

THE DATA CENTER REVOLT

How Community Technostress Torched America's AI Buildout In 18 Months

AI Leaders Can No Longer Treat Technostress-Driven Data Center Backlash As No Risk

Eighteen months. That is how long it took data center opposition to move from scattered local objections to a national political and infrastructure issue. Technostress provides a useful framework for understanding part of that escalation that force the unseating of state senators, fractured a governing party's midterm strategy, and drew a sitting president into a public fight with a governor. For any executive still treating data center backlash as a communications problem or a public-relations footnote, the timeline below is the argument for why that view is now a liability.

WHAT IS TECHNOSTRESS? THE RESEARCH BEHIND THIS ARTICLE

If the word "technostress" is new to you, here is the condensed version. In 1984, psychologist Craig Brod coined the term to describe the strain people feel when technology moves faster than their capacity to adapt to it. In 2007, management researchers Monideepa Tarafdar, Qiang Tu, B.S. Ragu-Nathan, and T.S. Ragu-Nathan turned that idea into a testable organizational framework, identifying five specific conditions inside a workplace (Tarafdar et al., 2007). Their model has since become the standard reference point for studying how people, teams, and now entire communities respond to fast-moving technology change.



The five creators Tarafdar and colleagues identified are illustrated below. Each has a workplace version and, as this article documents, a useful lens for interpreting some of the civic and political reactions now appearing in the data center fight.

TECHNO-OVERLOAD *Too much. Too fast.*

The volume of information, tasks, and tools exceeds what a person can process — an overflowing calendar, an unread-message count that never hits zero.

TECHNO-INVASION *Always on. No escape.*

Technology erases the boundary between work and personal life — the phone that buzzes at 10:47 PM with "need this by morning."

TECHNO-COMPLEXITY *Hard to master.*

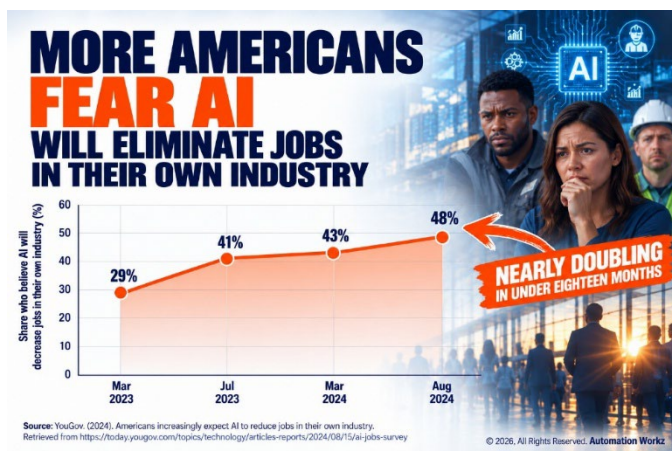
The skill required to use a system outpaces the training provided for it — a stack of platforms, layers, and vendors with no clear manual.

TECHNO-INSECURITY *Fear of displacement.*

The person using the technology believes it may be used to replace them — a skills gap read as a countdown, not a growth opportunity.

TECHNO-UNCERTAINTY *Change is constant. The future is unclear.*

The pace of change itself becomes the stressor — new tools, new processes, and no stable sense of what comes next.



Techno-insecurity is not just a line on a risk register. It is a working American lying awake doing the arithmetic on whether the mortgage survives the next reorg — wondering not if, but when, the very tool handed to them at work becomes the reason their name disappears from the org chart. That fear is not paranoia. It is a rational read of a decade of warning signs that leadership had every opportunity to see and chose not to act on.

YouGov's ongoing polling of employed Americans found the share who believe AI will decrease the number of jobs in their

own industry rose from 29% in March 2023 to 41% that same July, 43% in March 2024, and 48% by August 2024 — nearly doubling in under eighteen months (YouGov, 2024). That climb happened years before most Americans had ever heard the term "data center," which means executives had a clean, unambiguous signal — rising and measurable — that the workforce was experiencing techno - insecurity long before the first excavator arrived. The backlash cannot be explained solely by construction noise, utility bills, water use, or zoning. The evidence also suggests that broader insecurity about AI, employment, and technological change may be contributing to public resistance.. It was the sound of the American Dream — a stable job, a paid-off car, a house that holds its value — starting to feel like someone being quietly voted off the island, one AI deployment at a time, while the people making that decision keep calling it "productivity."

Leadership had years to close that gap, as all of the data seems to convey the same message techno-insecurity was accelerating. Even, Anthropic in its own 2025 survey of nearly 52,000 Americans found 64% named job loss as their top AI-related fear — consistent across every state surveyed and across party lines (67% of Democrats, 62% of Republicans) (Anthropic / YouGov, 2026).

Other surveys show comparable results. A parallel academic tracking project at Texas Tech University, following Americans under the age of 45 over a full decade, found an even sharper rise. the share who said they feared AI would take their job climbed from 16.6% in 2016 to 49.2% in 2025, tracking almost exactly with the public release of ChatGPT (Lee & Jalalian Ebrahimi, 2026).



And Pew Research Center's 37-country survey found the strongest pessimism concentrated in wealthier economies — roughly seven in ten adults in Australia, South Korea, and the United States (Pew Research Center, 2026). Three independent trackers, using three different methods and populations on different sides of the world, are not measuring soft anxiety. A June 2026 Reuters/Ipsos poll of 4,531 U.S. adults found 53% feared AI could put them or someone in their household out of work, including 61% of Democrats and 47% of Republicans — up from 68% who said they worried about increased AI use generally in a 2023 Reuters/Ipsos poll to 73% in 2026 (Reuters/Ipsos, 2026). They are measuring techno-insecurity in the community, recording a hardening conviction, held by a majority of working Americans, that the standard of living they were promised is no longer

guaranteed to them. And sadly, Americans, have accumulated resentment that no one cares to ease their fear. Since leadership refused to listen, and calm Americans' technostress, they are exercising the American civic rights to ease their pain. They are piling into data center public hearings, in droves, to thwart AI growth, fueled by data centers.

Leaders have attempted to frame techno-insecurity as a figment of American imagination. It is real. Fifteen technology companies cut a combined 71,650-plus jobs in 2026, each attaching its own stated AI or infrastructure-linked rationale to the decision. Not a critic's inference, but the company's own language, pulled from earnings calls, restructuring filings, and executive statements. The pattern of statements is heart-wrenching: "AI adoption," "AI-driven growth strategy," "toward AI," "AI is changing how work gets done," and — most directly — funding a data center buildout. These statements recur again and again as the stated reason Americans' paycheck stopped.

Company	Jobs Cut (Date)	Stated AI / Infrastructure Rationale
Amazon	16,000 Jan. 28, 2026	Efficiency gains from "using AI extensively across the company"; funds ~\$200B 2026 AI capex
Salesforce	<1,000 Feb. 10, 2026	"Agentforce" AI agents cited as managing a decline in support cases
Block	4,000 Feb. 26, 2026	Jack Dorsey cites AI "intelligence tools" enabling a "new way of working"
Atlassian	1,600 Mar. 11, 2026	CEO Mike Cannon-Brookes cites AI changing the skills mix needed
Snap	1,000 Apr. 16, 2026	"AI advancements enable teams to reduce repetitive work"
PayPal	4,500+ May 5, 2026	Stated push to "aggressively adopt AI" in development processes
Coinbase	700 May 5, 2026	"Engineers use AI to ship in days what took weeks"
Cloudflare	1,100 May 7, 2026	Cuts concentrated in middle-management "measurer" roles as AI tools scale
Cisco	4,000 May 14, 2026	Realigning "resources around silicon, optics, security and AI"
Intuit	3,000 May 20, 2026	Restructuring "centered on reducing complexity ... toward AI"
Meta	8,000 May 20, 2026	CEO Mark Zuckerberg cites AI investment discipline: "Success isn't a given"; funds ~\$125–145B 2026 AI/data center capex
GitLab	350 Jun. 3, 2026	CEO Bill Staples cites "100x growth requirements" for AI agent-scale workloads
Oracle	21,000 Jun. 22, 2026	"Adoption and deployment of AI technologies" cited in cutting roles; frees cash flow for its \$300B AI data center buildout with OpenAI

Company	Jobs Cut (Date)	Stated AI / Infrastructure Rationale
Microsoft	4,800 Jul. 9, 2026	CFO Amy Hood: "AI is changing how work gets done"; funds ~\$190B 2026 AI capex
Monday.com	600 Jul. 25, 2026	Restructuring filing cites an "AI-driven growth strategy"
TOTAL	71,650+ jobs	A floor, not a ceiling — several figures are ranges, not exact counts, and firms with no public tally are excluded

For the people on the losing end of each of those 15 decisions, this was never an earnings-call line item. It was a termination email arriving at 6 a.m., a severance clock starting, and a mortgage, a car note, or a rent payment that does not pause for a corporate restructuring. That is what techno-insecurity feels like once it stops being a survey response and becomes a household's actual balance sheet. It is the same threat, felt at a lifestyle level, that a family carries into a town hall about a data center already convinced the machines being sited next door are the ones coming for their livelihood next.



Ironically, total job loss is a floor, not a ceiling, as layoffs that did not make the news are occurring all over the US. (TechCrunch, 2026; Invezz, 2026) Each of those roughly 71,650 job losses is a household re-running its own budget in real time: which bill gets paid late, whether the car gets fixed or driven on the worn tire a little longer, whether a teenager's college plan quietly disappears from the conversation. This is what "positioning people for poverty" looks like in practice — not one dramatic collapse, but a slow,

compounding erosion of security that a family feels for months before it ever shows up in an unemployment statistic, and that can tip a household from a high American standard of living toward the survival-wage.

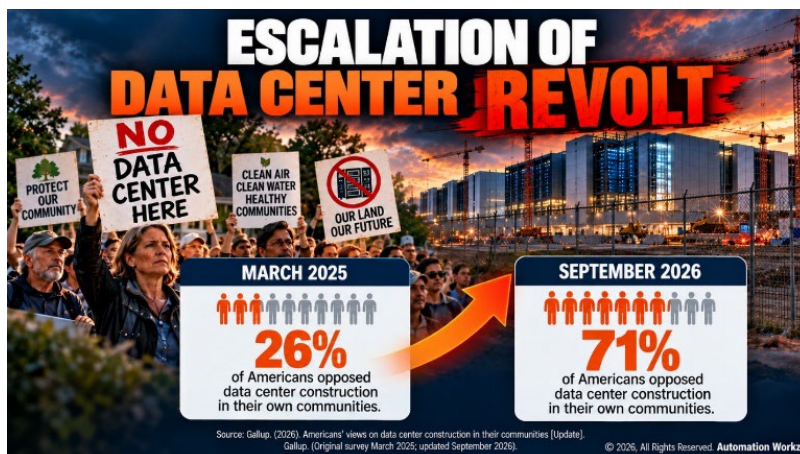
Leadership did not simply inherit this backlash. Years of deployment, workforce, and communication decisions helped shape the conditions behind it. Every company in that table had the earnings, the market data, and years of rising survey warnings to negotiate a slower, more humane transition — phased retraining, transparent timelines, honest communication about what AI adoption would cost the workforce before it cost them their jobs. They chose the faster, cheaper path instead, then redirected the savings into more of the exact infrastructure now drawing public fury. Corporate leaders cannot treat the data center revolt as somebody else's problem. Decisions about AI deployment, workforce displacement, investment, and communication have helped fuel the insecurity now surfacing in communities. Unaddressed techno-insecurity does not stay contained to an employee-engagement score or a severance letter. It curdles — into anger, into a conviction of being disposable, into despair that no one with power intends to protect a household's footing — and it looks for somewhere to go. In 2025 and 2026, it went to the ballot box, because a family with a threatened paycheck will eventually vote against the thing that looks like the threat, whether or not that thing is the true cause. Every canceled permit and every recalled politician is a bill leadership generated years ago and is only now being asked to pay. It

did not start with a zoning fight. It started with the decision to let techno-insecurity go unnamed, unmeasured, and unaddressed inside the workforce — and to treat the fear it produced as someone else's problem to manage.

Technostress was discovered in 1984 occurring in both corporate and government workplaces. What has changed in 2025 and 2026 is the venue. The same five technostress conditions used to understand resistance and disengagement inside organizations also provide a useful framework for interpreting some of the resistance appearing in communities hosting AI infrastructure. The phenomenon of how fast technostress fueled data center resistance.

THE ESCALATION

In March 2025, 26% of Americans opposed data center construction in their own communities. By March 2026, a Gallup survey found seven in ten Americans opposed it (Newsweek, 2026). By September 2026, a Gallup update placed local opposition at 71%, alongside Pew Research Center findings that 60% of Americans are "not too" or "not at all" comfortable with a new data center in their area, and an Annenberg Public Policy Center survey putting opposition at 61% (Gallup, 2026; Pew Research Center, 2026; Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2026). That is roughly an eighteen-month climb from a fringe position to a supermajority position — one of the fastest reversals of public sentiment on any infrastructure question in recent U.S. political history.



WHEN VOTERS FIRE THE PEOPLE WHO IGNORED IT

A Data Center Knowledge review of election results, government records, and local reporting found that at least 18 incumbent officeholders lost their seats between August 2025 and August 2026 after taking documented action on a data center project or becoming publicly associated with one (Data Center Knowledge, 2026). This is not a marginal statistic. It spans both parties and multiple states, and it has continued accumulating through the 2026 primary season:

- Utah State Senate President J. Stuart Adams, one of the most powerful Republicans in the state, lost his June 2026 primary to Stephanie Hollist by more than eight points after backing the Stratos Project data center near the Great Salt Lake. The same night, Box Elder County commissioners Lee Perry and Boyd Bingham were both unseated — Perry by Nathan Tueller, Bingham by Vance Smith — for the same vote. Perry said plainly: "Do I think that the data center vote cost me the election? Yes I do" (KSL, 2026; Utah Public Radio, 2026).
- In Festus, Missouri, all four incumbent city council members who had approved a proposed \$6 billion data center lost their seats: Bobby Benz (Ward 3) to Dan Moore, Jim Collier (Ward 1) to Karl Weekley, Brian Wehner (Ward 2) to Allen Joseph McCarthy, and Jim Tinnin (Ward 4) to Rick Belleville (KCUR, 2026; Newsweek, 2026).

- In Frederick County, Maryland, sitting Council President Brad Young finished third of four Democratic candidates for two at-large seats. In neighboring Calvert County, Board President Todd Ireland, Vice President Mark C. Cox Sr., and Commissioner Earl "Buddy" Hance all lost after voting against a data center moratorium near a nuclear power plant (Maryland Matters, 2026).



- In Spartanburg County, South Carolina, council members Jack Mabry and Jessica Coker lost their June 2026 runoffs — to Jason Seay and Alex Turner, respectively — after supporting tax incentives for two local data center projects. Chairman Manning Lynch chose not to seek reelection rather than face the same fight (Post and Courier, 2026).
- In Georgia, Democrats Peter Hubbard and Alicia Johnson unseated Public Service Commission incumbents Fitz Johnson and Tim Echols in the November 2025 special election, campaigning directly against data centers shifting infrastructure costs onto residential ratepayers (WRDW, 2025; AJC, 2026).
- In Texas, Republican state senate candidate Rena Schroeder lost her Senate District 22 primary to David Cook after opposing data centers, then crossed party lines to endorse Cook's Democratic opponent (TPR, 2026).
- Earlier precedents set the pattern: in Cascade Locks, Oregon, a recall vote removed two port commissioners — including Port President Jess Groves — by a two-to-one margin in June 2023 after a proposed data center, and Warrenton, Virginia's Heather Sutphin lost her council seat to Roy Francis in November 2024 in a race described locally as a referendum on Amazon data centers (Friends of the Columbia Gorge, 2023; Prince William Times, 2024).

The effect is not limited to incumbents who supported data centers. In Wyoming's August 2026 primaries, candidates who ran on strict anti-data-center platforms underperformed candidates who favored development or moderate regulation, across multiple legislative and county races (WyoFile, 2026). Cheyenne councilman Larry Wolfe summarized the lesson bluntly: "I can't point to any of the races where being opposed to data centers was a productive view." Read together, the two patterns say the same thing to any officeholder: unmanaged data center backlash is now a career risk whichever side of the issue you take, and only a credible, substantive answer — not a position — protects a seat. A professor of government and politics who studies this shift summarized the underlying voter logic directly. Energy costs have become "the current face of

affordability," and banning data centers now polls as one of the most popular remedies available to a candidate (Newsweek, 2026).

THE GLOBAL AI RACE MAKES THIS MORE DANGEROUS, NOT LESS

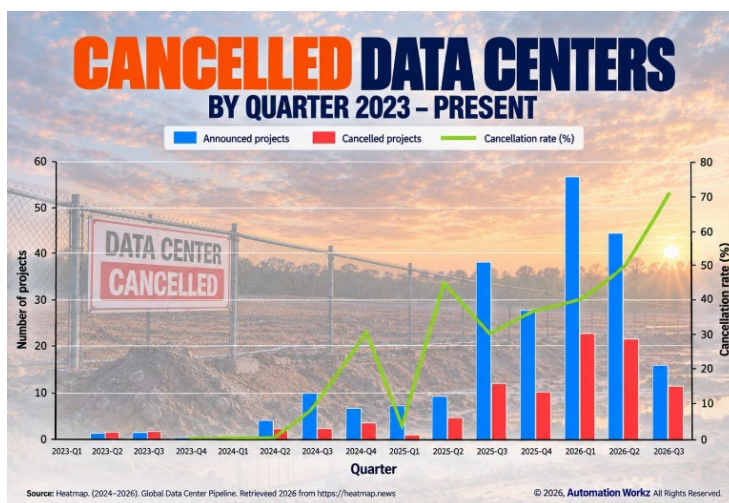
This backlash is colliding directly with a national policy of acceleration. In July 2025, the President signed Executive Order 14318, directing federal agencies to fast-track permitting for AI data center infrastructure (Columbia Climate Law, 2025). At Davos in January 2026, he authorized AI companies to function as their own private utilities to meet the two-to-five gigawatt power demands of frontier AI clusters (Fortune, 2026). The stated goal, reported alongside growing 2026 backlash coverage, is for the United States to remain the world's "No. 1 superpower in artificial intelligence" (NOTUS, 2026).



Here is the strategic problem corporate leaders need to sit with: a national race for AI dominance that depends on rapid data center buildout is now running directly into a local and state-level political environment that is blocking or delaying that same buildout at an accelerating rate.

Speed at the federal policy level and resistance at the local level are not offsetting forces. They compound exactly what shows up in the data above — \$130 billion in blocked or delayed data center projects in a single quarter (Brookings, 2026). A country cannot win a global infrastructure race one canceled county permit at a time. Unaddressed technostress should not be treated as irrelevant to the AI race. Alongside energy costs, water use, land use, permitting, and infrastructure concerns, it may be one factor contributing to resistance that slows AI infrastructure development.

MORATORIUMS, CANCELLATIONS, AND DELAYS: WHAT THE NUMBERS ACTUALLY MEAN



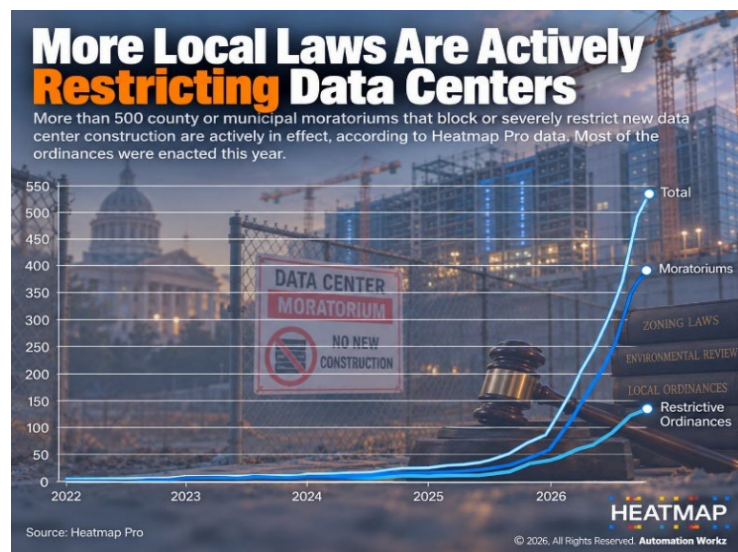
trackers now measure these differently, and their numbers should not be added together or treated as interchangeable.

On outright cancellations, the most rigorous tracker — Heatmap Pro, which reviews press accounts, public records, and calls county governments directly — shows the trend accelerating sharply: 6 projects cancelled in all of 2024, rising to 25 for all of 2025, then 20 in the first quarter of 2026 alone (Heatmap News, 2026). By late July 2026, cumulative cancellations for the year had passed 50 — already more than double the entire 2025 total — with 8 cancelled in July alone (Heatmap News, 2026).

On the broader "blocked or delayed" category — which includes cancellations but also counts projects stalled in permitting, litigation, or under active legal challenge without necessarily being dead — Data Center Watch's quarterly reports show 75-plus projects worth roughly \$130 billion disrupted in Q1 2026, followed by 45-plus projects worth roughly \$68 billion in Q2 2026 (Data Center Watch, 2026). Those are quarterly snapshots, not a running cumulative total, and different trackers using different windows and definitions have produced inconsistent full-year figures — a discrepancy that should be flagged, not resolved by picking whichever number reads best.

Underneath both trackers sits the real structural shift: more than 530 U.S. counties or municipalities now have laws actively restricting or banning new data center construction, with nearly 190 of those enacted since June 1, 2026 alone (Heatmap News, 2026). That is the mechanism producing the cancellations and delays above — it is easier to stop a project locally now than at almost any point in the AI buildout to date, and the rate of new restrictions is still climbing, not leveling off.

The moratorium wave sits between these two categories, and it is worth naming its own scale. At least three statewide or major-city moratoriums are now in force or in progress: New York enacted the first statewide data center moratorium in July 2026 (CNBC, 2026), Seattle's city council passed an emergency moratorium and policy framework the following month (Seattle City Council, 2026), and Fort Worth's city council voted unanimously to begin its own moratorium process in August 2026 (Fort Worth Report, 2026). At the federal level, Senators Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez introduced the AI Data Center Moratorium Act in March 2026, seeking to impose a nationwide pause (PBS / AP, 2026) — a bill that has not passed, but that signals the moratorium instrument has moved from a purely local tool to a live national policy proposal.



WHY THE FIGHT AGAINST DATA CENTERS IS A FIGHT AGAINST AI

Brookings Institution scholar Tom Wheeler frames the data center revolt stakes this way, "As AI leaps from technology to politics, the central question becomes who is in charge: democratic structures or autocratic executives" (Brookings, 2026). Wheeler's shorthand for the underlying fight is blunt —

"Five men control AI. Who controls them?" (Brookings, 2026).



It would be a mistake to read every one of these votes as a narrow argument about zoning, water tables, or electricity rates. Some of it is. But a growing body of reporting argues that the data center fight has become the visible front of a much larger argument the public is having about artificial intelligence itself — who controls it, who profits from it, and who bears its costs.

That framing is why the money moving into this fight looks less like a local land-use dispute and more like a national campaign over AI itself. In August 2026, a new super

PAC called Leading the Future launched with approximately \$140 million, including \$50 million each from venture firm Andreessen Horowitz and OpenAI president Greg Brockman, explicitly aimed at electing "pro-AI candidates" (Brookings, 2026). Opposition to that spending is bipartisan at the top: Republican Senator Josh Hawley and Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren have both raised alarm over the same underlying concern — a handful of companies accumulating an unprecedented "concentration of capital, information, and political power" (Brookings, 2026). NYU psychologist and AI researcher Gary Marcus put the public mood in even plainer terms: "The backlash is intensifying because the public is waking up to AI being about enriching a few people" (Newsweek, 2026).

The Washington Examiner named the mechanism directly, tying the AI industry's own labor claims to the infrastructure fight. AI is already displacing workers "customer service, accountants, and analysts. Technology companies call this productivity, which it undoubtedly is, but productivity looks different from the desk of the person whose work is being automated. That fear is measurable. Seventy-one percent of Americans now believe AI will result in fewer jobs over the next 20 years — and statements from tech barons themselves constantly fuel this. Communities are therefore being asked to provide enormous quantities of electricity, land, and infrastructure for machines whose creators advertise their ability to perform work currently done by the people being asked to accommodate them" (Washington Examiner, 2026).



That reaction is consistent with the techno-insecurity documented earlier in this article: anxiety about technological change shifting from the workplace into the community debate. This is the frame every executive reading polling numbers on data centers should hold in mind. A resident who shows up to block a substation is not only litigating kilowatt-hours. In enough of these fights, they are litigating whether a small number of AI companies and investors get to reorganize their community, their power grid, and their local economy without their consent. Techno-insecurity and techno-uncertainty — two of the five creators mapped earlier in this article — are not abstract constructs here. They are the lived experience of a community watching an industry it did not choose move in next door. Treating the data center fight as separate from the AI fight is the same category error as treating a workforce's resistance to an AI tool as separate from how that AI tool was introduced to them.

THE CORPORATE PARALLEL LEADERS KEEP MISSING

The evidence above suggests that technostress provides a useful framework for interpreting part of the data center backlash. It does not replace legitimate concerns about electricity prices, water use, land use, taxation, or local control. Rather, it adds another dimension: how insecurity, uncertainty, rapid technological change, and perceived loss of control can amplify resistance. Inside organizations, those conditions can contribute to disengagement and stalled technology adoption. In communities, similar human reactions may intensify opposition to the physical infrastructure supporting AI. The settings are different, but the behavioral parallels are important enough for leaders to measure rather than dismiss. The financial stakes of ignoring this internally



are not smaller than the political stakes of ignoring it externally. They are the same risk, arriving twice. There is a reason this gap keeps reopening, and it is not a communications problem — it is a measurement problem. Almost no organization, corporate or governmental, actually measures technostress before it detonates.

An engagement survey asks whether someone is satisfied with their job. It does not ask whether that same person believes the tool on their desk is quietly training their replacement,

and it does not tell leadership which individuals, teams, or communities are closest to the tipping point between insecurity and resistance. That is precisely the gap SenseiiWyze™ was built to close — using psychometric and behavioral data, not a satisfaction score, to identify who is at risk of technostress-driven disengagement before it becomes a stalled AI rollout. The same framework may also help leaders ask better questions about the human factors surrounding community resistance, although community-level prediction requires separate validation. Without that instrumentation, leadership is not managing the risk documented throughout this article. It is waiting to be surprised by it.

THE BOTTOM LINE FOR LEADERSHIP — AND FOR WASHINGTON

Executives cannot control a governor's moratorium or a county commission's vote on a data center, but they can quell the anger and resentment within their organizations. They can control whether their own organizations measure and intervene before technostress compounds into resistance — inside the workforce. Corporations and government agencies — the Department of War/Defense Industrial Base included — face the identical clock.

Every quarter spent treating technostress as a soft-skills line item, instead of a measured, managed risk is a quarter closer to the next canceled permit, the next recalled commissioner, or an AI rollout that fails not because the technology didn't work, but because the people asked to adopt it never stopped fearing it. Behavioral intelligence platforms, such as SenseiiWyze™ exist to close that gap — predicting who is at risk before the resistance shows up, at the individual level inside a workforce and predicting technostress risk at the individual and workforce level, while offering a framework that may inform broader community-readiness research. The alternative is not neutral.

Every quarter the United States spends managing this anger badly is a quarter China spends building without it — and an AI race is not won by the country with the better model if that country cannot get the model's own infrastructure built. Quelling the anger is not a communications campaign. It is a measurement discipline SenseiiWyze™ can fix.

The eighteen-month timeline shows how quickly resistance to AI infrastructure can escalate. The technostress framework helps explain one potential human dimension of that escalation. Organizations that wait to see whether it reaches their own boardroom are choosing, by default, to find out the hard way.

The stakes are no longer only corporate, and treating them as such is itself part of the failure. The federal government's own AI strategy — Executive Order 14318's expedited permitting, the private utility authorization granted at Davos, and the explicit goal of remaining the world's "No. 1 superpower in artificial intelligence" (NOTUS, 2026) — depends on a buildout that American communities are now blocking at a rate of dozens of projects and tens of billions of dollars per quarter (Brookings, 2026; Data Center Watch, 2026).

China's AI buildout does not stop for a county commission vote, a recalled official, or a ballot initiative. Every canceled U.S. permit documented in this article is ground the United States is voluntarily surrendering in a race it says it intends to win. Washington and corporate boardrooms are, in this specific and measurable sense, on the same clock. Neither can out-build a rival that faces no domestic technostress check on its infrastructure, so the only lever left is to quell the anger, driving the check — by naming it, measuring it, and addressing it before it reaches a hearing room or a ballot, rather than after.



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