

# IS TECHNOLOGY THE ANSWER TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

*Global Societal Trends on Trust, Climate,  
and Technology ahead of Davos 2024*



January 2024

# Introduction

New technology is rapidly changing our economies and societies. At the same time, there are growing existential concerns around environmental threats such as climate change and biodiversity loss. One of the key themes at Davos 2024 is AI as a driving force for the economy and society, exploring how we can use AI to benefit all and help address imminent sustainability challenges, all while managing the potential societal risks.

GlobeScan's global public opinion research shows that the public across all regions is largely supportive of technology to help solve climate change – and many are increasingly looking to Big Tech as a force for good.



# Tech and Climate Change

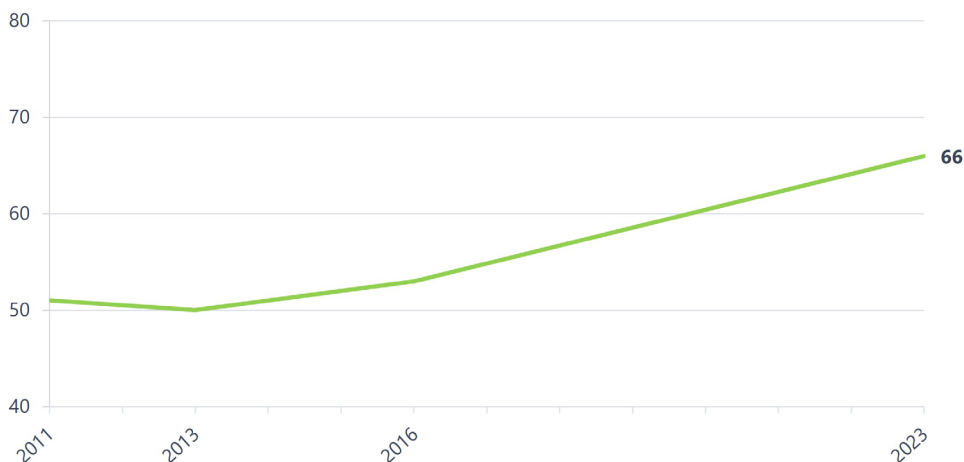
GlobeScan’s research shows a growing belief among people globally over the past decade that the benefits of modern technology are greater than its risks, along with relatively low concern about the potential dangers of AI. Proportions agreeing that the benefits of emerging technology outweigh its risks have increased from two-thirds in 2016 (65%) to three-quarters in 2023 (75%) in 13 countries consistently tracked over time.

The research also shows that people increasingly see technology as the key to solving climate change. Two-thirds of people across the world believe that “new technology will solve the problem of climate change, requiring only minor changes in human thinking and individual behavior” (up 15 points across 16 countries tracked since 2011).

The belief that technology is the answer to climate change is especially strong in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, with people in high GHG-emitting countries of China (79%), India (80%), and Saudi Arabia (75%) reporting a very strong belief that technology alone will solve the issue. Faith in technology to solve climate change is relatively weaker in North American and European top emitters, including the USA (53%), the UK (52%), Canada (48%), and Germany (47%).

Globally, those who are young, urban, and relatively affluent are more likely than others to count on technology to deal with climate change.

## New Technology Will Solve the Problem of Climate Change, “Strongly” and “Somewhat Agree,” Average of 16 Countries,\* 2011–2023



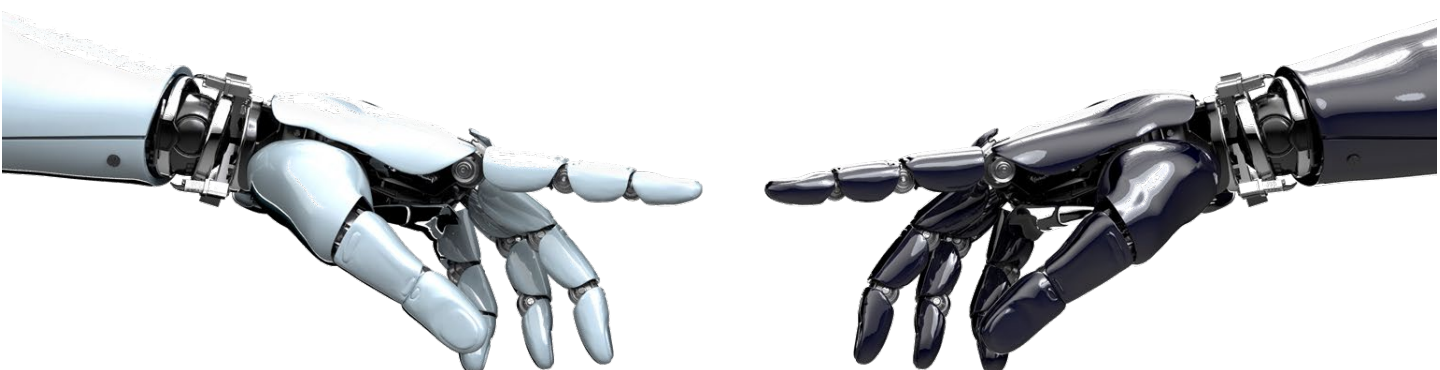
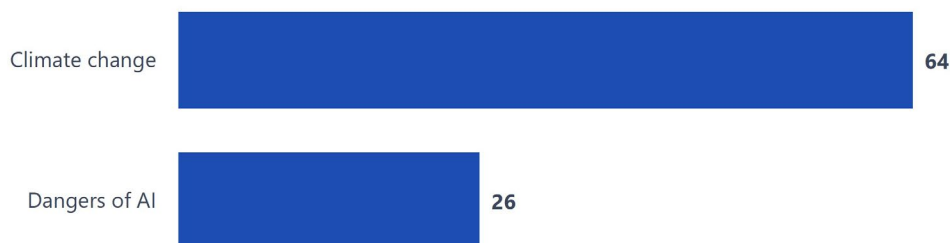
\*Includes Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Spain, South Korea, Turkey, UK, and USA. Not all countries were asked in all years. Before 2020 this question was asked using an in-person and telephone methodology.

# Climate vs Artificial Intelligence

Reflecting the positive perceptions that people tend to have about new technology, GlobeScan's research also highlights the relatively low level of concern that the global public has about the potential dangers of AI. Across the 31 countries and territories surveyed in 2023, just one-quarter of people (26%) say that the dangers of AI are very serious; in contrast, over twice as many (64%) feel the same about climate change.

People in OECD and non-OECD countries express similar levels of low concern about AI, although people in Asia and (less so) in Europe tend to be relatively less worried about its potential dangers. Women and people with lower education and lower purchasing power tend to feel more concerned about the dangers of AI than do men and those who are more educated and more affluent. However, there are only slight differences in concern among different age groups and between those in rural and urban areas.

## Perceived Seriousness of Climate Change and Dangers of Artificial Intelligence, "Very Serious," Average of 31 Countries, 2023



# Big Tech: A Social License to Lead?

Along with robust faith in innovation as the solution to our biggest challenges, GlobeScan’s research also reveals that views of the tech sector as a responsible societal actor have grown significantly in the past decade. Net ratings of technology companies fulfilling their responsibilities to society (positive perceptions minus negative perceptions) have increased from +18 in 2013 to +32 in the past year among the 17 countries tracked consistently over time.

However, there are very large differences in perceptions of the tech industry among different countries, regions, and demographic groups, revealing polarized views of Big Tech as a force for good. People in non-OECD countries tend to be much more positive about the social responsibility of technology companies than those in the OECD markets surveyed, with Europeans (and to a lesser extent, North Americans) holding much less favorable views of the sector compared to the global average.

## Performance of Technology Companies in Fulfilling Their Responsibilities to Society, Net Performance,\* Average of 17 Countries,\*\* 2013–2023



\*"Among the very best" and "Above average" minus "Below average" and "Among the very worst"

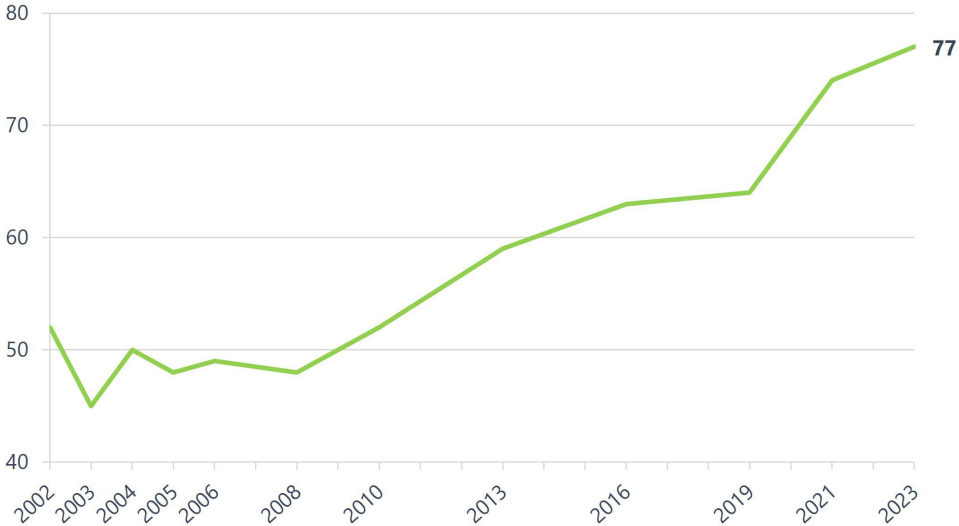
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# Regulatory Pressure Mounts

GlobeScan’s research also finds that global business in general is significantly less trusted than many other institutions and that trust levels have remained stagnant over time, although national governments tend to be even less trusted. The public trusts academic and scientific institutions and NGOs much more than business or government.

Despite the relatively low levels of trust in global companies as well as in governments, GlobeScan’s research shows a strong trend over the past two decades of increasing support for governments to step in and regulate companies to act more in the interests of society. Simultaneously, results reveal that nearly nine in ten people agree that companies should lobby governments to address climate change and protect nature and wildlife.

**Support for Regulating Corporate Responsibility, “Strongly” and “Somewhat Agree,” Average of 18 Countries,\* 2002–2023**



\*Includes Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, UK, and USA. Before 2020 this question was asked using an in-person and telephone methodology.

# Conclusion: Threading the Needle

People across the world increasingly see emerging technologies like AI as a driving force to solve challenges like climate change. GlobeScan’s global public opinion research reveals strong and growing expectations of technology to play a more active role, together with effective regulations, in solving issues like climate change.

Despite the drawbacks of AI and other new innovations that include their carbon footprint due to their high energy use or the uncertainty of new approaches like carbon capture, most of the global public – especially those who are younger, more urban, more educated, and relatively more affluent, and those living in emerging non-OECD markets – have faith that the benefits will outweigh the risks.

But the general public is not giving the tech sector a blank check. GlobeScan data suggest an important but complicated dynamic between two relatively poorly

trusted institutions – business and government. While there is growing support for governments to regulate corporate behavior, at the same time there is a greater social license for companies to address sustainability challenges.

It is likely that public expectations for technology to help solve our greatest challenges and lead us toward a low-carbon and nature-positive future will increase in the coming years. The tech industry has an opportunity to do this in ways that avoid previous challenges in societal adoption of new innovation including biotechnology, nuclear, and others. The tech industry is poised to deliver extraordinary value to society but it can only preserve a social license by working in partnership with government, academia, and civil society. This type of collaboration would create a robust trust equation to ensure societal acceptance of business-led technological innovation to help us achieve a stable, prosperous, and sustainable future.



# Methodology Summary

- Representative online samples of approximately 1,000 adults in each of 31 countries and territories (500 each in Hong Kong, Kenya, Nigeria, and Singapore), and 1,500 in USA ( $n=29,565$ )
- Samples representative of online population, weighted to reflect general population census data
- Online surveying between July 3<sup>rd</sup> and August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023
- Where historical data are shown, questions were asked using an in-person and telephone methodology before 2019.





# About GlobeScan

GlobeScan is a global insights and advisory consultancy working at the intersection of sustainability, behavior change, and trust.

We partner with leading companies, NGOs, and governmental organizations to deliver insights that guide decision-making and build strategies that contribute to a sustainable and equitable future.

Established in 1987, we have offices in Cape Town, Hong Kong, London, Hyderabad, Paris, San Francisco, São Paulo, Singapore, and Toronto. As a proudly independent, employee-owned company, we're invested in the long-term success of our clients and society. GlobeScan is a Certified B Corp and a participant of the United Nations Global Compact.

## Our Services

-  **Trends, Issues, and Foresight:** We help you identify, understand, and anticipate the current and emerging issues and trends that matter most to your business and stakeholders.
-  **Trust, Reputation, and Brand Building:** We evaluate the drivers of stakeholders' perceptions and help shape positioning that addresses risks, builds trust, and enhances your reputation with key audiences.
-  **Communications Development and Refinement:** We help develop and test communications strategies and narratives to make sure your messaging resonates and builds trust with stakeholders.
-  **Engagement, Advocacy, and Thought Leadership:** We identify and engage your most important stakeholders and create opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and thought leadership.
-  **Strategy and Best Practices:** We co-create sustainability strategies, frameworks, goals, and narratives that guide action, enhance impact, and build trust with stakeholders.

## Clients We Have Supported



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