASA conduct critical weather research. Now, new [AI technology](#) allows them to see past cloud cover and independently search for signs of catastrophic weather events.

Education

AI is rapidly entering American classrooms, bringing both promise and risk. Used well, it can reduce teacher burnout, personalize student support, and strengthen instruction. But it also raises real concerns about overreliance, critical thinking, privacy, and parental oversight.

Schools should carefully vet these tools, and parents should retain the final say over their children's use of them. Responsible adoption can improve student outcomes, support teachers, and keep parents meaningfully involved.

- 1. Giving struggling math students more personalized support:** [MATHia](#) by Carnegie Learning provides students with personalized AI math support and gives teachers insight into areas that need extra attention. The tool helps educators identify learning gaps and tailor instruction more effectively.
- 2. Turning everyday moments into personalized learning opportunities:** [Storytailor](#) helps parents turn personalized prompts into custom children's stories, complete with cartoon-style illustrations. The tool can make it easier to teach meaningful lessons in a creative, engaging format.

- 3. Expanding access to affordable, personalized math tutoring:** Math skills are essential to student success, yet many struggling students lack access to personalized tutoring. [Darsel](#), an educational nonprofit, uses AI to deliver customized math support via text-message-style questions.

- 4. Giving teachers more time to focus on students:** Teachers should be free to focus on students, not paperwork. [Fetchy](#) serves as an affordable AI assistant, helping educators draft permission slips, send emails, and find lesson-plan activities more efficiently.

When speaking about [MATHia's](#) impact on her classroom, Aurora Orvalle said that "it's great for helping students master concepts," and that it gives her "a good opportunity to meet with kids 1:1 or in groups if they're struggling with a certain topic."

Business

Across industries, AI is boosting productivity, expanding creativity, and helping businesses do more with less. Utah companies are among those leading the way, developing tools for everything from local business marketing to employee training.

While public debate often focuses on AI replacing workers, its potential to create opportunities, strengthen businesses, and support new kinds of work deserves equal attention.

- 1. Helping small businesses build a professional brand at lower cost:** [Looka](#) uses AI to help small businesses create custom logos and build cohesive brand identities. After that, it can even generate supporting materials such as websites, merchandise, business cards, and social media assets.

- 2. Giving financial advisors more time to serve clients:** [Jump AI](#) offers a complete AI-powered operating system for financial advisors that does everything from meeting notes to compliance records. The tool helps automate workflows and boost productivity.
- 3. Making employee training faster and more affordable for small businesses:** For small businesses, creating employee training courses, quizzes, and videos can be time-consuming and costly. Utah-based [Mindsmith](#) uses AI to make custom training content faster and easier to produce.
- 4. Helping businesses create more efficient, better-performing buildings:** [PassiveLogic](#) uses AI-generated digital twins to help companies test building designs virtually before construction. The process can improve efficiency, optimize performance, and support the development of autonomous buildings.
- 5. Helping small businesses grow without being overwhelmed by operations:** For small online sellers, growth often brings new challenges in fulfillment, returns, and customer support. [Redo](#) uses AI agents to simplify these back-end tasks, helping businesses scale more efficiently.

- 6. Giving local businesses more capacity to serve customers:** [Podium](#) provides AI-powered employees for local businesses, helping them manage sales, marketing, workflows, customer communication, and more. For businesses with limited resources, these tools can expand capacity and make daily operations more efficient.

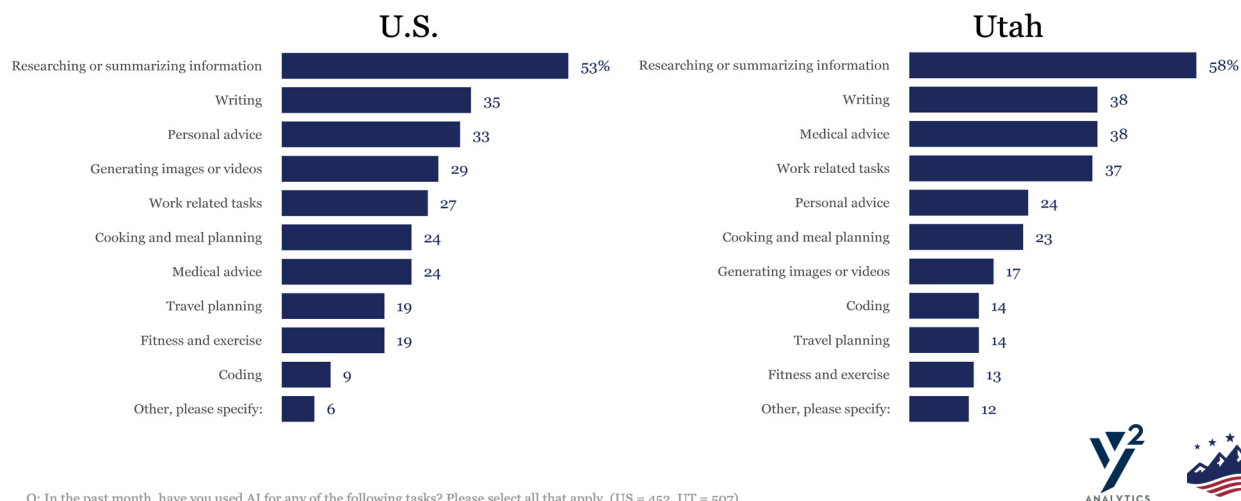
2026 AI Opinions Survey Data

The benefits of new AI tools are becoming increasingly visible across everyday life, driven by innovative applications like those highlighted above. Yet despite these advances and their potential to support human flourishing, much of the public conversation remains dominated by fear, uncertainty, and worst-case scenarios.

We wanted to understand how this tension between AI optimism and concern is shaping public opinion in Utah and across the country. To do so, Sutherland commissioned a survey by Y2 Analytics of national and Utah voters to measure how people view AI and its growing role in society.

The results reveal a deeply divided public. Utahns and Americans alike use AI tools frequently across a wide range of use cases and see significant promise in it, but they also express serious concerns, reflecting the complexity of the broader debate surrounding the technology.

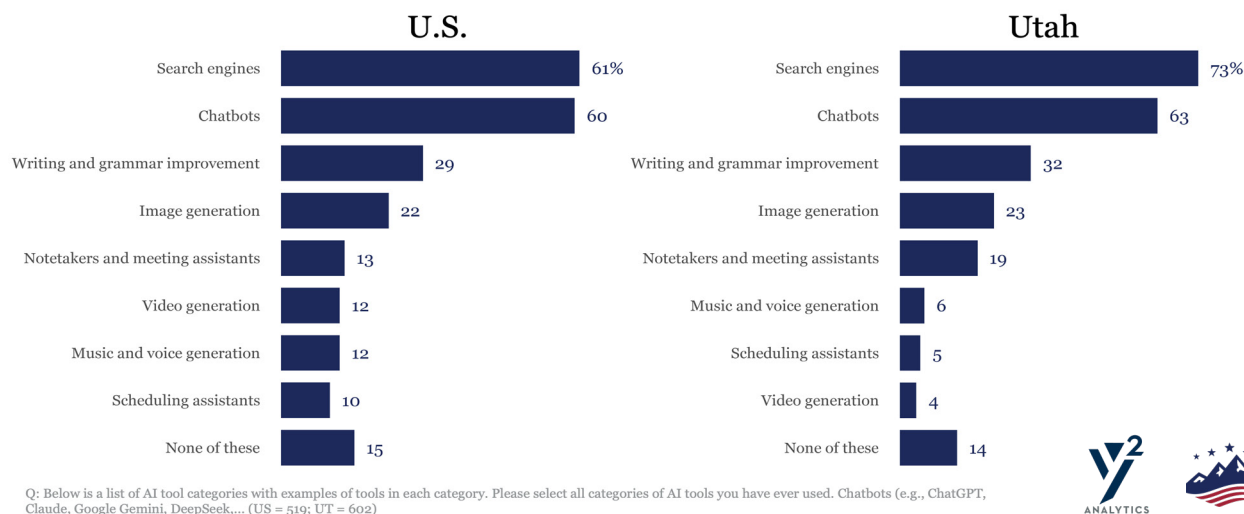
Over half of both Americans and Utahns use AI for reaching or summarizing information; using AI for other tasks, such as writing, personal advice, or medical advice, is less common. Asking AI for medical advice is more common among Utahns (38%) than it is among Americans as a whole (24%).



The graphs above show that productivity tools are the most common way Americans and Utahns interact with AI. This includes widely used applications such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini, as well as AI features integrated into existing tools, such as search-engine summaries. More creative or personal uses, including image and video generation, travel planning, and fitness, remain far less common.

Interestingly, Utahns are much more likely to use AI for medical advice than the national average, potentially reflecting the nation-leading work underway by Zach Boyd and the [Utah Office of AI Policy](#). By contrast, coding remains one of the least common AI use cases among Utahns and Americans alike, despite widespread predictions that software development will be among the professions most disrupted by AI.

Around 6 in 10 Americans have ever used AI in the form of search engines or chatbots, and nearly 3 in 4 Utahns have ever used AI with a search engine. These two tools are by far the most common forms of AI use among both Americans and Utahns.

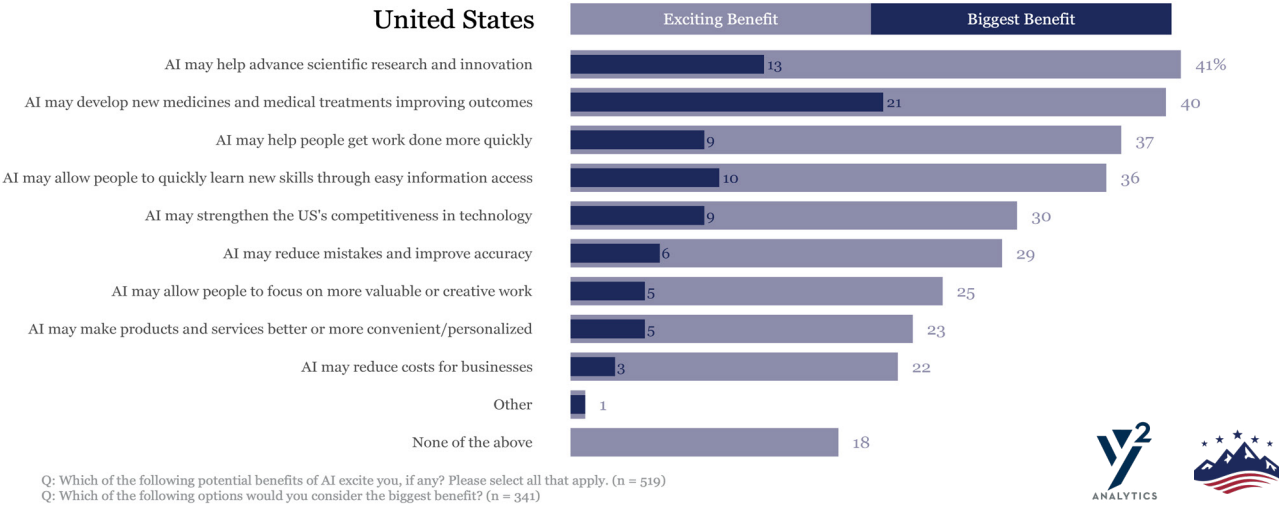


Looking more closely at the types of AI tools Americans and Utahns use, a similar pattern emerges. Productivity tools dominate, while more creative applications, such as music, voice, and video generation, remain relatively niche. Utahns report higher use of AI search engines, chatbots, writing assistants, notetakers, and image-generation tools

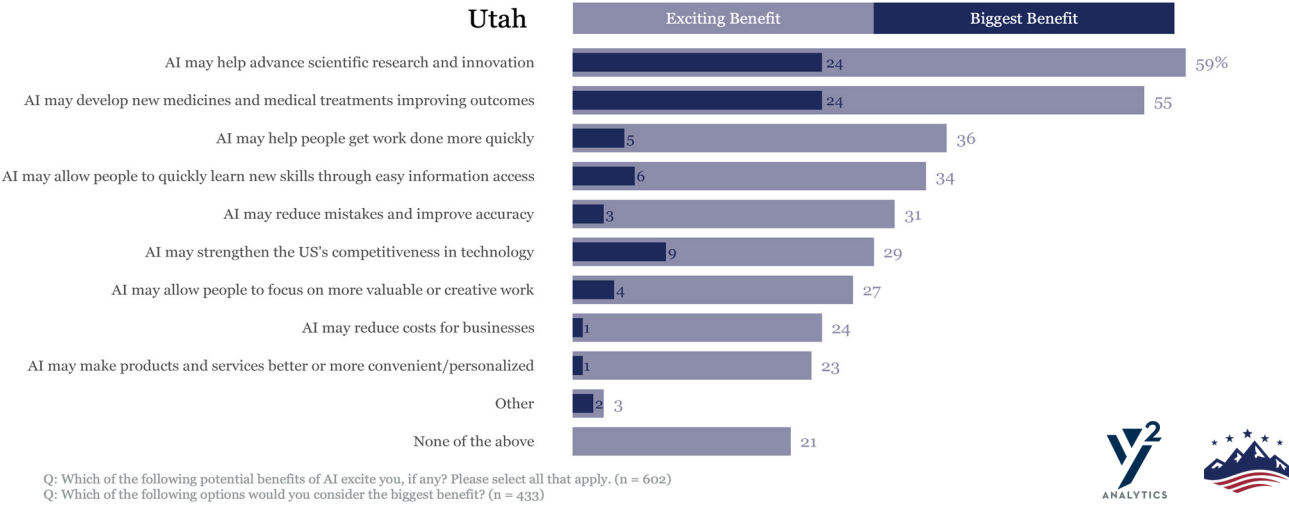
than Americans overall, but lower use of several other creative applications.

Taken together with the previous charts, the data suggests that Utahns are especially comfortable using AI for practical, productivity-focused purposes. Outside of medical advice, however, they appear less likely to explore more specialized or creative applications.

4 in 10 Americans agreed that the potential for AI to advance medicine and medical treatments was an exciting benefit, and 21% agreed it's the biggest benefit of AI. Other exciting benefits include advancing scientific research and allowing people to learn new skills. Notably, nearly 2 in 10 Americans said that no benefit of AI is exciting to them.



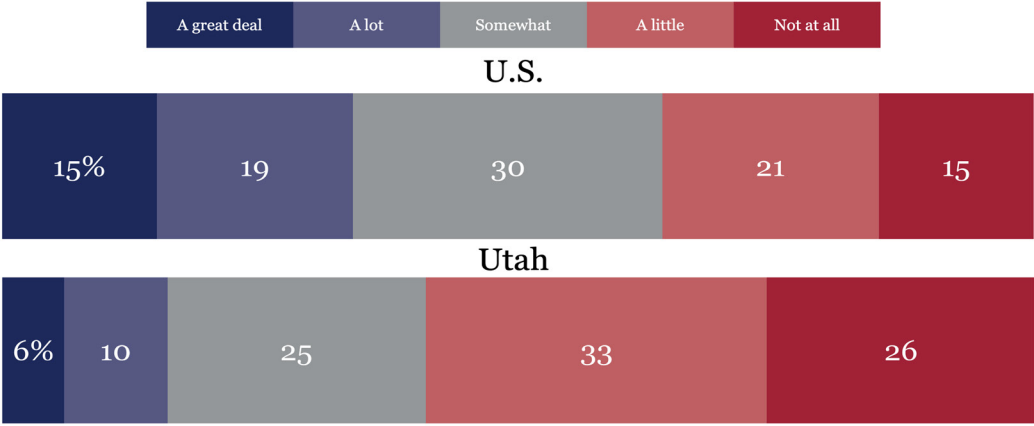
Utahns are even more excited by the research benefits of AI, with 6 in 10 Utahns saying they found this potential benefit exciting, and nearly one quarter saying either this or medical advancements were the most exciting benefit. Over 2 in 10 are not excited by any potential benefit of AI.



Utahns and Americans largely agree that advances in research, innovation, and medicine are among the most exciting potential benefits of AI. Yet despite reporting greater use of business-focused AI tools, Utahns are less

enthusiastic about AI's potential to lower business costs or make products more convenient and personalized. Nearly one in four Utahns also report feeling no excitement about AI's potential benefits.

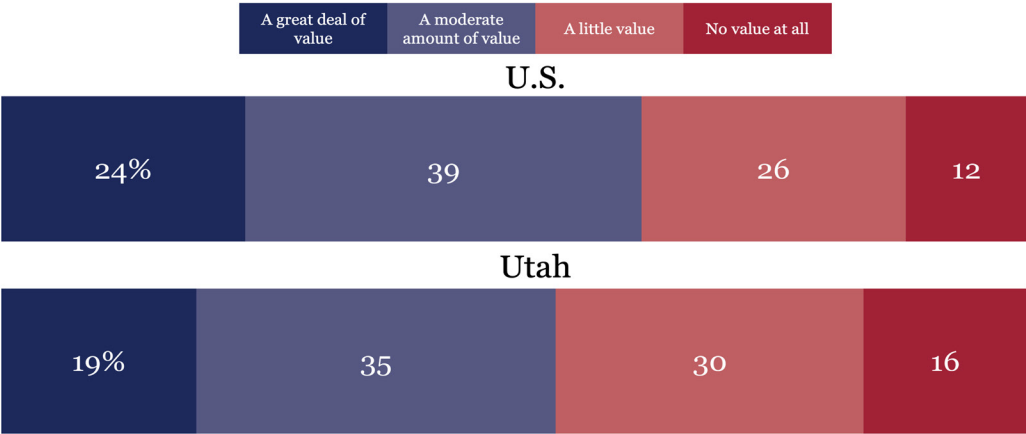
Generally, Americans are split on whether AI has made their daily life easier, with 34% saying it has made their daily life “a lot” or “a great deal” easier and 36% saying it has made their life “a little” or “not at all” easier. However, Utahns are far more likely to say that AI has not made their daily life easier, with 59% saying AI has made their life “a little” or “not at all” easier.



Q: How much, if at all, has AI made your daily life easier? (US = 444; UT = 514)



Over 6 in 10 Americans (63%) say that AI has a “great deal” or “moderate” amount of value, while a little over half (54%) of Utahns say the same.



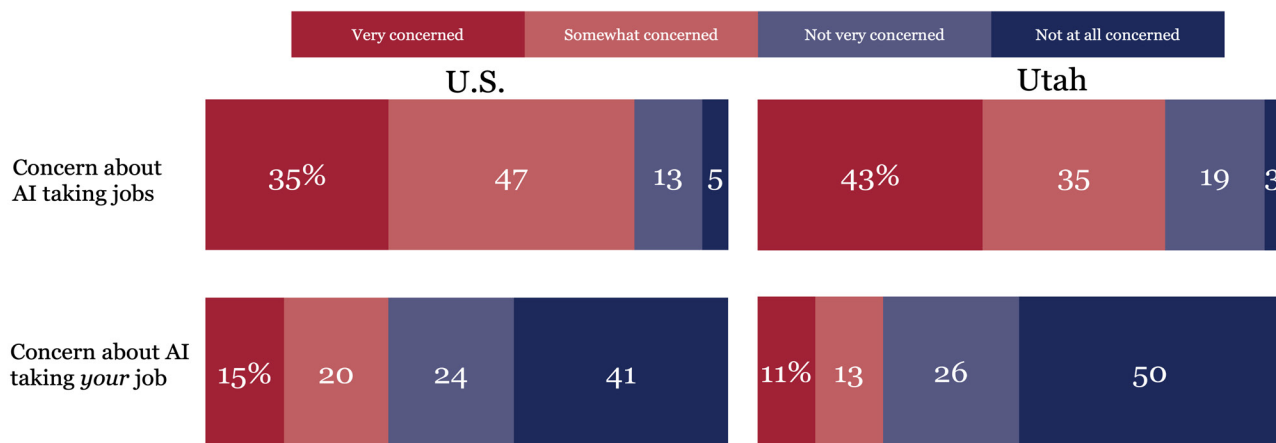
Q: How much value do you see in artificial intelligence (AI) tools? (e.g., chatbots, writing assistants, image and video generators, coding tools, scheduling algorithms, educational tools, note-takers... (US = 519; UT = 602)



Despite clear doubts about AI’s usefulness and broader impact, both Americans and Utahns still report that it provides value in their daily lives. This tension reflects the

complicated relationship many people have with AI, seeing practical benefits while remaining uncertain about its larger role in society.

8 in 10 of both Americans (82%) and Utahns (78%) are worried about AI taking jobs, but fewer are concerned about losing their own job to AI (35% of Americans and 24% of Utahns). 50% of Utahns are “not at all” concerned about losing their job to AI.



Q: How concerned, if at all, are you that AI will reduce jobs in the workforce? (US = 519; UT = 602)
 Q: How concerned, if at all, are you that AI will eliminate your job? (US = 519; UT = 602)



Americans and Utahns alike worry that AI will displace jobs, but they are far less concerned about losing their own. Utahns are even less likely than Americans overall to fear that AI will threaten their personal employment. This gap reveals a notable divide between broad concerns about AI’s impact on the labor market and individuals’ perceptions of the risk to themselves.

Conclusion

Americans and Utahns hold complex views about AI, its role in their lives, its effects on society, and its promise for the future. Understanding these nuances is important

for policymakers as they consider how emerging AI technologies should be governed.

The data above offers valuable insight into the concerns and expectations of both Americans and Utahns. Both groups are comfortable with productivity-focused AI tools but appear less familiar with more creative and personal applications. They see significant promise in medical and research advancements, while expressing less enthusiasm about AI’s potential benefits for business and commerce.

Both groups also express concern about AI’s effect on the broader job market while showing far less fear that it will threaten their own employment. This gap suggests that public anxiety about AI is often greater at the societal level

than at the personal level. Survey results also point to a need for better public understanding of AI advancements that extend well beyond basic productivity tools.

As policymakers consider AI regulation, they will need to account for both the technology's risks and its potential benefits. Utah has already taken an active role in developing new approaches to AI governance through state leaders and the Utah Office of AI Policy. That work provides an opportunity to continue examining how innovation,

transparency, accountability, and human flourishing can inform the state's approach.

Public understanding will also shape that conversation. Artificial intelligence is one of the defining technological developments of our generation, and decisions made today will influence how it affects work, families, businesses, and communities for years to come. The challenge is to address legitimate risks without losing sight of the opportunities AI may create.



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As Tech Policy Analyst, Ford Copple works to provide high-quality research on emerging tech topics to ensure Utah remains a pro-innovation state where tech benefits human flourishing.