# AI Expansion, Data Centers, and Public Safety

## Subtitle

A resident briefing on immediate risks, national policy, and practical priorities for protecting U.S. communities and children

## Immediate priority

The most urgent concern is the growing availability of low-cost drones and AI tools that can be adapted for surveillance, targeting, sabotage, and attacks by state and non-state actors.[cite:7][cite:11] Research on humanitarian UAVs notes that the same autonomy, sensing, and navigation functions used for rescue or demining can also be repurposed for harmful uses.[cite:7] Recent reporting connected to IEEE Spectrum coverage highlights how AI-enabled drone systems are becoming more capable in conflict settings such as Ukraine, where drones are increasingly used for detection and operations in dangerous environments.[cite:11]

## Security implications

The declining cost of hardware, software, and model access lowers the barrier for malicious actors to build capable systems without requiring large military programs.[cite:7][cite:11] This means domestic public safety planning now has to consider AI-enabled drones and related systems as a homeland security issue, not only as a distant battlefield development.[cite:7][cite:12]

## U.S. infrastructure policy

At the federal level, the Trump administration has taken steps to speed AI infrastructure rather than slow it, including actions to accelerate permitting for data center construction and to reduce federal regulatory delays.[cite:1][cite:9] A later executive order sought to limit state and local AI regulation that federal officials believe could obstruct national AI development.[cite:3][cite:5]

## State and local resistance

The strongest restrictions are emerging from states and local communities, where lawmakers and residents are responding to electricity demand, water use, land use, and local cost concerns tied to new data centers.[cite:2][cite:4] Reporting in April 2026 said that 27 states were advancing laws that could raise costs or slow AI-heavy data center development, and Maine was moving toward a moratorium on new data centers through late 2027.[cite:2]

## U.S. and China positions

The United States remains ahead at the frontier of AI model capability, with analyses finding that frontier models have been developed by U.S. labs and that Chinese frontier models still trail by several months on average.[cite:10] At the same time, China appears to be ahead in broad industrial deployment, with one analysis reporting AI use in production by about 67 percent of Chinese industrial firms compared with 34 percent of comparable U.S. firms.[cite:6]

## What the gap means

These findings suggest that the United States leads in top-end research and model performance, while China is stronger in spreading AI through everyday industrial activity.[cite:6][cite:10] Delays in U.S. power, permitting, and data center buildout can therefore slow the very deployment capacity that supports domestic adoption at scale.[cite:2][cite:9][cite:12]

## Why opposition is growing

Resistance to AI infrastructure is being driven by several concrete factors: expected pressure on electric grids, fears of higher utility bills, water consumption, local environmental impacts, and distrust of large technology firms.[cite:2][cite:8][cite:12][cite:15] Additional reporting describes a broad populist backlash in which communities increasingly see AI buildout as benefiting large companies while shifting local costs onto residents.[cite:8][cite:12][cite:15]

## Public safety priority order

For resident education and advocacy, the issues can be ranked in the following order of urgency for reducing future bloodshed in the United States:

1. Prevent misuse of AI-enabled drones and autonomous systems through strong security controls, monitoring, and national preparedness.[cite:7][cite:11][cite:12]
2. Protect critical infrastructure and public spaces from low-cost airborne threats that can be assembled or adapted by hostile actors.[cite:7][cite:11]
3. Expand U.S. capacity for safe AI research, testing, and deployment so that defensive capabilities are not weakened by fragmented infrastructure delays.[cite:1][cite:2][cite:9][cite:10]
4. Require data centers to meet clear standards on energy, water, grid impact, and community benefit so local resistance does not turn into broad national paralysis.[cite:2][cite:9][cite:12][cite:15]
5. Increase public literacy so residents understand that AI is both a civilian tool and a dual-use security technology.[cite:7][cite:11][cite:12]

## Practical direction

A balanced national approach would combine faster infrastructure development with stronger rules for high-risk uses, especially autonomous weapons, surveillance, and critical system protection.[cite:7][cite:9][cite:12] Local communities are more likely to support AI-

related projects when costs, safeguards, and public benefits are made explicit rather than assumed.[cite:2] [cite:12] [cite:15]