

Data centers have united Americans of both parties in a shared hatred

[Shira Ovide](#)

Kyle Schmidt ticked through what makes him irate about the [massive Google data center](#) slated for construction about a mile away from his home near Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

He didn't like that residents were kept in the dark about what would be built on a pristine tract of mostly forested land.

He's worried about the data center's potential impact on the community's water supply and on the dream home that his family moved into last year.

But Schmidt said what really bothers him is the powerlessness he felt as the project advanced and elected officials, Google representatives and bigwig data center backers belittled or misled people who raised concerns.

"I hate bullies," said Schmidt, a 43-year-old flooring salesman and project manager who leads [a community group](#) opposing the project. "Data center developers discovered if we can sneak in here without anyone noticing, we can pretty much take what we want."

A rare issue uniting Americans is opposition to data centers, the sprawling computer complexes that are the most visible manifestation of the artificial intelligence boom. In a recent Gallup poll, about [7 of 10](#) Americans said they would oppose a data center being built near them, and many express concerns about the projects operating [in secret](#) and [gobbling](#) scarce land, water and electricity.

But experts and activists say that the intensity and breadth of the data center backlash reveals something bigger: Americans' disgust with political and economic systems that feel stacked against them. Data centers, often backed by technology giants and advancing at the speed of AI, may be tangible symbols for a fed-up public to push back against powerful and unaccountable interests.

Data centers are a "physical embodiment of all the anxiety that people are feeling around AI and the economy," Utah Gov. Spencer Cox (R) said in an interview last month. And Cox, who faced [blowback](#) over his support for a data center project, said people feel like "this is something that they can fight."

The groundswell against data centers is [blurring](#) typical political and social divisions. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) wants to ban data centers, and Humans First, led by [former tea party movement leader Amy Kremer](#), is organizing national data center [protests](#) on Saturday. Hill

County, Texas, where Donald Trump won [82 percent](#) of the vote in 2024, [banned](#) data center construction this year. So did [residents of Monterey Park](#), California, a predominantly Asian and Latino working-class city east of Los Angeles.

It remains unclear whether this opposition will meaningfully slow the expansion of data centers fueling the AI boom, or limit the AI chatbots that [half of Americans use](#). But many elected officials say they know that the tide has turned against data centers, and they're rushing to show that they're listening to residents' concerns — or facing a political price.

Sherrod Brown, the Ohio Democrat [vying to flip a Senate seat](#) in a closely watched race, has run [advertisements](#) accusing his opponent, Sen. Jon Husted (R), of recruiting data centers to the state at Ohioans' expense. This spring, residents of Festus, Missouri, [voted out incumbent city council members](#) over their approval of a data center project.

Scott Babwah Brennen, director of New York University's Center on Technology Policy, said he is stunned by how quickly popular outrage over data centers is shifting public policy.

For 15 years, he said, local governments rolled out the red carpet for data center construction in places such as eastern Washington and [Northern Virginia](#). Companies including

Google, Amazon, Meta and Microsoft often received tax breaks for what elected officials believed would be reliable future tax revenue, some additional jobs and a minimal strain on public services — at least compared with housing developments or factories. (Amazon Executive Chairman Jeff Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

But about two years ago, Babwah Brennen said that power-hungry data centers in some parts of the country started being blamed for [driving up household electric bills](#).

Opposition in both red and blue regions continued to build to the point where he has tracked about 65 state data center restrictions enacted since the start of 2025, and dozens of cities that have imposed temporary halts to data center development. This week, New York became the first state in the nation to [impose a temporary pause](#) on large new data center projects.

“There is far more partisan alignment here than there was even last year,” Babwah Brennen said.

Some people resisting data centers say they’re not opposed to AI; Schmidt said that he’s using AI to create a community information [website](#).

But some data center activists said they’re wary of politicians and powerful corporations asking people to

sacrifice in exchange for economic revitalization that may never arrive.

Shaena Crossland, a lifelong West Virginian, said she's worried that data centers will repeat the pattern of industries such as coal mining and logging that harvested resources from West Virginia, while the state remained largely poor.

"Hopefully this cycle of extraction and taking advantage of people will stop," Crossland said. She and another local resident, Amy Margolies, are helping spearhead [opposition](#) to a [proposed data center complex](#) in the eastern part of the state.

People across the country have grown skeptical of promises that data centers generate good local jobs and technological advantages, said Abre' Conner, director of the center for environmental and climate justice at the NAACP, which is among the groups [suing](#) over Elon Musk's [expanding](#) data center complex in the Memphis area.

Data centers are now galvanizing citizens to push back against economic and political influences, she added. "This is one of the largest expansions of people recognizing their power," Conner said.

Tech giants and other data center backers have been caught off guard by the rapid rise of public opposition, arguing that

the hubs are essential for modern digital services and to keep the United States ahead of China on AI.

A spokesperson for Google, which is behind the Sand Springs data center, said it “strives to always be a good neighbor through long-term partnerships and investments in our sites, our people and the communities where we are located.” The company said it’s working to ensure compliance with Oklahoma law and local permitting guidelines.

Some data center proponents also say that concerns about the computer hubs are sometimes misinformed, stirred by [foreign propaganda](#) or a symptom of NIMBYism — or “Not in My Backyard,” shorthand for resistance to housing development and other new construction.

“If NIMBYism becomes the reason we lose the AI race, for whatever reason, we’re in a whole lot of trouble in this country,” Constellation Energy CEO Joseph Dominguez [said](#) in April. But while nuclear energy was once widely unpopular, Dominguez said that nuclear power complexes are now less controversial than the data centers that Constellation is hoping to attract.

[Katherine Levine Einstein](#), a Boston University political scientist who researches local pushback to new home construction, said that data center opposition shares traits

with this longtime resistance but only to a point.

Since zoning and permitting decisions are typically made at the local level in the U.S., she said, "20 grumpy neighbors" can quash homes or data centers near them even if the new construction could benefit many others.

With new housing, though, "we like it in the aggregate but we don't want it near us," Epstein said. "The public opinion about data centers is different: We don't want them anywhere."