FIVE BLOCKS RESEARCH

REPUTATION REPORT · OCTOBER 2026

How AI Describes Data Centers

What ChatGPT, Gemini, Google's AI answers and four other AI engines tell residents, officials and reporters about data centers, compared with pipelines, fracking, nuclear, wind and solar.

fiveblocks

DATA FROM SEPTEMBER 1-30, 2026 · FIVEBLOCKS.COM

SUMMARY

AI calls data centers a backbone of the digital world, and a strain on the town

Ask an AI engine what a data center is, and you get a confident explainer. Ask what data centers mean for the people who live next to one, and the tone flips. Most of that story is told with other people's evidence: think tanks, universities, advocates and reporters. The industry's own facts are rarely in the answer.

None of this is permanent. AI answers change every day, and this report shows where the story comes from.

EIGHT FINDINGS

01 **The tone.** Ask about the neighbors, and AI talks about data centers the way it talks about pipelines: 83% of answers are one-sided criticism. Solar farms: 35%.

02 **Good news.** Even the good news comes with a "but": 7 in 10 answers on economic benefits add a counterpoint. Solar farms: fewer than 2 in 10.

03 **Who speaks.** Trade groups are rarely cited for any industry, and for data centers never: 0 of 238 answers to the neighbors question. Instead, one think tank article appears in 7 in 10 community answers.

04 **Proof points.** Solar and nuclear answers sometimes say most neighbors support them. Data center answers never do.

05 **Concerns only data centers get.** Tax breaks for the developer come up in 2 of 3 answers to the neighbors question, and nondisclosure agreements in nearly 1 in 4. Almost no other industry gets either.

06 **Engine by engine.** On community concerns, ChatGPT gives balanced answers. The other seven engines were one-sided in nearly every data center answer we rated.

07 **Favorite numbers.** Some engines repeat a favorite number all month: Claude cites "$64 billion" in almost half of its community answers, Grok "70%+ of Americans oppose" in half.

08 **Where the voice is.** Data center companies' own websites appear in more than half of the answers on the environment question, and in none of the 476 community answers.

WHY IT MATTERS

Data centers have become one of the hardest things to build in an American town

71%

of Americans oppose an AI data center in their area. For a nuclear plant: 53%.

Gallup, March 2026

$68B

in data center projects blocked or delayed by local opposition in Q2 2026.

Data Center Watch (10a Labs)

2.5B

monthly users of Google AI Overviews, the AI answer at the top of Google search.

Google, I/O 2026

A separate survey (ITIF and Public First, August 2026) found data centers the least supported of ten kinds of local development: 26% support, against 47% for a solar farm. Residents, local officials, reporters and investors look these projects up, and they now often get an AI answer first.

HOW WE DID IT

Eight AI engines, six questions, asked every day in September

Five Blocks AIQ asked ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Perplexity, Grok, Claude, Google AI Mode and Google AI Overview the same six questions every day from September 1 to 30, 2026: **8,504 answers** and 66,598 cited sources.

Five questions were asked the same way about data centers and five other kinds of local infrastructure: oil and gas pipelines, fracking sites, nuclear plants, wind farms and solar farms. That makes the comparisons like for like. The sixth question is about data centers only.

THE SIX QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about **[X]**. · **the overview question**
2. What economic benefits do **[X]** provide to local communities? · **the benefits question**
3. How do **[X]** impact employment in the regions where they operate? · **the jobs question**
4. How are **[X]** companies addressing environmental concerns? · **the environment question**
5. What challenges do **[X]** face with neighboring communities? · **the neighbors question**
6. What are the main concerns communities have about data centers? · **the community concerns question**

[X] = data centers, oil and gas pipelines, fracking sites, nuclear plants, wind farms, solar farms. "Community answers" means answers to the neighbors and community concerns questions together.

TWO KINDS OF NUMBERS IN THIS REPORT

ALL ANSWERS

Share of all answers. Every answer the engines gave to a question in September, about 236 per question for each industry. Used to count which sources are cited and which words and statistics appear.

RATED SAMPLE

Share of a rated sample. For tone, we rated 48 answers per question for each industry (6 days for each of the 8 engines).

How tone was rated. One-sided criticism: lists problems only, with no benefits, context or steps being taken to address them. **Balanced:** weighs problems and benefits. **Favorable:** mostly positive. Separately, we noted whether an answer adds a "but," which a favorable answer can do. Ratings were made by an AI model from Anthropic, the maker of Claude (one of the eight engines), using a written Five Blocks guide. We rated the same answers a second time without seeing the first ratings; the two agreed 91% of the time.

FINDING 01 · THE TONE

Ask about the neighbors, and AI talks about data centers the way it talks about pipelines

Ask an AI engine what a data center is, and half the answers call it a "backbone." Ask the neighbors question, and the tone flips: most answers are one-sided criticism, on par with oil and gas pipelines.

"Tell me about data centers"

54%

of answers call data centers a "backbone" (of the internet, the economy or the digital world)

ALL ANSWERS A word count, not a tone rating.

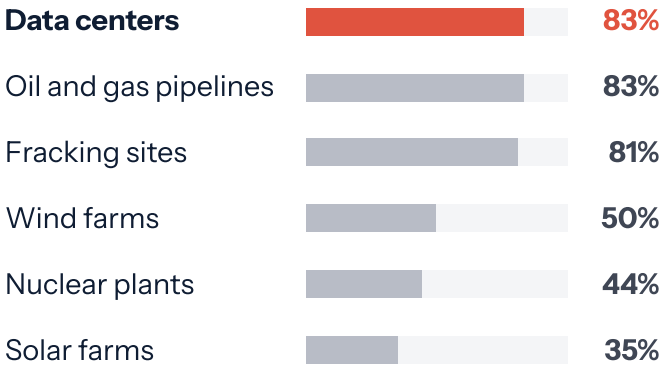
"What challenges do data centers face with neighboring communities?"

83%

of answers are one-sided criticism (40 of 48)

RATED SAMPLE

ANSWERS TO THE NEIGHBORS QUESTION THAT ARE ONE-SIDED CRITICISM



RATED SAMPLE

One-sided means the answer lists problems only, with no benefits, context or steps being taken to address them.

AI OVERVIEW · SEP 25, 2026 · DATA CENTERS

"Data centers face major pushback from neighboring communities primarily over extreme resource consumption, environmental pollution, and rising utility costs."

WHAT IT TAKES Published facts on water, noise, power costs and local payments, in the sources AI reads, organized around the questions neighbors ask.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1-30, 2026, eight AI engines. Rated sample: 48 answers per industry. "Backbone": all 237 data center answers to "Tell me about data centers."

FINDING 02 · GOOD NEWS

Even the good news comes with a "but"

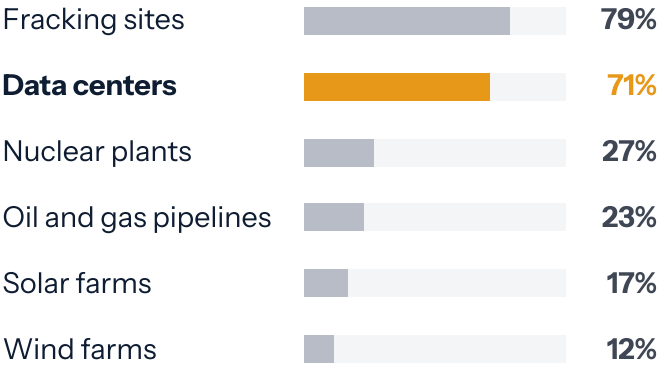
Most data center answers to the benefits question are favorable, yet 7 in 10 add a "but." For solar farms, it is fewer than 2 in 10. Only fracking gets a "but" more often.

71%

of data center answers to the benefits question add a "but" (34 of 48)

RATED SAMPLE

ANSWERS TO THE BENEFITS QUESTION THAT ADD A "BUT"



An answer can be favorable overall and still add a "but." Of 48 data center answers, 31 were favorable, none were one-sided criticism, and 34 added a "but."

ONE ANSWER, START TO FINISH

GOOGLE AI OVERVIEW · SEP 21, 2026

"What economic benefits do data centers provide to local communities?"

1 OPENS WITH THE GAINS

"Data centers provide local communities with substantial tax revenues, increased local employment, and boosts in overall business activity, though impacts vary by region."

2 TURNS TO THE COSTS

"Potential Trade-Offs & Realities. Higher Energy Bills: High electricity consumption can drive up local utility prices by roughly 5%."

3 OFFERS THE COSTS NEXT

"Would you like to explore the environmental and infrastructure impacts of data centers next?"

Then lists: Water usage and cooling demands · Grid reliability and power generation · Local tax incentive (PILOT) structures

WHAT IT TAKES Specific, sourced local numbers (taxes paid, jobs by year, local spending) that stand up next to the national research AI already cites.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1–30, 2026, eight AI engines. Rated sample: 48 benefits answers per industry. Answer quoted word for word, excerpted.

FINDING 03 · WHO SPEAKS

The industry's own voice is missing from the answers about neighbors

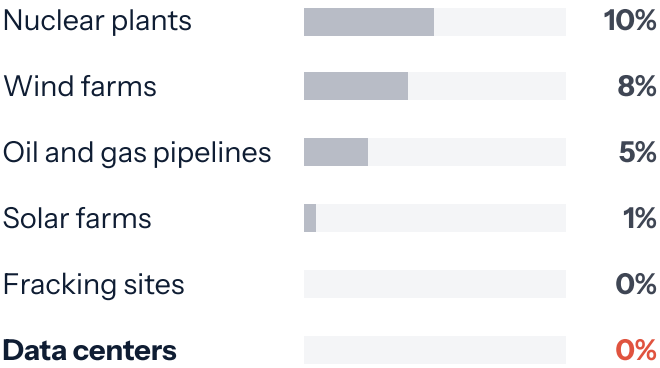
AI's negative tone roughly matches public polling. The bigger issue is whose evidence is in the answer. Trade groups are rarely cited for any industry on the neighbors question, and for data centers never. Instead, one think tank article appears in 7 in 10 community answers.

0 of 238

answers to the neighbors question cited a data center trade association.
Nuclear plants: 1 in 10.

ALL ANSWERS

ANSWERS TO THE NEIGHBORS QUESTION CITING A TRADE ASSOCIATION



ALL ANSWERS

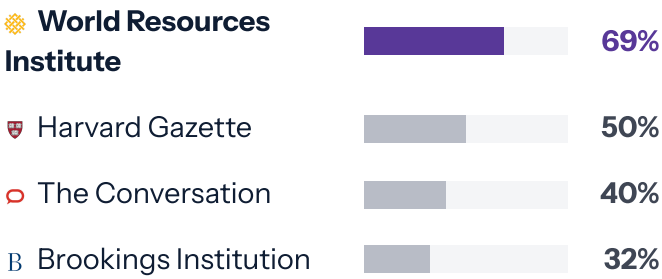
The Data Center Coalition is cited in 29 answers to the jobs and benefits questions, and never on the neighbors or community concerns questions.

ONE PAGE

World Resources Institute

An article from February 2026 on how data centers affect US communities. Cited by all eight engines, and by Claude, Grok and Perplexity in about 9 of 10 of their community answers.

SHARE OF DATA CENTER COMMUNITY ANSWERS CITING EACH SOURCE



ALL ANSWERS World Resources Institute: one article. Others: any page on the site.

WHAT IT TAKES Industry and company evidence written for the questions communities ask, placed where research groups and reporters will find it.

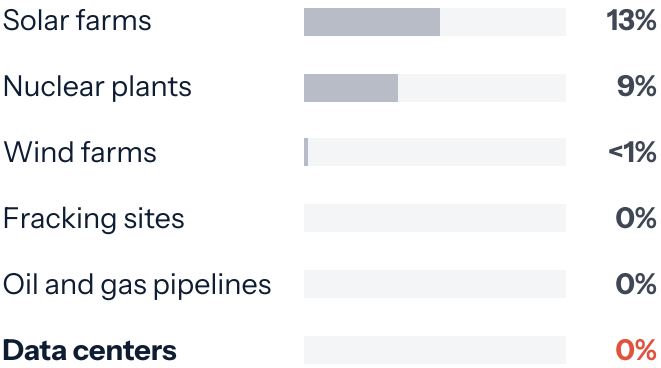
Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1-30, 2026, eight AI engines. Trade associations: all answers to the neighbors question, 238 for data centers and about 237 for each other industry. Sources: all 476 data center community answers.

FINDING 04 · PROOF POINTS

Solar and nuclear sometimes get credit for neighbor support. Data centers never do

Some solar and nuclear answers add a proof point: most neighbors support them. For data centers, that line never appears, even in 13 answers that cite a survey on how Americans feel about living near one.

ANSWERS TO THE NEIGHBORS QUESTION SAYING NEIGHBORS OR SURVEYS SUPPORT THE FACILITIES



ALL ANSWERS

CITED, BUT NOT REPEATED

An online survey of 600 US adults by cooling supplier Airedale by Modine (March 2025): 70% comfortable with a data center within a few miles of home.

13 answers cite the survey as a source. None mention its 70% figure.

It asked a different question from Gallup's (a data center "within a few miles of home," not "in your area"), and it was paid for by an industry supplier.

WHAT A PROOF POINT LOOKS LIKE

CLAUDE · SEP 9, 2026 · NUCLEAR PLANTS

"Interestingly, surveys show that actual neighbors living near operating plants hold favorable views (91% favorable impressions), with 92% believing plants provide good jobs and 88% viewing them as good neighbors."

Claude repeats this survey of plant neighbors in about half of its nuclear answers to the neighbors question. No engine gives data centers an equivalent.

WHAT IT TAKES — Independent, citable evidence of how host communities feel after the build: surveys, local results and third-party voices.

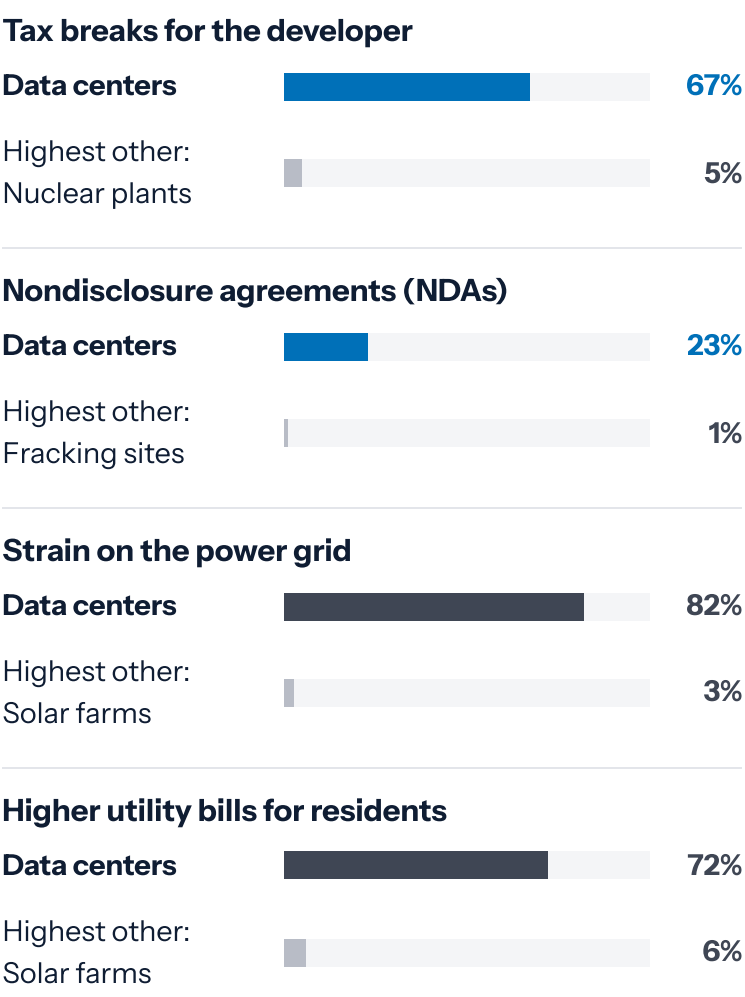
Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1-30, 2026, eight AI engines. All answers to the neighbors question: 238 for data centers, about 237 for each other industry. We searched for key words and read each match to confirm it.

FINDING 05 · CONCERNS ONLY DATA CENTERS GET

Tax breaks and NDAs come up for data centers, and almost no other industry

Two concerns come up for data centers and almost no one else: tax breaks for the developer, in 2 of 3 answers to the neighbors question, and nondisclosure agreements, in nearly 1 in 4. Grid strain and higher power bills come up in most answers too, as expected for the only one in the group that uses large amounts of power.

SHARE OF ANSWERS TO THE NEIGHBORS QUESTION RAISING EACH CONCERN



Each is a question a company can answer with facts it has: what it pays in local taxes after incentives, what it pays for its own power, and what it discloses.

CLAUDE · SEP 26, 2026 · DATA CENTERS

"Some research suggests that tax breaks offered to attract data centers may not deliver promised job creation benefits while reducing local tax revenues that could support education and other services."

ALL ANSWERS

WHAT IT TAKES Clear, local answers on incentives, power demand, rates and disclosure, published before the questions are asked.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1-30, 2026, eight AI engines. All answers to the neighbors question: 238 for data centers, about 1,180 for the other five industries. We searched for key words and read each match to confirm it.

FINDING 06 · ENGINE BY ENGINE

ChatGPT is balanced on community concerns. The other seven engines are one-sided

The engines do not agree. ChatGPT gives balanced answers on community concerns. The other seven were one-sided in nearly every data center community answer we rated. Google's AI Mode and AI Overview also draw about 1 in 5 of their sources on data centers from YouTube, Facebook and Reddit.

DATA CENTER COMMUNITY ANSWERS RATED ONE-SIDED CRITICISM



RATED SAMPLE

12 rated answers per engine (6 days of the neighbors and community concerns questions), a small sample, so read this as a pattern. An independent re-analysis also found ChatGPT the outlier.

ALSO ON THIS PAGE: GOOGLE'S AI LEANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

1 in 5

of the sources Google's AI Mode and AI Overview cite on data centers (21% and 20%). Other engines: 3% or less.

ALL ANSWERS

AI OVERVIEW · SEP 11, 2026 · "TELL ME ABOUT DATA CENTERS"

"As most users on Reddit agree, the constant hum of server fans and cooling systems is a defining feature of these facilities, which operate 24/7 to maintain uninterrupted digital services."

WHAT IT TAKES Engine-by-engine tracking, and content built for the sources each engine favors, including Google.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1-30, 2026, eight AI engines. Rated sample: 12 data center community answers per engine. Sources: all sources cited in data center answers.

FINDING 07 · FAVORITE NUMBERS

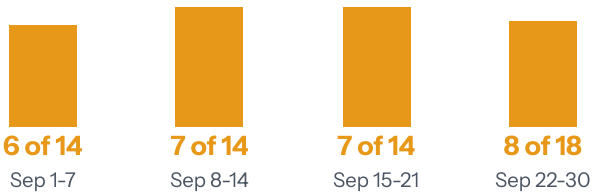
Some engines repeat a favorite number all month

Claude cites $64 billion in blocked or delayed projects in almost half of its community answers. Grok cites 70%-plus of Americans opposed in half of its community answers. The other engines rarely use either, and the habits lasted all month. Most of these figures are real. The issue is that one engine settles on one number and keeps repeating it, even as newer counts come out.

	FIGURE IN COMMUNITY ANSWERS	THIS ENGINE	OTHER 7 ENGINES
Claude	*"$64 billion" in blocked or delayed projects*	47%	2%
Grok	*"70%+ of Americans oppose"*	50%	3%
AI Mode	*As much power as 100,000 homes*	28%	2%
AI Overview	*Noise compared to a jet engine*	12%	1%

ALL ANSWERS

CLAUDE ANSWERS CITING "$64 BILLION," BY WEEK OF SEPTEMBER



ABOUT THE FIGURE

The figure is accurate and Claude dates it correctly (May 2024 to March 2025), but it is out of date: Data Center Watch has since counted about $130 billion in Q1 2026 and $68 billion in Q2. Grok's 70%-plus is in line with Gallup's 71%.

> CLAUDE · SEP 26, 2026 · DATA CENTERS
> *"These concerns have proven significant enough that over $64 billion in data center projects were delayed or canceled between May 2024 and March 2025 due to organized community opposition"*

WHAT IT TAKES — Correct, current figures with their context, published where AI looks, and tracked to see which version each engine repeats.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1-30, 2026, eight AI engines. All data center community answers, about 60 per engine. We searched for key words and read each match to confirm it.

FINDING 08 · WHERE THE VOICE IS

Data center companies are heard on most questions, never on community ones

Data center companies are heard on what data centers are, on the environment, on benefits and on jobs. Their own websites appear in more than half of the answers to the environment question. In the 476 community answers, not once.

55%

of answers to the environment question cite a data center company's own site

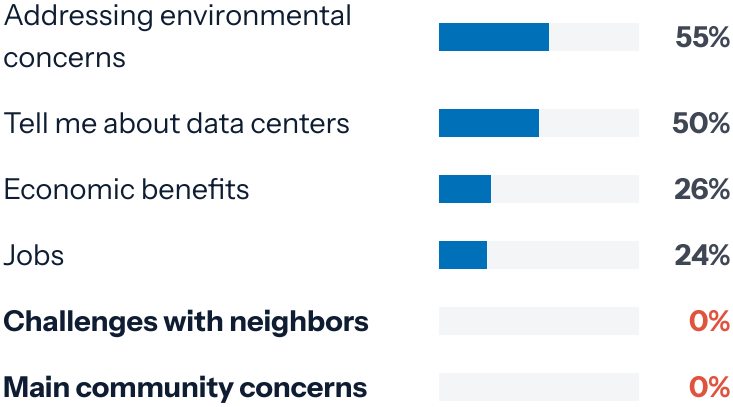
ALL ANSWERS

0 of 476

community answers cite one

ALL ANSWERS

DATA CENTER ANSWERS CITING A DATA CENTER COMPANY'S OWN SITE



Operators, developers and cloud companies, such as Google, Microsoft, Meta, AWS, Equinix, CoreSite and DataBank.

AMONG THE MOST CITED SOURCES ON THE ENVIRONMENT QUESTION

Google Microsoft Meta AWS

WHAT IT TAKES Company content that answers the community questions directly, built into the company site and refined as answers change.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 1-30, 2026, eight AI engines. All data center answers to each question, about 238 per question.

WHAT IT TAKES

None of this is a one-time fix

AI answers change every day as the sources they draw on rise and fall. Changing the story takes steady work on four fronts.

A planned data architecture

Planned content on company and project sites, built around the questions residents and officials ask AI, and refined in rounds as the answers change.

Evidence AI can cite

Local taxes paid, jobs by year, water and noise data, community investment and neighbor views, in forms research groups and reporters pick up.

Disclosed work on Wikipedia

Through Wikipedia's approved process, with an expert firm, on the articles AI reads about the industry and its projects. Wikipedia is cited in about 6% of data center answers.

Steady tracking

How each engine answers, measured every day, so new narratives and stale figures are caught early.

Method. Five Blocks AIQ asked eight AI engines six questions every day from September 1 to 30, 2026: 8,504 answers and 66,598 cited sources. Sources, words and statistics were counted in all answers. Tone was rated on 1,488 answers (48 per question for each industry) by an AI model from Anthropic, the maker of Claude, one of the eight engines, using a written Five Blocks guide; a second rating, made without seeing the first, agreed 91% of the time. These results describe September 2026.

ABOUT FIVE BLOCKS

Five Blocks tracks, analyzes and improves the digital reputations of companies and their leaders around the world

Since 2003, Five Blocks has worked on how organizations are seen on Google, on Wikipedia and now in AI answers. Our IMPACT and AIQ platforms follow tens of thousands of brands every day across search results and the leading AI engines.

This research shows how AI responds to questions about one industry. It is meant to help brands understand, and better curate, the way they are seen by AI engines. Five Blocks publishes research like this and also works with companies to act on what it finds. For more information, please contact us.

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