Confronting Our Future: Hopes and Fears

The big picture. AI is advancing faster than institutions can adapt, stirring hope and fear. HAI's mid-year AI Index shows first-half 2026 investment already 46% above all of 2025. Only about a third of Americans say AI excites them, versus more than 80% in China and other parts of Asia. The day's recurring question: **who decides?**





Opening

Audrey Tang · Taiwan's Cyber Ambassador

"Pacing the frontier" requires evidence anyone can check, a witness independent of labs and states, and a duty to answer by a deadline. Tang favors "selfless" recursive improvement that strengthens human coordination over "solipsistic" improvement.

Governance

Daniel Ho · Alondra Nelson · Amy Zegart

Government can obstruct or enable AI. Agile, versioned governance needs real state capacity and enforcement. "Winning" means shaping norms and infrastructure, not being first. Negative U.S. public sentiment (70–75%) is a political force; the implementation gap remains vast.

Security

Dawn Song · Andrew Feldman · Yejin Choi

On CyberGym, vulnerability discovery rose from 20–30% in January to about 90% today. Near term, AI favors attackers. Song proposes verifiable code generation with proofs that code meets its specification. Choi argues small, varied models are safer and resist a "hive mind."

Science

Jeff Dean · Fei-Fei Li

Self-improvement iterates toward a measurable goal; recursive self-improvement also upgrades the system proposing changes. Claims of infinite speed ignore physics: training, compute, and evaluation take real time.

Agents

Michael Bernstein · Ion Stoica · Diyi Yang

Agents fail in the gaps between intent and specification, model and environment, and tests and reality. Math advances fastest because those gaps largely vanish. Workers want tedious tasks automated but want control. AI power users won 74% of the time against the best AI, versus 27% for infrequent users.

Work

Erik Brynjolfsson · Melissa Valentine
Anahita Tafvizi · Andrew Bosworth

Adoption is uneven: entry-level hiring is down in exposed fields, while new business formation is about double 2019 levels. Task-doing prompts were linked to job loss; teaching or augmenting prompts were not. How junior workers will build skills remains unresolved.

Education

Dora Demszky · Joe Liemandt · Don Daves-Rougeaux

AI in education is a people problem, not a tech problem. Teachers and mentors remain central. AI feedback helps novices quickly but has not narrowed the novice-expert gap.

Humanity

Meghan Sullivan · Jessica Riskin · Shane Denson
Bishop Oscar Cantú

Today's AI is universal and concentrated in a few companies. Chatbots can imitate relationships but cannot embody them. Fears center on atrophy of mind and trust, and fragile institutions. Hopes center on humanism, art, and scientific discovery.