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# Shaping AI

## YOUTH PERSPECTIVES, STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS, AND POLICY TRENDS IN GERMANY

ERASMUS+ PROJECT
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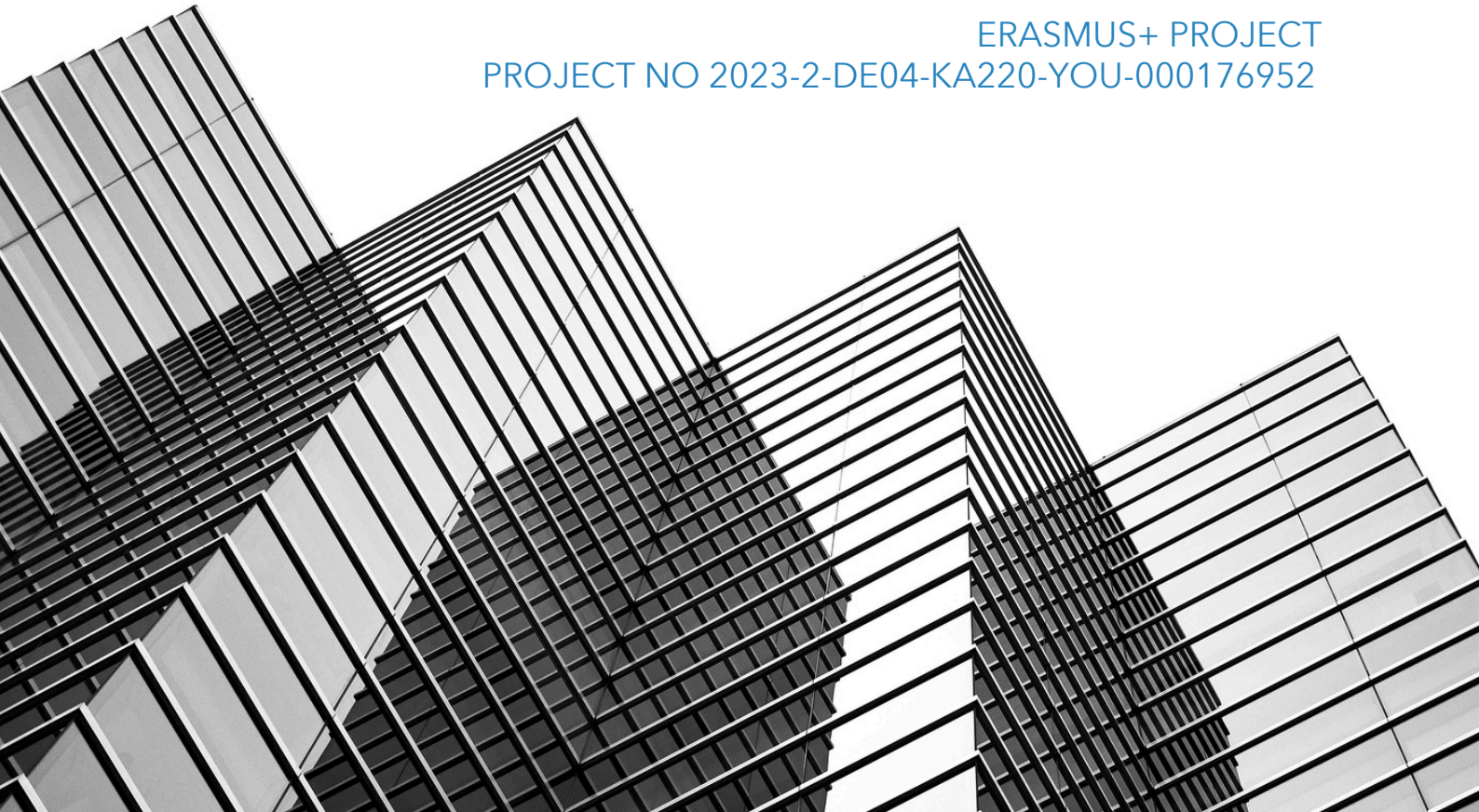

# Shaping AI: Youth Perspectives, Stakeholder Insights, and Policy Trends in Germany
# Regional White Paper

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# Introduction

This report, developed by YouthGovAI, offers a comprehensive overview of Artificial Intelligence (AI) regulation and its practical applications in Germany, with a particular focus on the perspectives and experiences of young people. As AI rapidly integrates into various facets of society, from daily life to education and critical public services, understanding its governance and societal impact becomes paramount. This document examines Germany's alignment with the overarching European Union AI Act, adopted in 2024, which categorizes AI applications by risk levels and imposes strict requirements on high-risk systems. It further explores the supplementary national guidelines, such as the German Standardization Roadmap for AI, and the expected enforcement roles of bodies like the Federal Network Agency. Beyond the regulatory landscape, the report delves into the dynamic political and cultural debates surrounding AI, balancing the imperative for innovation with the necessity for robust ethical and legal frameworks. Through an analysis of survey results and insights from national stakeholder focus groups, this report sheds light on German youngsters' familiarity with AI, their confidence in its understanding, usage patterns, and critical perceptions regarding its reliability and control. Ultimately, this document aims to highlight the dual imperative of bridging the AI literacy gap among youth and establishing meaningful channels for their participation in AI policy and governance, ensuring that Germany's AI future is both innovative and inclusively shaped.

# National Regulatory Framework on AI

## 1. Regulatory Framework: The AI Act and National Adaptation

Germany's AI governance is primarily shaped by the European Union Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act), adopted in 2024. This regulation classifies AI applications into four risk levels: unacceptable, high-risk, limited-risk, and minimal-risk. High-risk AI systems—such as those used in biometric identification, hiring processes, or credit scoring—must comply with strict transparency, accountability, and data governance requirements (European Commission, 2024).

The German Standardization Roadmap for AI, developed by Deutsches Institut für Normung (DIN) and Deutsche Kommission Elektrotechnik Elektronik Informationstechnik (DKE), supplements the AI Act by addressing technical guidelines for AI safety, interoperability, and ethical compliance (DIN&DKE, 2023). Furthermore, the Federal Network Agency (BNetzA) is expected to take an active role in enforcement, ensuring that AI systems meet European safety and transparency standards. However, as discussed in the OECD report on AI in Germany, a key challenge remains the fragmentation of governance structures, where responsibilities are spread across multiple regulatory bodies without clear coordination (OECD, 2024).

Additionally, Leicht, A. and Privitera, D. (2024) highlight the necessity of strengthening national oversight bodies and establishing a permanent AI advisory council to monitor technological advances and potential risks. The report emphasizes AI's economic potential and suggests international cooperation on AI safety standards to align Germany's policies with global frameworks (Leicht, A. and Privitera, D., 2024)

Germany's AI regulation also interacts with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), reinforcing strict rules on data processing in AI systems. Notably, AI developers must ensure compliance with Article 22 of the GDPR, which limits automated decision-making when it affects individuals' rights (EDPB, 2018).

According to Interface's 2024 report on EU digital regulation, Germany faces ongoing political debates about whether a national digital agency is needed to consolidate AI and digital oversight responsibilities (Interface, 2024).

A further dimension of the regulatory debate comes from the Letter of Concern on Foundation Models, which calls for stronger binding regulations on general-purpose AI models rather than relying on self-regulation. The letter, signed by leading AI researchers and policymakers, highlights risk such as AI-driven disinformation, cyber threats, and economic concentration. It urges the German government to support stricter oversight of foundation models to ensure public safety and fair competition (KIRA Center for AI Risks & Impacts (no date).

## 2. The Political and Cultural Debate: Balancing Innovation and Regulation

Germany faces a critical challenge: maintaining AI-driven innovation while ensuring compliance with ethical and legal frameworks. Federal Digital Minister Volker Wissing has emphasized that AI is crucial for economic competitiveness, arguing that excessive regulation may hinder Germany's ability to lead in AI innovation (BMV, 2023). However, Interface, a Berlin-based think tank, warns that weak regulatory enforcement mechanisms may undermine the AI Act's effectiveness, leading to compliance gaps at the national level (Interface, 2024).

The debate extends beyond policy implementation. The OECD's report on AI in Germany highlights that Germany has strong AI research and innovation ecosystems but lags in translating research into commercial applications due to regulatory uncertainty (OECD, 2024). The SNV report by Maham and Küspert on governing general-purpose AI also warns of the risks associated with generative AI models, including misinformation, systemic bias, and concentration of power among a few large technology firms (Maham, P. and Küspert, S., 2023). Leicht, A. and Privitera, D. (2024) echo these concerns, emphasizing that AI governance must not only regulate

but also facilitate safe and beneficial AI development, particularly in sectors like healthcare, education, and industry (Leicht, A. and Privitera, D., 2024)

At the Paris AI Action Summit held on February 10 and 11, 2025, former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz represented Germany and engaged in discussions on managing artificial intelligence (AI). The summit's official statement emphasized the need for inclusive and sustainable AI that serves the public interest (Artificial Intelligence Action Summit, 2025).

Beyond the European Union's AI Act, the European Commission (2020) has proposed additional initiatives to build trustworthy AI. These include a civil liability framework that adapts liability rules to the digital age and AI, aiming to uphold fundamental rights and address specific safety risks associated with AI systems. Furthermore, in September 2024, the EU, along with countries like the US and UK, signed a legally binding treaty known as the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence. This treaty ensures that AI technologies adhere to principles protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Council of Europe, 2024).

These developments reflect Europe's comprehensive approach to AI regulation, extending beyond the AI Act to encompass broader legal and ethical considerations.

# Stakeholder Analysis

## 1. Public Sector

The German public sector is highly fragmented on AI policy. Unlike some countries, Germany has no single "Digital Ministry"; instead, the Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport (BMDV) formally heads digital affairs, but responsibilities are spread across multiple ministries (Jaursch, 2024). Key ministries include: the BMDV, which champions a multi-stakeholder, values-driven approach (hosting international AI forums and G7 dialogues); the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), which funds AI research and seeks a "responsible, public-interest" embedding of AI while warning against excessive EU over-regulation (BMBF, 2023); the Ministry for Economic Affairs (BMWK) and Ministry of Justice (BMJ), which lead Germany's position in EU AI Act negotiations (BMWK, 2023); and others (Labor, Interior) involved in labour-market, infrastructure or security aspects. Because ministries belong to different coalition partners, their interests vary: for example, industry-oriented ministries (FDP-led BMDV/BMBF) stress innovation. With the recent election and the formation of a new federal government under Chancellor Friedrich Merz, it will be interesting to see how the new leadership will shape Germany's AI policy direction. Merz's government is expected to place a strong emphasis on economic competitiveness and innovation, which could influence both the implementation of the EU AI Act and Germany's national AI strategy (FAZ, 2025).

<u>Data protection and other regulators:</u>

Germany's federal and state Data Protection Authorities (DPAs) are vigilant actors, enforcing GDPR and advising on AI. They routinely issue guidance – for example, in May 2024 the DPAs published a comprehensive orientation guide on privacy-compliant AI (with a focus on large language models) (DSK, 2024). The Federal Commissioner for Data Protection (BfDI) warns that AI systems must respect fundamental rights and demands transparency and accountability in AI processes (BfDI, 2024). Other regulators – such as the Federal Network Agency

(Bundesnetzagentur), the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI), and the Federal Cartel Office – also monitor AI's impact (e.g. on competition or cybersecurity). In a notable federal–state collaboration, Hesse's digital ministry partnered with the BNetzA and BfDI in 2025 to launch a "KI-Reallabor" pilot project that simulates EU-AI-Act compliance under real conditions (BNetzA, 2025). This pilot will simulate compliance requirements and workflows for high-risk AI in realistic settings, thereby speeding innovation and informing regulation (BNetzA, 2025).

Parliament and Länder:

At the federal level, the Bundestag has committees (Digital Affairs, Research & Technology Assessment, Interior, etc.) that hold hearings and draft positions on AI. For example, in Sept. 2022 the Bundestag Digital Committee held a hearing on the EU AI Act with expert testimony from AlgorithmWatch (Bundestag, 2022). The Bundesrat (council of Länder governments) also plays a role: in 2021 it welcomed the European AI Act proposal as a first step to trustworthy AI, and urged a balance between innovation and fundamental rights (Bundesrat, 2021). More generally, German states have their own AI initiatives (North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria, etc.) and coordinate via federal–state councils. The states' interests include education, local innovation hubs, and ensuring AI tools serve public services, while seeking to protect citizens' rights.

## 3. Private Sector

The German private sector has a strong stake in AI rules. Major tech and industrial companies (SAP, Siemens, Bosch, Volkswagen, Deutsche Telekom, etc.) view AI as crucial for future competitiveness. They generally welcome legal certainty but warn against burdensome measures. For example, the German Association of the Automotive Industry (VDA) publicly welcomed an EU AI framework for vehicles, but cautioned that the draft AI Act "threatens to complicate development" by over-classifying many automotive AI systems as "high-risk," which could slow innovation and hurt competitiveness (VDA, 2023). In practice, many companies prepare for

compliance (e.g. by developing internal AI ethics guidelines) and lobby through associations.

Industry associations articulate collective interests. The digital-industry lobby Bitkom has repeatedly urged a "proportionate, future-proof" AI law that balances risk protection with innovation (Bitkom, 2023). Bitkom stresses risk-based rules, clear definitions, and regulatory sandboxes. Similarly, the German AI Association (KI-Verband) – representing startups and AI firms – warns that the AI Act must avoid "unsustainable regulatory burdens" and support innovation (KI-Verband, 2023). The employers' federation (BDA/BDI) echoes this stance, backing a risk-based framework but insisting on an "innovation-friendly legal framework"; its position paper warns that over-regulation would hamper innovation, productivity, and even Europe's digital resilience (BDI, 2023). In sum, German industry's concerns centre on keeping compliance costs manageable (especially for SMEs), avoiding redundant overlap with other laws (GDPR, sectoral rules), and ensuring Europe stays globally competitive. Notably, business leaders have sometimes criticized the AI Act as too rigid, fearing it could put Europe "on the sidelines" of AI development (Handelsblatt, 2023).

AI Startups and SMEs are more heterogeneous but generally support a balanced approach. Many startups have joined Bitkom or the KI-Verband to voice support for strong AI rights rules alongside flexibility for research and early adoption. They share industry concerns about not stifling innovation and maintaining access to global markets. Overall, Germany's private sector is influential (via formal consultations, standards bodies and through the EU Council), advocating that the final AI legislation include practical definition of AI, narrow "high-risk" categories, and reasonable transition periods (Bitkom, 2023; BDI, 2023).

### 4. Civil Society and Academia

Civil-society organizations and academic experts provide analysis, advocacy and expertise. Research institutions and academia (universities, Fraunhofer and Max

Planck institutes, the German Research Center for AI (DFKI), AI excellence clusters, etc.) supply critical R&D capacity and often advise government. They generally push for robust public funding, open standards, and "trustworthy AI" practices. Through forums like the federal Plattform Lernende Systeme and advisory panels, scholars and experts influence policy design (for instance advising on AI ethics curricula and standards). Universities also train AI talent and study societal impacts, sometimes forming position papers on things like AI liability or data use.

Digital rights and ethics NGOs play a watchdog role. Organizations such as AlgorithmWatch (Berlin-based), Digitalcourage, Chaos Computer Club (CCC), Interface, Bits & Bäume, KIRA (AI Initiative), and DKHW (German Children Fund) raise the alarm about privacy, bias and surveillance. For example, AlgorithmWatch researchers told parliamentarians that if the AI Act is to protect fundamental rights, its scope must remain broad (no blanket exemptions for law enforcement or defense) and deployers must face strong transparency/accountability rules – including mandatory risk-impact assessments and effective complaint rights (AlgorithmWatch, 2022). Similarly, advocacy groups criticize loopholes (e.g. potential allowances for biometric surveillance) and demand that citizens have rights to explanation or appeal when affected by AI. The German Ethics Council (Ethikrat) has also published guidelines: its 2023 report asserts that "AI must expand human development and not diminish it," and that AI can never replace human responsibility (Ethikrat, 2023). This reflects civil society's fundamental concern that technology serve people's autonomy and dignity.

Consumer protection and labour organizations add their perspectives. The national consumer federation (vzbv) warns that even with the AI Act, "significant protection gaps" remain and consumers may still face opaque algorithms or manipulative advertising (vzbv, 2024). It calls for a strong national oversight authority (to be set up by 2025) and an independent advisory council so consumer interests are represented in AI governance (vzbv, 2024). On the worker side, unions like IG Metall

urge that AI in the workplace should relieve employees, not threaten them. IG Metall leaders stress involving workers in AI deployment from the start and demanding co-determination in AI systems design, so "the opportunities from AI are used for workers and the risks are minimized" (IG Metall, 2023). (Ver.di likewise advocates training and digital rights for public-sector employees using AI.)

In sum, civil society and academia influence policy through studies, public debate, advisory commissions (e.g. the 2019 Data Ethics Commission) and litigation. They generally press for strong safeguards in any AI law. For the EU AI Act, German advocates pushed to keep definitions broad and to guarantee transparency and redress for individuals (AlgorithmWatch, 2022; vzbv, 2024), even as they acknowledge the Act's step forward.

## 5. Youth Organisations

Youth organizations in Germany play a pivotal role in shaping AI governance by fostering digital literacy, promoting ethical standards, and amplifying the voices of young people in policy debates. Institutions such as *Jugend hackt*, the *Deutscher Bundesjugendring (DBJR)*, and the *Bundesschülerkonferenz (BSK)* advocate for robust digital literacy and participatory approaches to AI design. Through coding labs and civic-tech projects, Jugend hackt empowers teenagers to understand and build AI tools, making them active stakeholders in digital transformations (Jugend hackt, 2024). The DBJR, as the national umbrella body for youth organizations, serves as an official advisor within the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), ensuring that young people's interests are reflected in national digital policies (DBJR, 2023). Meanwhile, the BSK influences AI policies in the education sector by advising on digital curricula and the role of AI in future classrooms (Bundesschülerkonferenz, 2023). Together, these bodies emphasize access to digital education and advocate for AI literacy as a fundamental right for every young person.

Other organizations operate at the intersection of AI, digital rights, and democratic participation. The *DGB-Jugend*, representing young workers, argues for AI and digitalization policies that safeguard labour rights and ensure equitable working conditions in an automated future (DGB-Jugend, 2021). Similarly, the *Grüne Jugend* focuses on AI's environmental and social impacts, calling for algorithmic transparency and accountability in its party positions (Grüne Jugend, 2023). The *IJAB e.V.* promotes international youth dialogue, including on digital ethics and AI, and works closely with European institutions to integrate youth perspectives into AI policymaking (IJAB, 2023). Meanwhile, the *Stiftung Jugend forscht* promotes AI literacy through science fairs and educational programmes that foster critical thinking and technical proficiency (Jugend forscht, 2023). The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kinder- und Jugendhilfe (AGJ)* engages in AI-focused studies and promotes inclusive digital policies that consider the vulnerabilities and needs of young people (AGJ, 2023).

Importantly, the *IGF Youth Germany* initiative operates as the national youth node of the global Internet Governance Forum (IGF), bringing young voices into debates about AI and internet policies. IGF Youth Germany promotes awareness of AI's social and political impacts, advising stakeholders and participating in national and international digital policy consultations (IGF Youth Germany, 2023). Its work underscores the growing role that young people play in shaping normative frameworks for AI, aligning closely with the recommendations of civil-society advocates and ethics commissions.

Through these platforms, youth organizations and their networks have become vital actors in AI governance in Germany. They educate and mobilize the next generation of AI developers and policymakers, engage in legislative consultations, and insist that AI policies remain aligned with democratic values, social justice, and digital rights. Similar to civil-society groups and academic institutions, youth actors generally advocate for strong safeguards, inclusive design, and AI literacy as

foundational elements of a trustworthy AI landscape (AlgorithmWatch, 2022; Ethikrat, 2023). In doing so, they help bridge the gap between technologists and society, ensuring that AI serves the interests and autonomy of all, especially those who will inherit its long-term impacts.

## 6. European Union Institutions

EU bodies profoundly shape Germany's AI regime. The European Commission proposed the AI Act in April 2021 and it entered into force on 1 August 2024. The Act is the first comprehensive AI law globally, using a risk-based approach: banning only the most dangerous systems and imposing strict obligations on high-risk applications while leaving low-risk AI largely unregulated. According to the Commission, the law "aims to foster responsible AI development" and balance citizen safety with innovation. It will create EU-level structures (like a European AI Office) and require each Member State (Germany by 2025) to set up an AI supervisory authority. Within the EU legislative process, German officials play a key role. In Council, Germany's formal positions have been led by the Ministry for Economic Affairs (BMWK) and the Ministry of Justice (BMJ), with input from others. For example, in late 2023 Germany joined France and Italy in insisting that "general-purpose" foundation models (like large language models) be regulated only through voluntary standards rather than mandatory restrictions. German MEPs (e.g. Axel Voss in the European Parliament) also influenced the debate, pushing for a deal that delays very stringent rules on cutting-edge AI. The final EU-AI Act (adopted Dec 2023) reflects many compromises: it enshrines safeguards in line with GDPR and bans applications like social scoring, but industry-led concerns shaped narrower definitions of high risk. EU regulatory bodies supplement this: the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) and the EDPS (EU privacy watchdog) have endorsed the AI Act's rights-based framework and will guide its interplay with GDPR. German stakeholders coordinate with these bodies, e.g. through the EU's Digital Ministerial forums. In practice, German ministries now act to implement the AI Act domestically

– for instance, by preparing national compliance guidelines and research funding for "trustworthy AI" standards. EU rules dovetail with German institutions: the planned Hessian AI lab pilot was explicitly designed to meet the new EU requirements. Overall, Germany sees the EU AI Act as the backbone of its own AI regulation. Government ministries officially "follow the European approach," preferring EU-wide harmonization over separate national laws. German stakeholders are thus deeply engaged at the EU level: industry and civil society participated in the EU trilogue via Brussels, and German public bodies coordinate with EU agencies. The AI Act's adoption (and related EU data rules) will force German policymakers to update national strategies and enforcement frameworks, aligning German innovation with the new European rulebook.

## Stakeholders within the Power-Interest-Matrix

### 1. High Power / High Interest – *Manage Closely*

These actors shape and implement AI policy and regulation at both national and EU level. They are key decision-makers or powerful advocates directly involved in designing or enforcing rules.

- **Federal Ministries (BMWK, BMBF, BMJ, BMDV):** Core architects of Germany's AI and digital policy, shaping positions in EU AI Act negotiations.
- **Chancellor's Office / Friedrich Merz Government:** Sets strategic direction; expected to emphasize innovation and competitiveness.
- **European Commission:** Primary driver of the EU AI Act; has legislative and enforcement authority.
- **State Data Protection Authorities (DPAs):** Enforce GDPR and issue influential AI guidance.
- **Federal Data Protection Commissioner (BfDI):** Publicly advocates for rights-based AI regulation.

- **Federal Network Agency (BNetzA):** Oversees tech infrastructure and participates in AI oversight pilots.
- **Bundestag Committees:** Shape legislative input and public discourse on AI regulation.
- **Major Industry Players (SAP, Siemens, VW, etc.):** Strong lobbying power and vested economic interests in regulatory outcomes.
- **Bitkom, BDI/BDA, KI-Verband:** Major business associations lobbying for innovation-friendly rules.

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### 2. High Power / Low Interest – *Keep Satisfied*

These institutions have regulatory power or formal roles but are not as directly focused on AI as their primary concern.

- **Federal Cartel Office:** Can intervene on AI-related competition issues, but AI is a secondary focus.
- **Federal Office for Information Security (BSI):** Handles cybersecurity, including for AI systems.
- **Bundesrat (Länder governments):** Can block or shape federal legislation, though not AI-focused per se.
- **European Council & Member States (France, Italy, etc.):** Influence final EU regulation but prioritize different national agendas.
- **Ver.di Union:** Powerful in the public sector, weighs in on AI use in administration and public services.

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### 3. Low Power / High Interest – *Keep Informed*

These stakeholders care deeply about AI's societal impact and frequently engage in public discourse, though they hold less formal decision-making power.

- **NGOs and Civil Society Organisations:**
    - **AlgorithmWatch**, **Digitalcourage**, **Chaos Computer Club (CCC):** Monitor and critique policy proposals.
    - **Interface**, **Bits & Bäume**, **KIRA**, **DKHW:** Represent niche but important ethical, cultural, or sustainability perspectives.
- **Youth Organisations:** Ensuring that the digital interests and rights of the younger generation are represented across education, policymaking, and digital ethics.
- **German Ethics Council (Ethikrat):** Issues influential moral and philosophical guidelines on AI.
- **IG Metall:** Advocates for worker participation and rights in AI deployment.
- **Consumer Federation (vzbv):** Pushes for transparency and complaint mechanisms for consumers.
- **Academic Institutions (Universities, Fraunhofer, Max Planck, DFKI):** Contribute expertise, policy advice, and critical research.
- **Plattform Lernende Systeme:** Federal expert group shaping best practices and frameworks.
- **Startups and SMEs (via KI-Verband):** Innovators with strong interest but less influence individually.

### 4. Low Power / Low Interest – *Monitor*

These stakeholders are marginally affected by or involved in AI regulation but may become more relevant as deployment expands.

- **General public / non-engaged citizens:** Often unaware or uninvolved unless personally affected.
- **Non-tech local businesses:** May use AI tools without actively shaping regulatory frameworks.
- **Non-digital-focused unions or associations:** Have minimal involvement unless specific sectoral impacts arise.

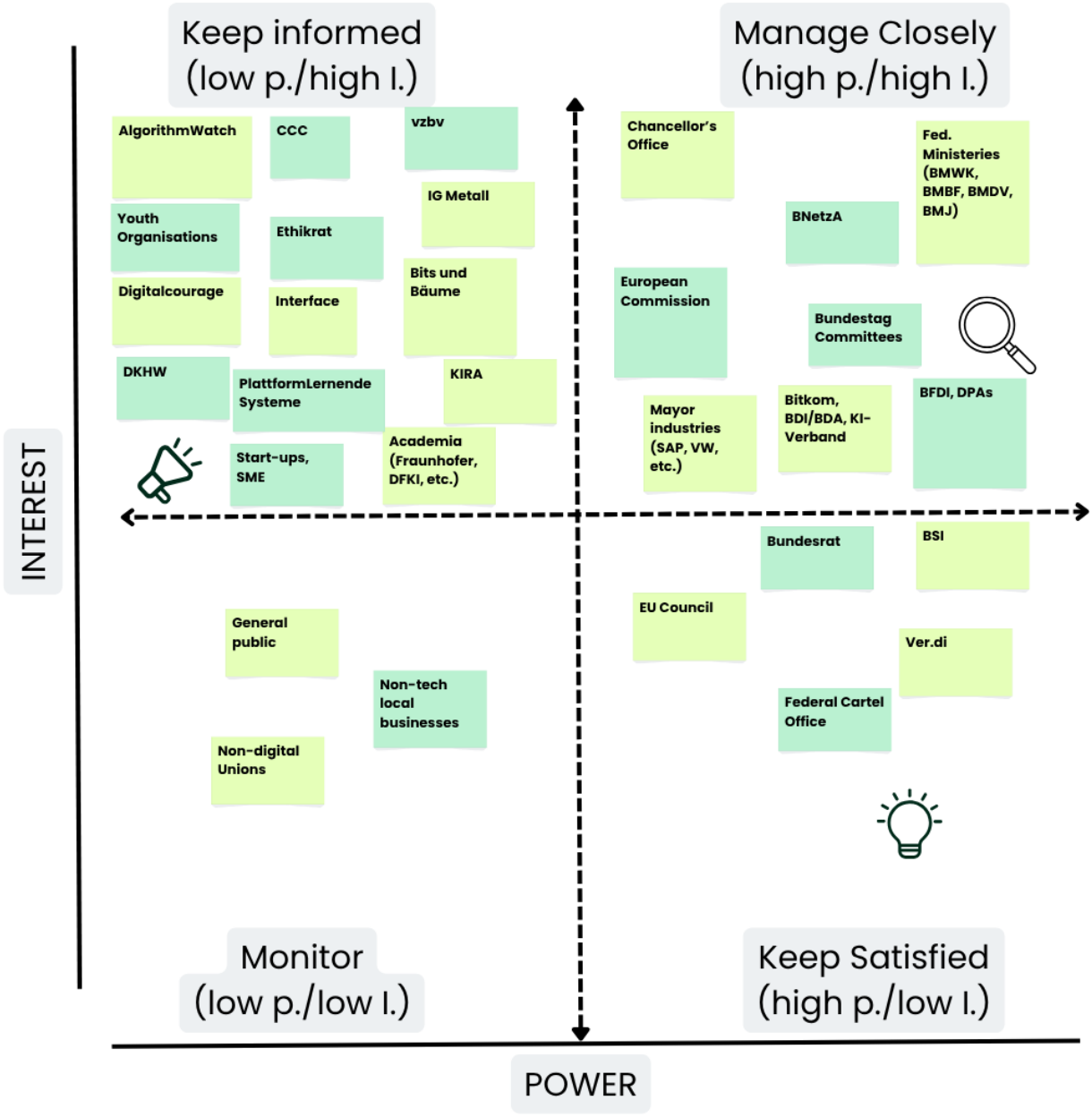


*Figure 1: Power-Interest Matrix (own presentation)*

# Survey's results

This analysis delves into the survey results, highlighting German youngsters' knowledge, attitudes, and potential misconceptions regarding Artificial Intelligence, crucial for understanding the landscape of AI regulation. In total, 305 youngsters took part in the survey.

## 1. Demographic Overview

The survey data primarily reflects the perspectives of adolescents and young adults, with a strong focus on the 16-18 age group (197 respondents), followed by the 13-15 age group (44 respondents). The older demographics (19-21 and 21+) constitute smaller, yet significant, portions of the sample. This age distribution suggests that the findings are highly representative of high school students and those just entering higher education or the workforce. The gender distribution is notably balanced, with a near-equal number of male (140) and female (151) respondents, along with representation from non-binary individuals (6) and those who preferred not to answer (8). This balanced demographic representation enhances the generalizability of the insights across young German populations.

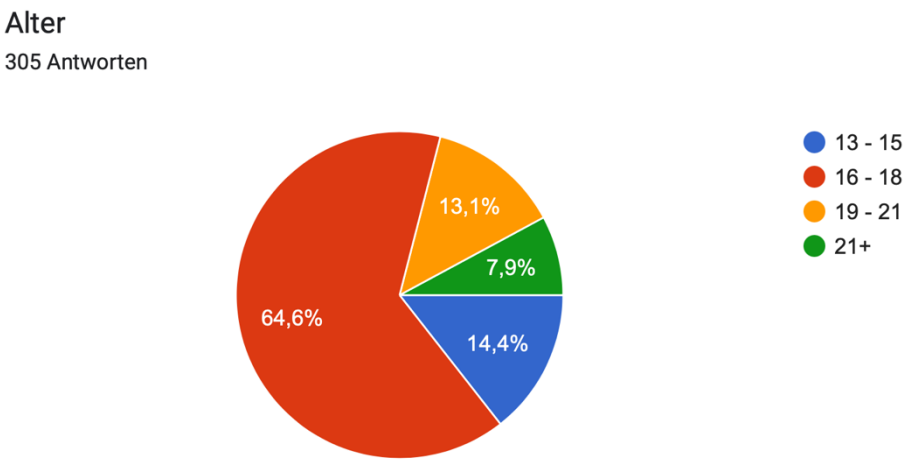


*Figure 2: Age distribution (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

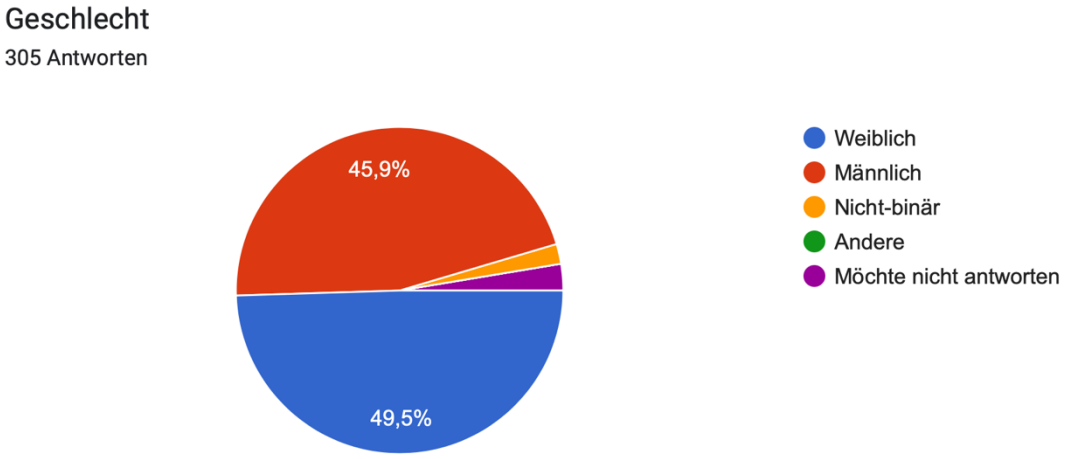


*Figure 3: Gender distribution (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 2. Familiarity with AI

The findings indicate a high level of general awareness of AI among German youngsters. A substantial majority of respondents – 263 out of 305 (approximately 86.2%) – reported not only having heard the term "Artificial Intelligence" but also being able to explain what it means. This suggests that "AI" is a widely recognized concept within this demographic. However, a smaller but significant group of 37 respondents (approximately 12.1%) indicated that while they have heard the term, they do not precisely understand its meaning. This gap points to a need for more nuanced and deeper educational initiatives beyond mere recognition of the term. The very low number of respondents who have never heard of AI (3) or cannot imagine what it means (2) underscores the pervasive nature of AI in contemporary discourse.

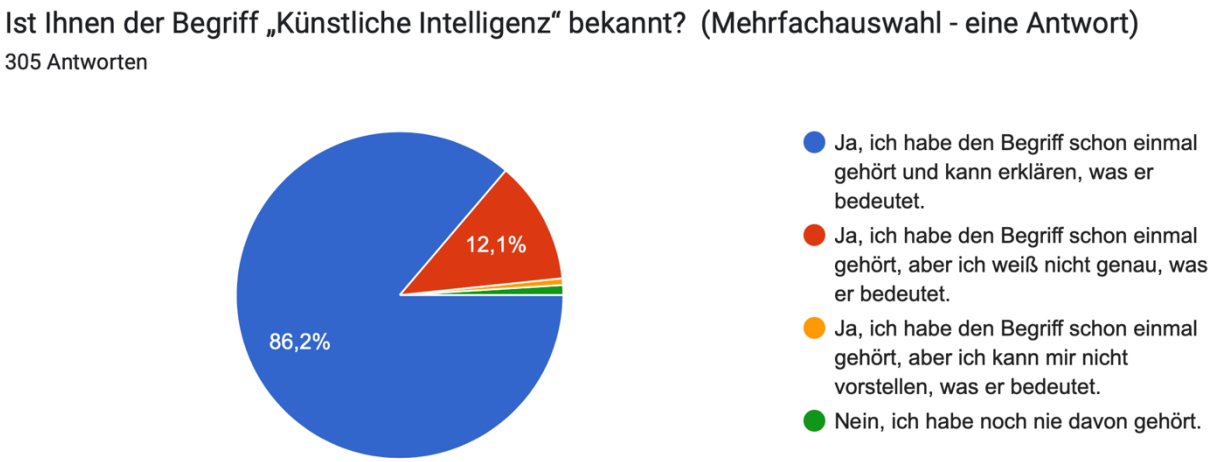


*Figure 4: Familiarity with AI (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 3. Confidence in AI Knowledge

Despite the high familiarity, the level of confidence in understanding AI and its functioning varies. The largest groups fall into the "Sicher" (Confident - 115 respondents) and "Mäßig sicher" (Moderately Confident - 116 respondents) categories. This suggests that while many feel they have a grasp of AI, a considerable portion acknowledges a moderate level of understanding rather than complete certainty. Importantly, 38 respondents felt "Geringfügig sicher" (Slightly Confident) and 4 felt "Überhaupt nicht sicher" (Not at all Confident). This distribution indicates that while overall confidence is fair, there is a segment of the youth population that requires more foundational knowledge and perhaps practical experience to build their confidence in this complex field.

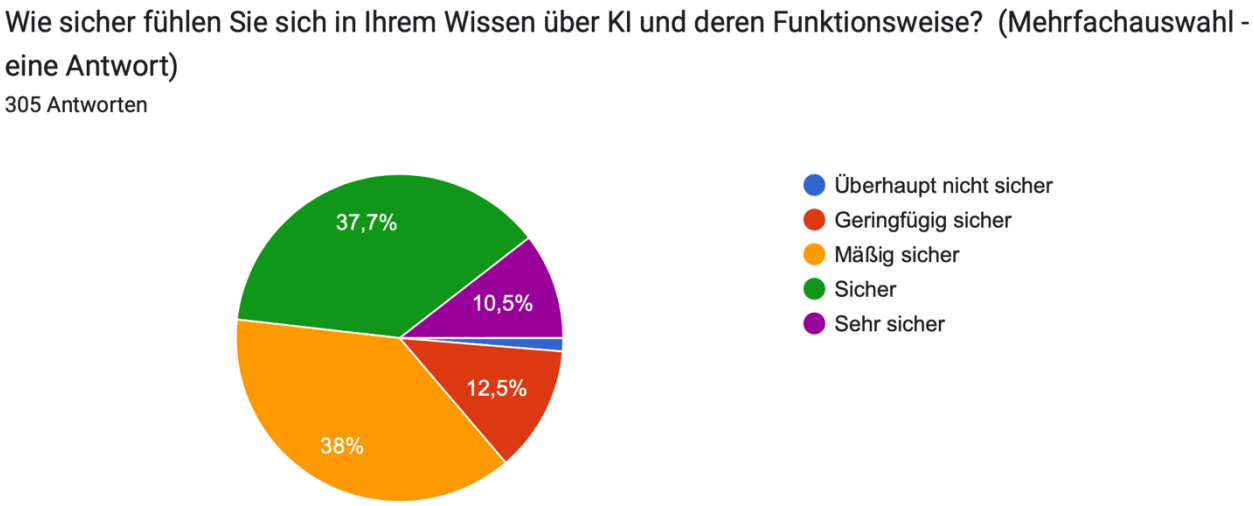


*Figure 5: Confidence in AI knowledge (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 4. Confidence in Identifying AI Technologies

The ability to identify specific AI technologies is a crucial aspect of practical AI literacy. Here, the responses show a slightly different pattern from general AI knowledge. The most common response was "Mäßig sicher" (Moderately Confident - 141 respondents), followed by "Sicher" (Confident - 73 respondents). This suggests that while many are moderately confident, fewer are highly confident in pointing out specific AI applications. Furthermore, 57 respondents felt "Geringfügig sicher" (Slightly Confident) and 11 felt "Überhaupt nicht sicher" (Not at all Confident). This could indicate a gap between theoretical knowledge of "AI" as a concept and practical recognition of its diverse manifestations in daily life. This gap is important for policymakers considering public engagement with AI-powered systems.

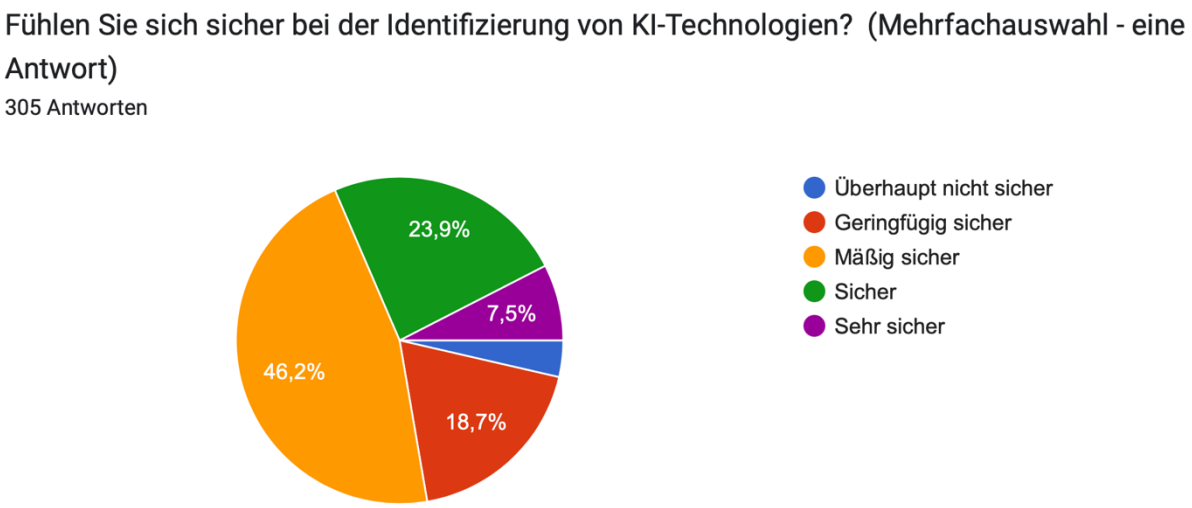


*Figure 6: Confidence in identifying AI technologies (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 5. Frequency of AI Use (Daily Life)

The survey reveals a high integration of AI technologies into the daily lives of German youngsters. A combined 229 respondents (approximately 75.1%) reported using AI technologies either "Täglich" (Daily - 114 respondents) or "2-4 Mal pro Woche" (2-4 Times per Week - 115 respondents). This high frequency of use indicates that AI is not a distant concept but an active part of their routines, likely through smartphones, social media algorithms, voice assistants, and personalized recommendations. Only 13 respondents (4.3%) reported never using AI in their daily lives, underscoring its widespread adoption.

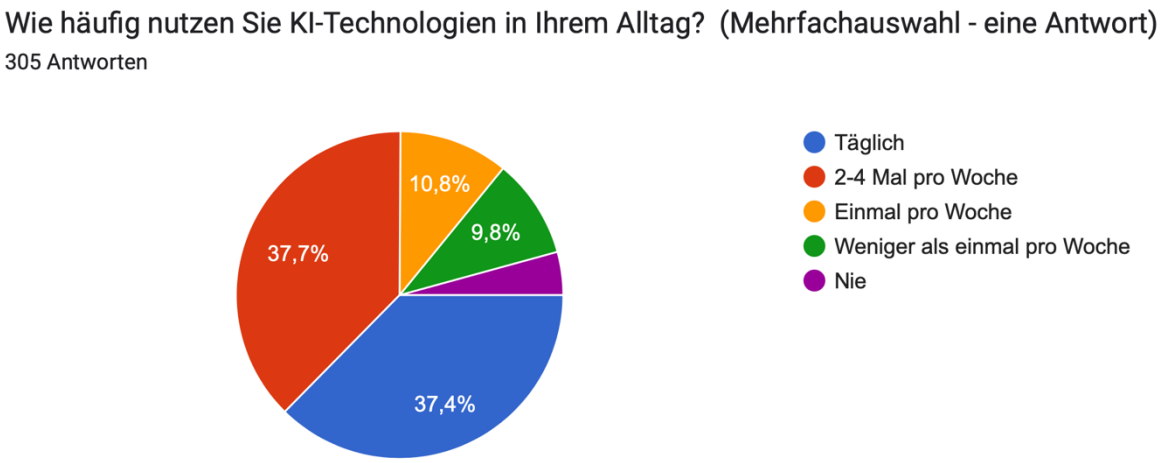


*Figure 7: Frequency of AI use in daily life (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 6. Frequency of AI Use (Schoolwork or Learning)

Beyond daily life, AI technologies are also significantly integrated into academic and learning contexts. The most frequent responses for using AI for schoolwork or learning were "2-4 Mal pro Woche" (111 respondents) and "Täglich" (82 respondents). This signifies that AI tools, such as Large Language Models (LLMs) or other intelligent learning platforms, are actively used for educational purposes by a substantial portion of the youth. This high usage presents both opportunities for enhanced learning and challenges related to academic integrity and critical evaluation of information, which should be considered in AI regulation and educational policy.

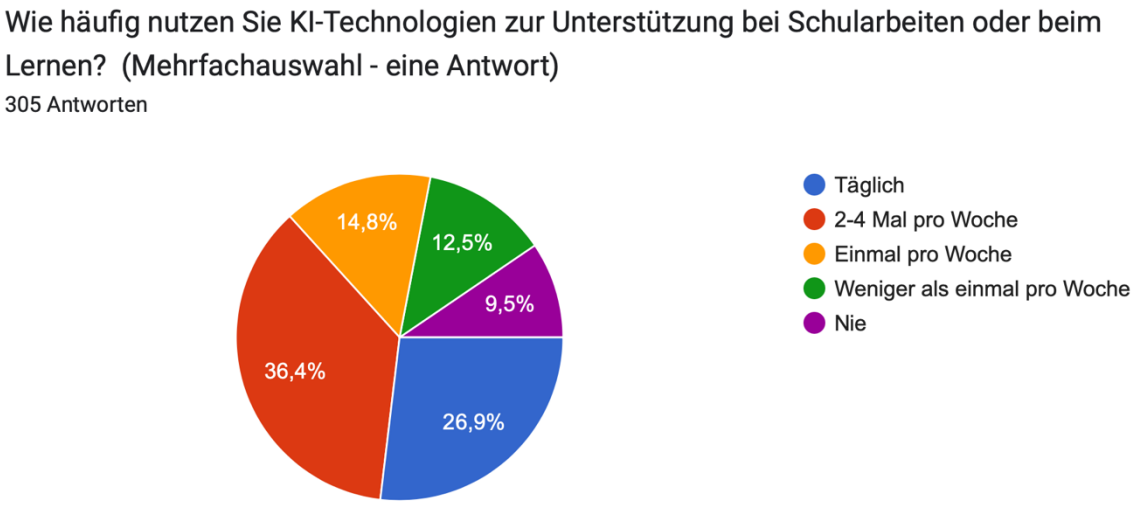


*Figure 8: Frequency of AI use for school and learning (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 7. Confidence in LLM Information Accuracy

The increasing use of LLMs like ChatGPT necessitates an understanding of how youngsters perceive the reliability of information generated by these tools. The majority of respondents were "Mäßig sicher" (Moderately Confident - 138 respondents) or "Sicher" (Confident - 100 respondents) regarding the correctness of LLM-generated information. While these figures suggest a degree of trust, it is crucial to note that a considerable number felt "Geringfügig sicher" (Slightly Confident - 42 respondents) or "Überhaupt nicht sicher" (Not at all Confident - 9 respondents). This mixed confidence level indicates a healthy scepticism among some, but also a potential vulnerability for others who might over-rely on LLM output without critical evaluation. This finding is particularly relevant for educational strategies aimed at fostering digital literacy and critical thinking in the age of AI.

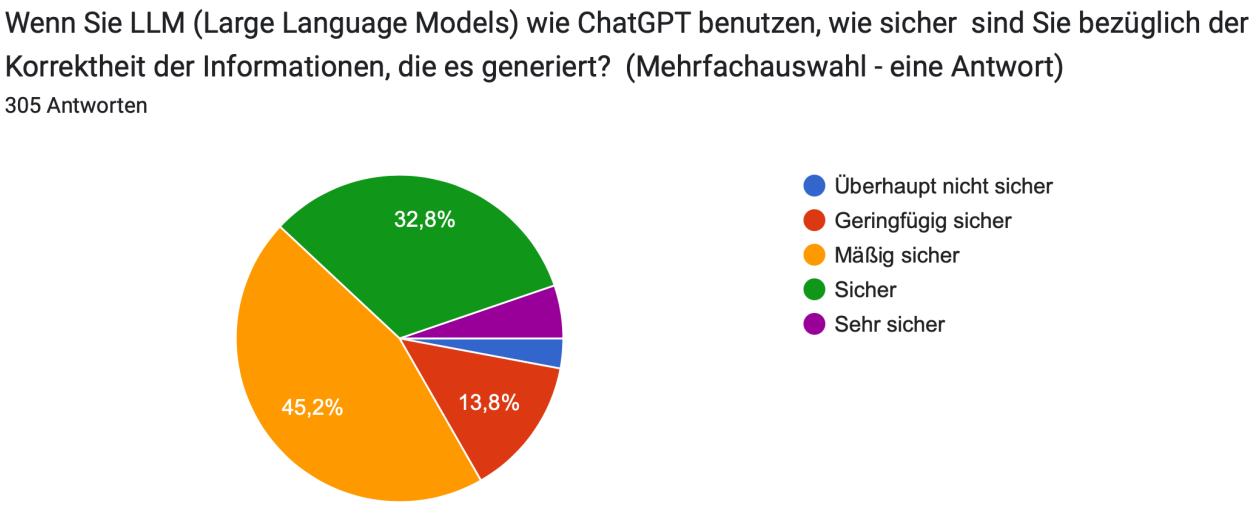


*Figure 9: Confidence in LLM information accuracy (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 8. Confidence in Detecting AI Disinformation

The ability to identify AI-generated disinformation and fakes is paramount in today's digital landscape. The responses here are concerning. While "Mäßig sicher" (Moderately Confident - 129 respondents) was the most common answer, a significant number of youngsters expressed lower confidence: "Geringfügig sicher" (Slightly Confident - 77 respondents) and "Überhaupt nicht sicher" (Not at all Confident - 26 respondents). This suggests a potential deficit in critical evaluation skills concerning AI-generated content. Only a small fraction (10 respondents) felt "Sehr sicher" (Very Confident). This finding highlights a critical area for intervention through education and awareness campaigns to equip youngsters with the skills to discern genuine from AI-manipulated content, which is vital for maintaining a well-informed populace.

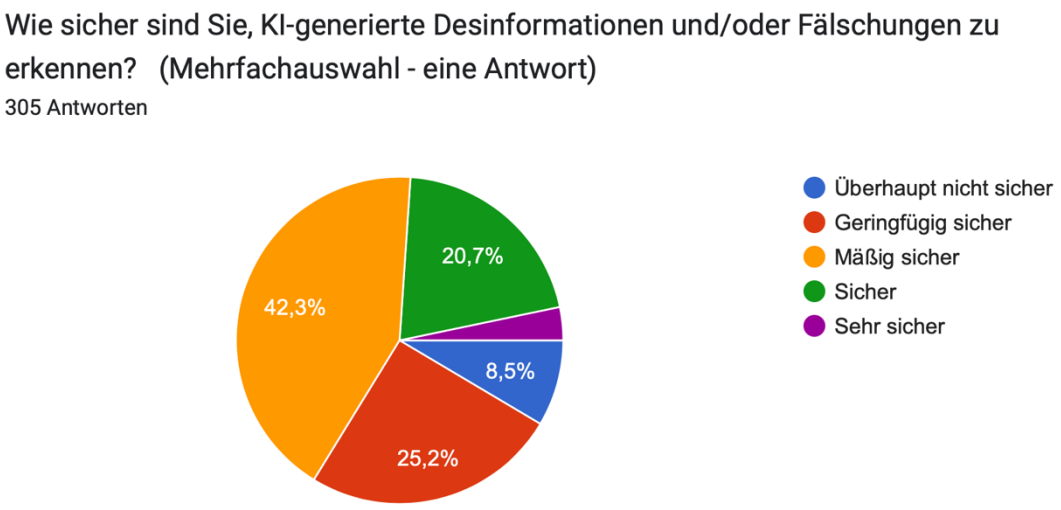


*Figure 10: Confidence in detecting AI disinformation (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## 9. Perceptions on AI Decisions and Control

The survey included two true/false statements designed to probe potential misconceptions about AI's autonomy and benevolence.

### AI Decisions in User Interest (True/False):

The statement "An AI always makes decisions in the interest of its users" elicited a highly varied response, indicating a significant lack of consensus or understanding. The most frequent response was "Nicht sicher" (Not Sure - 112 respondents), followed closely by "Eher wahr" (Rather True - 109 respondents). Only a minority recognized this as "Falsch" (False - 20 respondents) or "Eher falsch" (Rather False - 38 respondents). This suggests a prevalent misconception or naive assumption that AI is inherently benevolent and aligned with user interests. This perception can be dangerous, as AI systems are designed with specific objectives and can reflect biases or lead to unintended outcomes, regardless of user interest. This finding is crucial for AI regulation discussions, as it underscores the need for transparency, accountability, and user education about AI's limitations and potential for misalignment with individual interests.

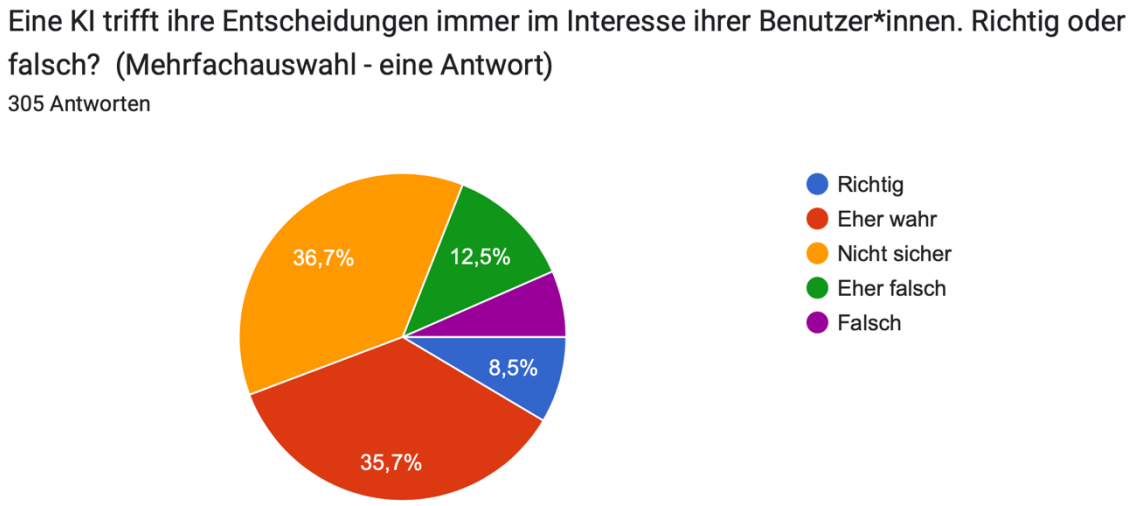


*Figure 11: AI misconception - AI decisions in user interest (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

### AI Beyond Human Control (True/False):

The statement "Artificial intelligence is beyond human control and can, in the worst case, act against the will of its developers" also revealed a mixed and uncertain understanding. The most common response was "Nicht sicher" (Not Sure - 78 respondents), with a substantial number also responding "Eher wahr" (Rather True - 67 respondents) or "Richtig" (True - 57 respondents). While a good portion recognized it as "Falsch" (False - 40 respondents) or "Eher falsch" (Rather False - 63 respondents), the high uncertainty and inclination towards "true" or "rather true" suggest a tendency among youngsters to believe in the potential for AI autonomy and even malicious intent. This is a common theme in science fiction but can be a dangerous misconception if it leads to undue fear or, conversely, an underestimation of human responsibility in AI development. It highlights the importance of clarifying the current capabilities and limitations of AI, emphasizing that AI systems are tools designed and controlled by humans, even if their complexity makes their behaviour difficult to predict. This finding has direct implications for public discourse on AI safety and governance.

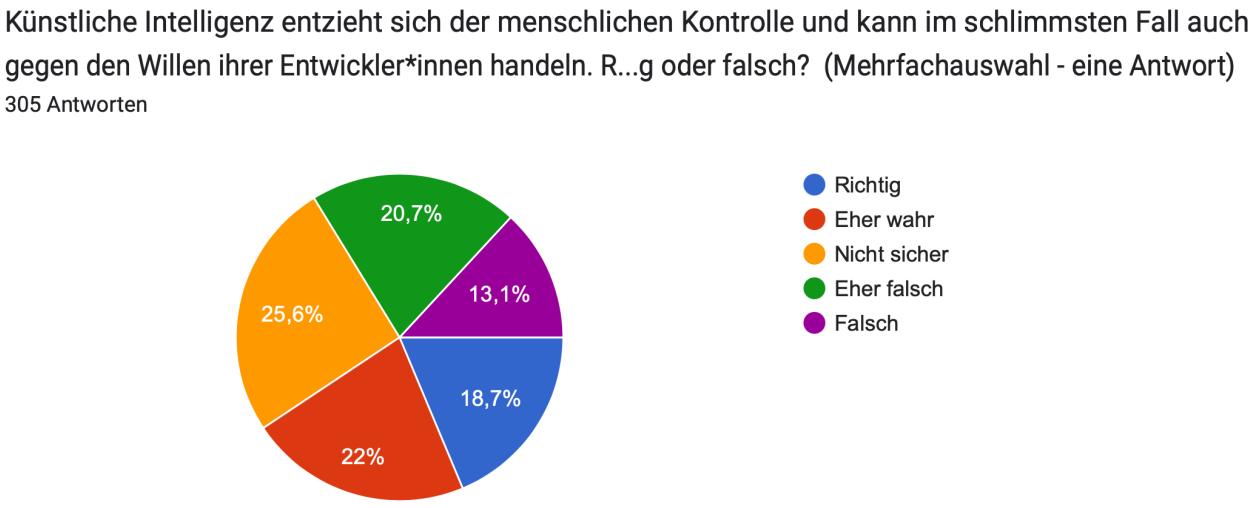


*Figure 12: AI misconception - AI beyond human control (YoutGovAI - Wissen und Einstellung der Jugend zu Künstlicher Intelligenz, 2025)*

## Conclusion and Implications for AI and AI Regulation in Germany

The survey data provides valuable insights into the German youth's relationship with AI:

- High Engagement and Awareness: German youngsters are highly engaged with AI technologies in their daily lives and for learning, and most are familiar with the term "AI." This suggests a fertile ground for AI literacy initiatives.
- Knowledge Gaps and Moderate Confidence: While generally confident in their AI knowledge, there are significant segments with only moderate or slight confidence, particularly in identifying specific AI technologies and detecting AI-generated disinformation. This points to a need for more practical and critical AI education.
- Critical Misconceptions: The responses to the true/false questions reveal concerning misconceptions regarding AI's inherent benevolence and its potential for acting beyond human control. These beliefs can foster an unrealistic view of AI's capabilities and risks, potentially leading to either blind trust or irrational fear.

For AI regulation in Germany, these findings underscore the need for:

- Comprehensive AI Literacy Programs: Education should move beyond basic definitions to include practical identification of AI technologies, critical evaluation of AI-generated content (especially from LLMs), and a nuanced understanding of AI's capabilities and limitations.
- Addressing Misconceptions Directly: Public awareness campaigns and educational curricula should actively address the common misconceptions about AI's alignment with user interests and its autonomy. It's crucial to explain that AI is a tool, and its behaviour is ultimately determined by human design and oversight.

- Fostering Critical Thinking: Given the moderate confidence in detecting AI disinformation, regulatory frameworks should consider mechanisms to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills specific to AI-generated content.
- Promoting Transparency and Accountability: The "AI decisions in user interest" misconception highlights the importance of regulatory measures that enforce transparency in AI systems' decision-making processes and ensure accountability for their impacts.

In summary, while German youth are actively embracing AI, there is a clear and urgent need for targeted educational interventions and policy frameworks that address existing knowledge gaps and prevalent misconceptions to ensure a well-informed and resilient society in the age of Artificial Intelligence.

## Focus Group with national Stakeholders

Three national focus groups in Germany brought together experts in digital policy, education, AI ethics, youth advocacy, and environmental sustainability to explore how young people are interacting with AI – and being left out of its governance. The results clearly highlight a dual imperative: bridge the AI literacy gap among youth and build meaningful channels for their participation in policy and governance.

### 1. Youth Are Missing from AI Policymaking

Despite being one of the most affected demographics, young people are largely absent from AI regulation processes such as the EU AI Act, which fails to explicitly recognize them as stakeholders. All sessions underscored the systemic exclusion of youth voices, despite their demonstrated interest and creativity.

"Young people are not named as a stakeholder group in the EU AI Act. Their interests are simply not represented." (Documentation Session 1, 2025)

### 2. The AI Literacy Gap Is Growing

Participants described a significant mismatch between youth enthusiasm and critical competence: Students use AI to generate, rewrite, and even disguise content to evade detection – often without understanding its limitations or risks. Teachers feel unequipped to guide students, and there is no standardized framework for AI education in schools.

"From digital native to digital naïve." (Documentation Session 3, 2025)

### 3. The Techno-Solutionism Trap

There was broad consensus that AI is overhyped as a universal solution, particularly in environmental contexts. Participants warned that climate change requires systemic societal and political action, not just tech fixes. AI's own carbon footprint and opaque supply chains often undermine its benefits.

"If we overhype AI, we quickly forget the real political tasks." (Documentation Session 3, 2025)

### 4. AI Is Disrupting Classrooms and Pedagogy

AI is already reshaping education: Teachers use AI to prepare lessons. Students use it to do assignments. In some cases, AI tools are used to grade work that was created by AI in the first place. This feedback loop calls for a rethink in pedagogy – moving from lecture-based teaching to facilitation of AI-enhanced learning.

### 5. Governance Without Borders

Participants warned about the limits of regional regulation: AI tools transcend national boundaries. Without global coordination, enforcement becomes ineffective. Ethical and labor issues (e.g., data labeling in the Global South) are invisible in most public discussions.

"You can shut it down in the EU, but people will still access it via proxies." (Documentation Session 1, 2025)

The sessions reveal a pressing need to move beyond deterministic narratives about AI. Instead, we must equip youth with the tools to understand, critique, and shape the trajectory of AI technologies. YouthGovAI can play a pivotal role in building this capacity – blending education, empowerment, and real-world participation (Documentation Sessions 1–3, 2025).

# Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis presented in this YouthGovAI report underscores the intricate and evolving landscape of AI in Germany, revealing both significant advancements in regulatory frameworks and critical challenges in public understanding and engagement. Germany's commitment to the EU AI Act forms the backbone of its AI regulation, aiming to balance innovation with safety and fundamental rights through a risk-based approach. However, the report highlights ongoing challenges, including the fragmentation of governance structures and the necessity of strengthening national oversight. The political and cultural debates reflect a persistent tension between fostering economic competitiveness through AI and ensuring stringent ethical and legal compliance.

Crucially, the survey results provide invaluable insights into the perceptions of German youth, who are highly engaged with AI technologies in their daily lives and for learning. While there is a high general awareness of AI, significant gaps exist in their confidence to identify specific AI technologies and, more critically, in detecting AI-generated disinformation. Disturbingly, the survey reveals prevalent misconceptions among youngsters regarding AI's inherent benevolence and its potential to operate beyond human control, emphasizing a potential for either blind trust or irrational fear.

The focus group discussions with national stakeholders further amplify these concerns, pointing to a systemic exclusion of youth voices from AI policymaking despite their direct interaction with these technologies. Experts noted a growing "AI literacy gap," where enthusiasm for AI is not matched by critical competence, and highlighted the dangers of "techno-solutionism" that overlooks AI's limitations and broader societal implications. The discussions also emphasized the transformative impact of AI on education and the imperative for global coordination in AI governance due to the borderless nature of AI tools.

In summary, for AI regulation in Germany to be truly effective and future-proof, it must move beyond purely legislative measures to include targeted educational interventions. These interventions should aim to build comprehensive AI literacy among youth, actively addressing critical misconceptions about AI's capabilities and ethical implications. Furthermore, integrating youth voices into policy discussions is not merely a matter of representation but a strategic necessity to ensure that AI development and governance truly serve the public interest and align with societal values. By fostering critical thinking, promoting transparency, and ensuring accountability in AI systems, Germany can navigate the complexities of the AI age, ensuring a resilient, well-informed, and ethically sound digital future.

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