How Australians feel about the rise of AI

in ACT, NSW and Victoria

Artificial intelligence is everywhere…and society is reacting.

Knowingly or unknowingly, we interact with AIs every day. They are increasingly present in our work, our car, our phone, our loungeroom, our public services.

What level of trust should we have in AIs? What tasks should we entrust to them, or keep within the domain of humans? What opportunities should government and business embrace? As a society, what limits should we put in place to safeguard what's important?
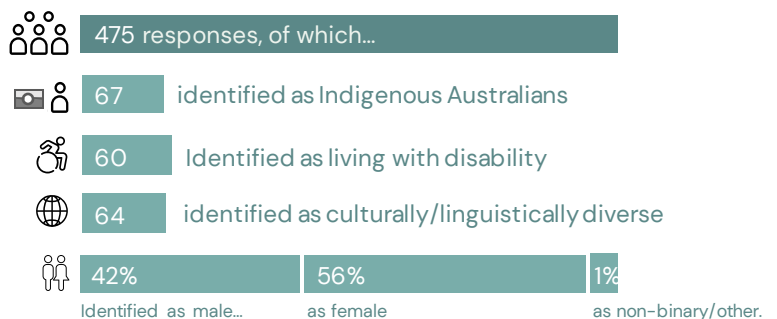
There are no easy answers to these questions. AIs outperform humans in many areas, and act as engines for research, creativity and productivity. But they are also vulnerable to bias, they 'hallucinate', they often can't meaningfully show why they arrived at a conclusion or a decision.

ThinkPlace's 2023 benchmark survey explores how Australians in ACT, NSW and Victoria perceive AI's role in society.

Would you rather trust an AI or a human jury with your liberty? An AI or a human doctor with your health? An AI or a human accountant with your finances? If traits like compassion, intelligence and creativity are important to you, how do you feel AIs compare to humans today? What about in 2033?

Rather than focus on an isolated notion of 'trust', our approach compares and contrasts community perceptions of AIs and of humans in a way that reveals important insights about the intersection between technology and society.

Our study in numbers:

475 responses, of which…

67 identified as Indigenous Australians

60 Identified as living with disability

64 identified as culturally/linguistically diverse

42%	56%	1%
Identified as male…	as female	as non-binary/other.

Note: This study's overall margin of error is 4.49% against a 95% confidence level, calculated using ABS cohort data for jurisdictions in-scope of the study. Low-quality/low-confidence responses have been excluded from the response count and from analysis.

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Section 1: Imagine that...

When things get serious, when do people want to rely on an AI or a human?

3 scenarios that characterise our trust in AIs vs humans

We asked respondents to think about three scenarios that represented a dimension of personal risk – either health, financial or legal. For each scenario, they could select if they would prefer a human or an AI to be involved in a critical role.

If you had a health issue that needed medication, would you choose a doctor or an AI to prescribe it?

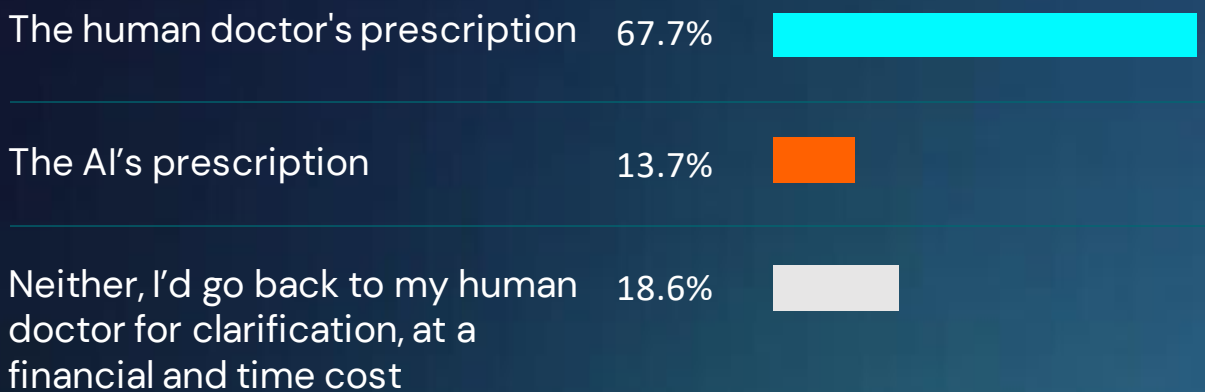Would you be more willing to entrust a human accountant or an AI with your tax return?

If you were charged with a serious crime, and were innocent, would you prefer a human jury or an AI determine your innocence or guilt at your trial?

Scenario 1 findings

It is 2024. Your doctor prescribes you an antibiotic medication for an infection. Later that day, you go to a pharmacy to get your medicine. At the pharmacy, you are offered a free consultation with an AI. The AI asks you a number of questions about you and your health issue, similar to those asked by the doctor earlier that day, and then prescribes a different antibiotic medication.

Which prescription would you ask the pharmacist to fill?

The human doctor's prescription	67.7%
The AI's prescription	13.7%
Neither, I'd go back to my human doctor for clarification, at a financial and time cost	18.6%

Responses showed a strong preference towards a human doctor, and preference towards an AI declined with age, falling steeply in the 40+ cohort.

For those who preferred an AI over a human, males had a significantly higher tendency than females to rank an AI as their preferred advisor in this scenario.
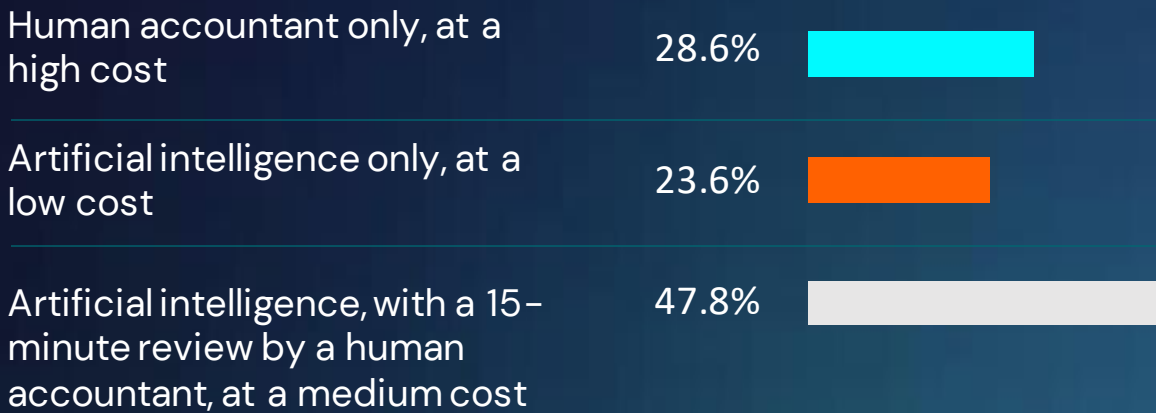
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people preferred a human doctor, but showed an above-average preference for wanting human validation of a divergent AI opinion (27.1% vs an 18.6% average).

Scenario 2 findings

It is 2024. Your accountant offers you a new service where an AI can complete your tax return at a reduced cost.

Which of the following services would you prefer in this situation?

Human accountant only, at a high cost	28.6%
Artificial intelligence only, at a low cost	23.6%
Artificial intelligence, with a 15-minute review by a human accountant, at a medium cost	47.8%

People generally prefer a "human-in-the-loop", with preference for AI only tending to decline with increasing age.

The highest earners were also the lowest 'fans' of the AI-only model. 61% of $200,000+ earners wanted AI with human review.

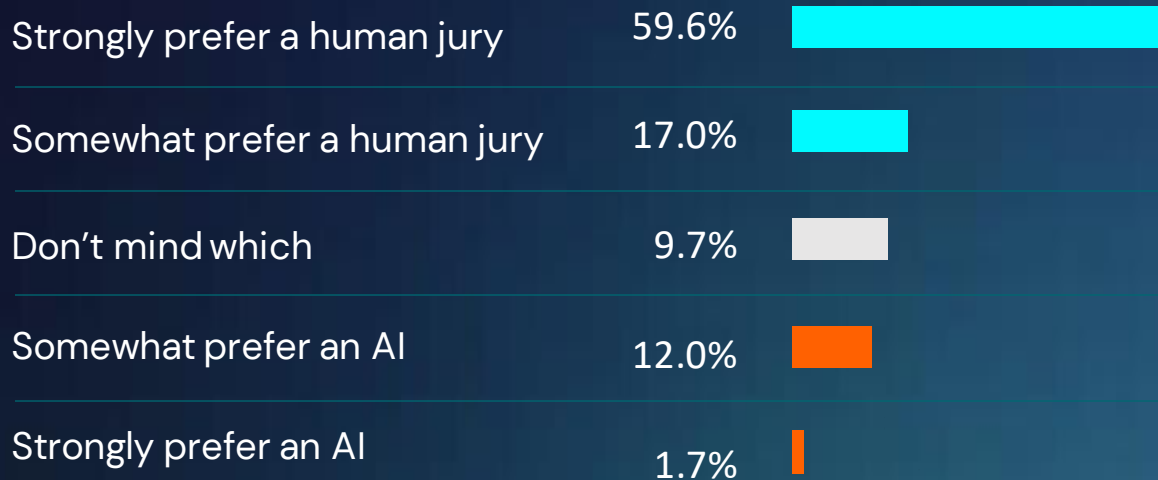Female respondents had a distinctly lower preference for AI-only than males (19.6% vs 29.3%).

Being an early adopter of technology did not significantly change people's preferences.

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Scenario 3 findings

It is 2024. You have been charged with a serious crime, and you are innocent. You are given the choice at your trial about whether you would prefer a human jury or AI decide if you are innocent or guilty.

Who would you prefer to judge you as innocent or guilty?

Strongly prefer a human jury	59.6%
Somewhat prefer a human jury	17.0%
Don't mind which	9.7%
Somewhat prefer an AI	12.0%
Strongly prefer an AI	1.7%

There was generally a strong preference for a human jury rather than an AI jury, but 13.7% of respondents did indicate a preference for AI. Responses were consistent across male and female cohorts.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had an overall significantly lower preference for a human jury, and a heightened preference for the 'don't mind which' response.

People living with disability had a strong preference for a human jury, dramatically outweighing all other jury models.

Age was a predictor of AI preference in a legal setting, with younger cohorts somewhat more positive about AI in this scenario, and older cohorts somewhat less positive.

Respondents with post-graduate degrees tended to have significantly more positive preference for an AI jury than other education levels.

Section 2: How do AIs rate?

What is the community perception of how the most advanced AIs and humans compare for important traits, today and in the future?

# How the community assesses AI with respect to important 'human' traits

AI's power and sophistication has advanced rapidly over the last decade. We remain in a world of 'Narrow AI' – AI which has a specific function, such as ChatGTP, which generates conversational text, or self-driving cars, which sense and navigate through their environment.

Achieving the next stage of AI - an Artificial General AI can learn organically, reason, problem-solve, communicate, and integrate many skills in a way similar to humans – is still many decades away, although some researchers are seeing the first 'sparks' in the latest AI innovations.

While humanlike AI remains on the distant horizon, it is possible and useful to attribute human-like traits to AIs. Can we trust AIs? Are they truth-tellers? Can they show – or at least behave in a way that emulates – compassion? Are they creative, intelligent, helpful?

We asked the community to contrast how they see the most advanced AIs and humans with respect to 4 important traits.

The 4 traits
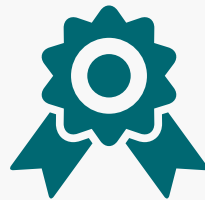
1. Trustworthy

2. Creative

3. Intelligent

4. Compassionate

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⚜ Trustworthiness

Are AIs more or less trustworthy than humans today? What about in 10 years' time?
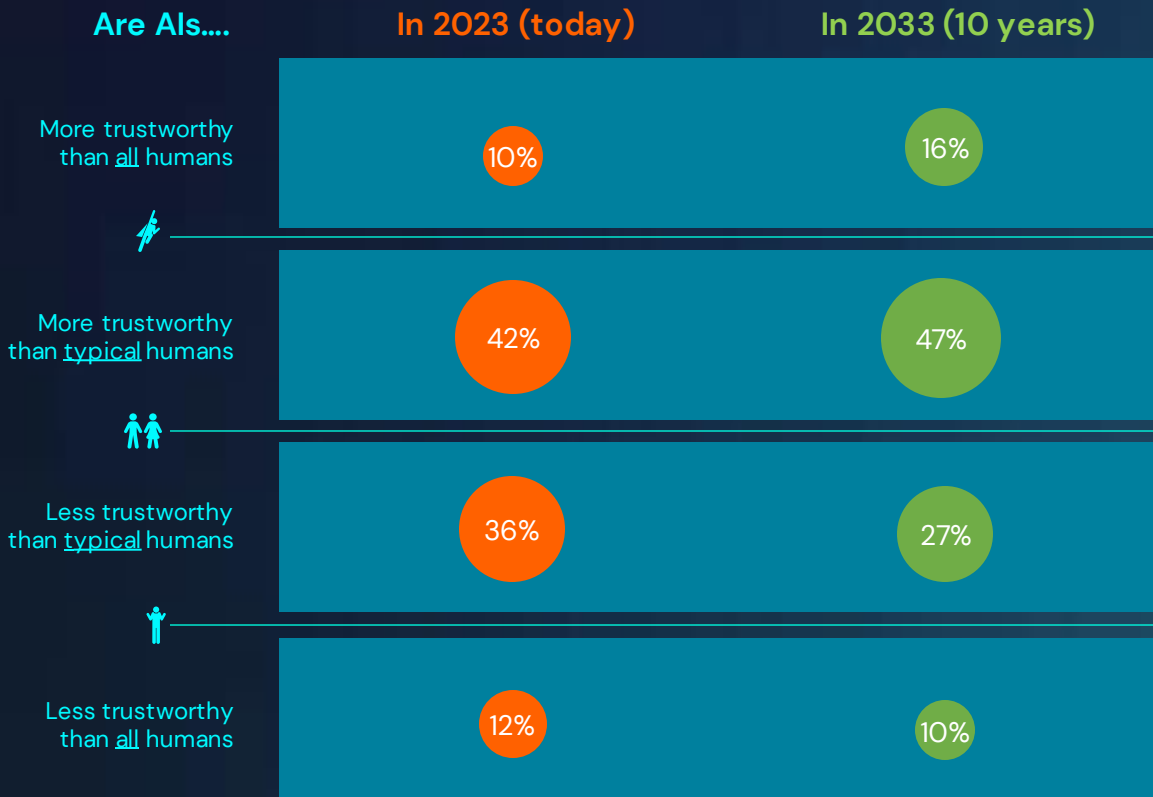
Big picture trend(s)

A slim majority (51%) believe that the most advanced AIs are reasonably trustworthy compared to typical humans. In ten years, this grows to (63%), with almost 1 in 6 believing they will be more trustworthy than humans by this point. In both timeframes, however, many continue to have doubts.

Take-aways

A prevailing belief that advanced AI will become more trustworthy over the next decade.

52% of respondents thought that advanced AI is already more trustworthy than typical humans.

While not the majority, many respondents had doubts about advanced AI trustworthiness relative to humans, now (49%) and in the future (37%).

Are AIs....	In 2023 (today)	In 2033 (10 years)
More trustworthy than <u>all</u> humans	10%	16%
More trustworthy than <u>typical</u> humans	42%	47%
Less trustworthy than <u>typical</u> humans	36%	27%
Less trustworthy than <u>all</u> humans	12%	10%

Creativity

Are AIs more or less creative than humans today? What about in 10 years' time?

Winner	Today: 😊	2033: 🤖

Big picture trend(s)

A slight majority believe that humans are typically more creative than AI right now.

In a ten-year timeframe, this flips, with 56% of respondents believing the most advanced AIs will overtake humans in the creativity stakes by 2033.

Are AIs....	In 2023	In 2033
More creative than all humans	11%	18%
More creative than typical humans	34%	38%
Less creative than typical humans	39%	31%
Less creative than all humans	16%	13%
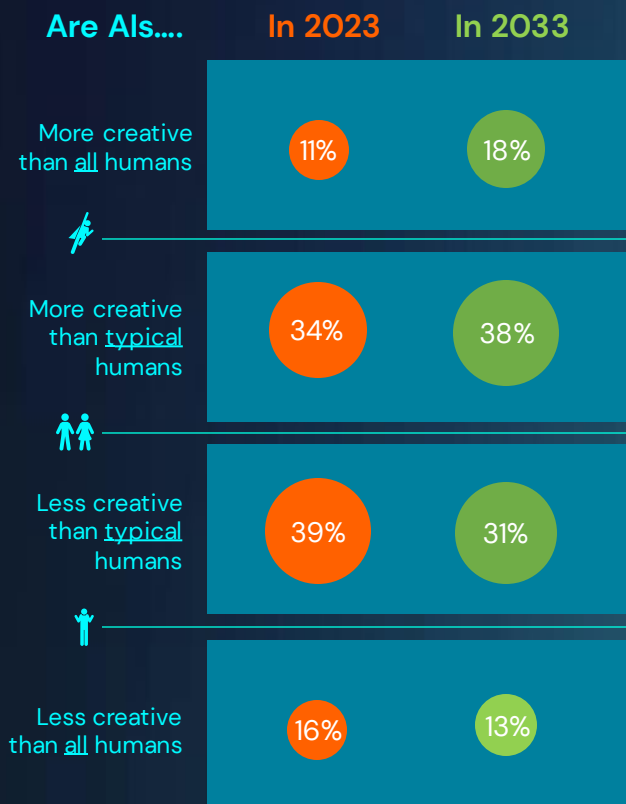
Intelligence

Are AIs more or less intelligent than humans today? What about in 10 years' time?

Winner	Today: 🤖	2033: 🤖

Big picture trend(s)

71% believe that AI are more intelligent than typical humans, now and in the future.

In the future, a third of us believe that they will be more intelligent than *all* humans.

Are AIs....	In 2023	In 2033
More intelligent than all humans	23%	33%
More intelligent than typical humans	48%	41%
Less intelligent than typical humans	22%	18%
Less intelligent than all humans	7%	8%
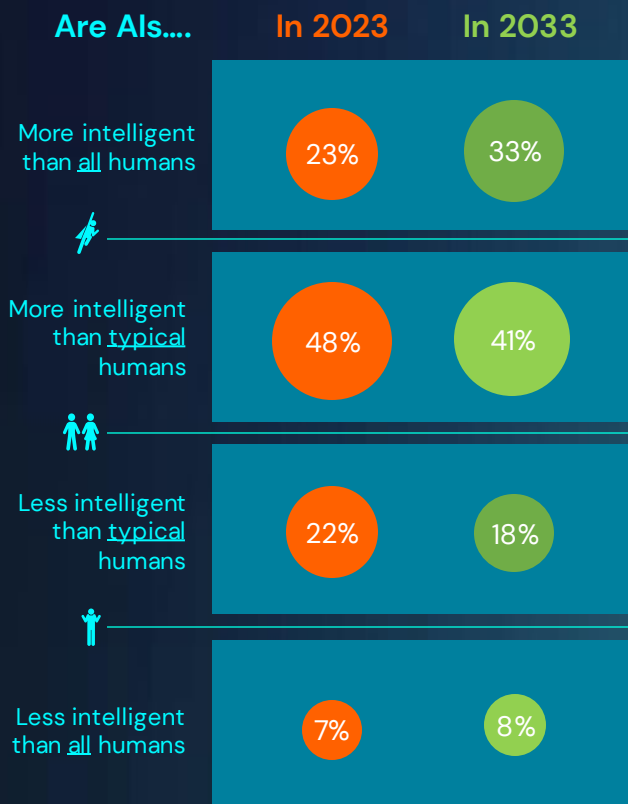
❤ Compassion

Are AIs more or less compassionate than humans today? What about in 10 years' time?

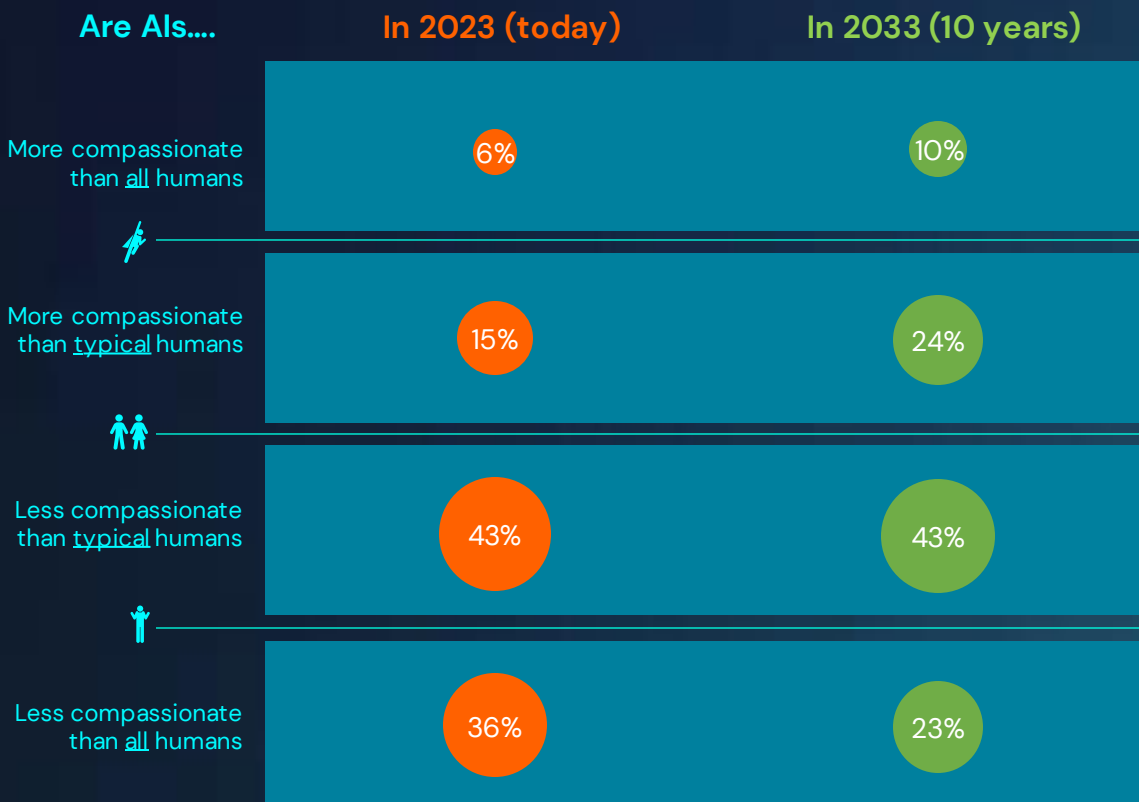## Winner   Today: 👤   2033: 👤

Big picture trend(s)

Two thirds of respondents believe that humans behave more compassionately than the most advanced AIs now, and will in the future as well. Almost a quarter felt in 10 years, they would remain worse than all humans in this trait.

Take-aways

Most people see compassion as a human trait that AI's will not perform as well in. But this is far from universal.

Female respondents had a consistently poorer view of AI compassion, and in the future, 27% felt AIs would be worse than all humans (compared to 17% of males).

In qualitative comments, a number of respondents, unprompted, cited AI's lack of compassion as a cause of concern in areas such as AI decision-making in government service delivery.

Are AIs....	In 2023 (today)	In 2033 (10 years)
More compassionate than <u>all</u> humans	6%	10%
More compassionate than <u>typical</u> humans	15%	24%
Less compassionate than <u>typical</u> humans	43%	43%
Less compassionate than <u>all</u> humans	36%	23%

Section 3: What do we fear? What do we hope for?

What did the community say about the risks and the opportunities that AI present to society, or to them personally, as our use continues to increase and AIs' power continues to improve?

Theme 1: A crowding-out

While many are optimistic about the opportunity presented by AI, others are concerned that human beings will be crowded out of roles previously in the domain of humans, to the detriment of those so displaced.

Example quotes from the research

"my concern with artificial intelligence is that there will be no human jobs around"

"I believe over the years it will significantly reduce the jobs and human will be heavily dependent on it"

robots replace humans

"AI taking away the rights that artists have to creative works made by them and schools taking away the creative process that goes into such things by putting AI stuff into the curriculum."

"It will eat up all the jobs"

Over= reliance

"they get too powerful or they make humans lose to many jobs"

"AI will bring an ease in our day to day lives and it will help human by cutting down his work in a meaningful manner."

"We still need a world of selfreliance and having a computerised or artificial intelligence may mean we stop thinking, knowing how to do things for ourselves and also not being able to have an opinion."

A lot of humans may lose jobs

what are we humans going to do? machines are to HELP us not take over.

"certain industries are going to use this instead of paying people, so it could put a lot of people out of a job"

Note: to ensure no bias is introduced through an editing process, no spelling or grammatical corrections have been applied to quotes from the research.

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Theme 2: Governing with AI

Opinions about the role of AI in government are mixed. Some see that there is an opportunity to speed up decisions or assist with better policy-making. Others see it as perilous, with potential for introducing bias or resulting in a loss of privacy. The Robodebt scheme has increased distrust in government AI (despite not being an AI system).

Example quotes from the research

I hope that AI is used to rapidly make appropriate decisions when there are clear yes or no options. It would also be helpful to use AI to advanced model the effects of proposed government policies.

It would cause the government workers to turn lazy and too reliant on technology to make things work

Improve government decisions

I don't think this is a very good idea. Look at what happened with the robodebt scheme

No concerns in liberal democracies

[...] can lead to a twisted view on a number of topics, gender bias, race bias, religion bias and more.

[concerned about] increased surveillance and monitoring of citizens

the loss of privacy, being able to access sensitive information, a feeling of big brother, it will be 1984

That it is accurate. We have already had a Robodebt issue which has caused trauma and consequences for inadequacy.

I think AI would help to increase the perception that people and their circumstances are nothing but numbers and algorithms

I hope it radically improves government services. I have no real concerns.

Government should not be allowed to use

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Theme 3: Business/society: enhancement/erosion

There is a mixture of optimism and grave concern about business use of AI. People see the potential for AI to enhance business, reduce costs and increase profits and customer experience. Conversely, unethical use of AI by business was viewed as a worrying risk and a potential source of harm to people and society.

Example quotes from the research

It is vital for businesses to prioritize responsible AI practices, ensuring transparency and fairness in their algorithms.

More intrusion into our lives by tracking us and inundating us with useless product suggestions. The unfortunate result of the digital revolution is that business will push the mots profitable products using AI to facilitate their greed.

I think AI can be very helpful and help businesses to be more productive, being monitored and regulated, tough

businesses, especially big businesses, are primarily focused on making profits, so they'll streamline that process with the use of AIs to the detriment of their customers.

Hope it may make some things in life easier. Less errors occurring in workplace.

That consumers will be taken advantage of

Help the economy

I would be concerned about potential privacy violations. I don't want my face to be scanned every time I go into a shop in order to receive product recommendations.

increased efficiency and innovation

misuse by businesses and I've never had a satisfactory outcome using ai.

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Theme 4: An existential threat

There was a significant level of concern about the risk of powerful/super-intelligent AI becoming taking over, and subjugating or destroying humanity, and the role of government in preventing this was seen as an important mitigation for this possibility.

Example quotes from the research

"It requires very strict supervision. The dangers of AI should not be underestimated."

"I'm afraid they will be too intelligent and take over"

"I do not trust Artificial Intelligence, one error in the way they are programmed could spell disaster for millions."

"Things need to controlled and monitored by government, so AI does not over power human"

"The AI taking control."

"It'll take over"

"Artificial intelligence will take over the world, with no humans left."

"I hope our Government is smart enough to put laws in place that prevent AI from hurting humans...if they don't do this, AI will figure out that humans are the ones destroying the planet and we will be wiped out."

"That they will use it and we'll skynet/ terminator our species"

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Theme 5: A compassion gap

In our research, compassion was seen by most as a trait where humans would exceed AIs now and in the future. In their comments, people demonstrated concern that AIs would displace humans in decision-making roles, and as a result, compassion would be absent in decisions that affect people's lives.

Example quotes from the research

it is only a machine and as such is fallible but NOT compassionate.

not neutral and may take steps to act on things without emotional intelligence

Every scenario is different, AI would not show any compassion in making decisions. Compassion and emotion is needed in decision making.

Just to have a unbiased ai that'll not just condemn someone cause of the own personal feelings or attachment towards the subject

without emotional intelligence or empathy

not neutral and may take steps to act on things without emotional intelligence

Lacks compassion and empathy and is only intended to generate profit for the business

Too much automation, loss of human touch which vulnerable people need.

The cost to humans on a empathy and moralistic value

The danger of decisions made without feeling and compassion

A greater loss of transparency and less integrity in the political process. Politicians need to have feelings to do their job properly.

The concerns I have are that AI are only as good as the information they are fed and they don't have feelings.

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Theme 6: "Take it slowly"

The research surfaced a desire for being careful with AI – getting the right laws, oversight and monitoring in place, and making sure that AI is fair, responsible and well-regulated, rather than rushing headlong and carelessly into an AI future.

Example quotes from the research

Take it slowly

needs to be regulated

Legislation needs to be created, updated and implemented to ensure Australian standards are maintained.

That it will be governed properly.

The need for this to be carefully monitored

AI is new and must be tried and tested before we put our complete trust in it.

I do not trust Artificial Intelligence, one error in the way they are programmed could spell disaster for millions.

that the human who program are fair and responsible people. a machine is only as good as the manufacturer, designer and programmer makes them.

I hope they get it right first time

AI is new and must be tried and tested before we put our complete trust in it.

Generally concerned that they will be mainstream in 10 years time

AI should be used after lot of regulations & in moderation

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Meet the team behind the research

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