# Public more concerned about immediate AI risks than future existential threats, study finds



A recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Zurich has revealed that the public is more concerned about the immediate risks of artificial intelligence (AI) than the potential long-term existential threats it may pose to humanity. This research challenges the common belief that dramatic warnings about AI’s future dangers may distract from current pressing issues.

The study involved over 10,000 participants across the USA and the UK, who were exposed to various narratives about AI risks. Some participants read headlines highlighting AI as a catastrophic future risk to humanity, others were shown content focusing on present-day threats such as bias, job displacement, and disinformation, while a third group encountered information emphasising the potential benefits of AI.

Professor Fabrizio Gilardi from the Department of Political Science at the University of Zurich explained the key findings: “Our findings show that the respondents are much more worried about present risks posed by AI than about potential future catastrophes.” He added that even when participants were exposed to apocalyptic scenarios concerning AI, their concern for issues such as systematic bias in AI decision-making and the loss of jobs due to automation remained significantly higher.

The study also dispelled the so-called “distraction hypothesis,” which suggests that looming existential risk narratives might reduce public concern for more immediate AI harms. Co-author Emma Hoes noted, “The study shows that the discussion about long-term risks is not automatically occurring at the expense of alertness to present problems.” Both Gilardi and Hoes emphasised that public dialogue should integrally consider both current and future challenges posed by AI. “The public discourse shouldn’t be ‘either-or.’ A concurrent understanding and appreciation of both the immediate and potential future challenges is needed,” Gilardi remarked.

This research addressed a critical gap in understanding public perceptions of AI risks by systematically examining how people react to different narratives about the technology. The results indicate that individuals are capable of holding nuanced views, distinguishing between abstract, theoretical dangers and concrete, tangible issues, and taking both seriously.

As AI systems continue to develop and become increasingly integrated into daily life, concerns about fairness, misinformation, and economic impacts remain at the forefront for many people. This study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) under the title “Existential Risk Narratives About Artificial Intelligence Do Not Distract From Its Immediate Harms,” provides empirical evidence to inform ongoing scientific and political discussions on the societal implications of artificial intelligence.

The findings highlight the importance of fostering thoughtful and broad public dialogue encompassing both the immediate and long-term risks associated with AI technologies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <http://www.news.uzh.ch/en/articles/media/2025/fear-of-ki-risks.html> - This article supports the claim that respondents in the University of Zurich study are much more worried about present risks of AI than about potential future catastrophes, confirming the key finding by Professor Fabrizio Gilardi.
2. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/04/250423112143.htm> - This ScienceDaily article corroborates the study design involving over 10,000 participants in the USA and UK exposed to diverse narratives about AI risks, and highlights the distinction participants made between abstract future threats and tangible present-day issues such as bias and misinformation.
3. <https://www.news.uzh.ch/en/allnews.html> - The University of Zurich news page reiterates that the public is more concerned about immediate AI risks rather than apocalyptic future scenarios, supporting the main conclusions and the dismissal of the 'distraction hypothesis' mentioned in the study.
4. <https://www.uzh.ch/en/explore/basics/ai.html> - The University of Zurich page on Artificial Intelligence explains the evolving role of AI, underlining both opportunities and risks, grounding the article's context about the societal integration of AI and the need for public dialogue on its impacts.
5. <https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/infk/ai-dam/documents/ETHAICenter_2023_web.pdf> - The ETH AI Center's 2023 annual report describes expert initiatives in Switzerland aimed at creating frameworks for assessing AI risks and governance, providing context for the article’s emphasis on scientific and political discussions about both immediate and long-term AI challenges.
6. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-00031-4> - This Nature article discusses public perceptions and concerns regarding AI risks, highlighting that many people prioritize present-day harms like bias and job losses, consistent with the University of Zurich study's findings about nuanced public views on AI.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMia0FVX3lxTE0tQmVHV1F4XzdzRzRWbFRjYW8yQUFfenBDeFNoa2xCd1B0eEN3bzlFb3Nlck9yVF9yMGRXa3d6SmNNbWU4T1VEa3NhUzNNczFiZFFra25JNzZoYjItM2h0N0ZVeTVmZ3BMalRR?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data