



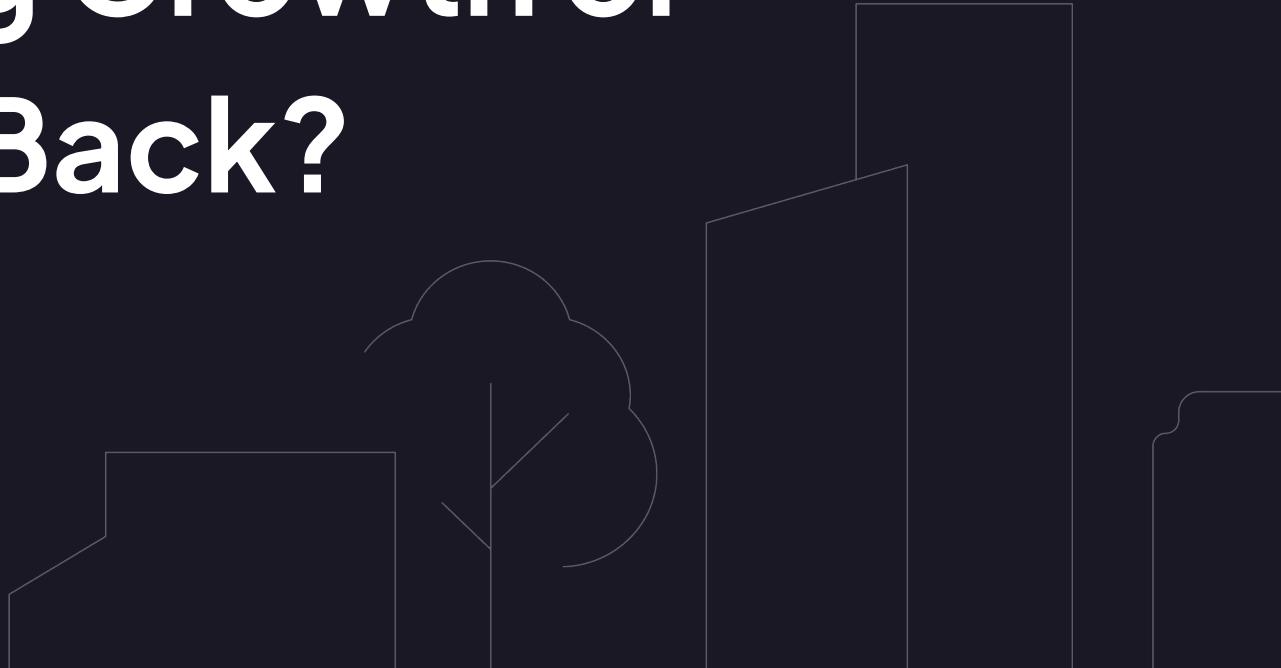
**Power the Work  
of Government with  
Community Voices**

FCCMA 2026



# Powering Growth or Pushing Back?

Survey Insights on Resident  
Perceptions of Data Centers



# Speakers



**Lee Feldman**  
Senior Advisor  
Zencity



**Scott Butler**  
City Manager  
Mesa, AZ



**Jonathan Lewis**  
County Administrator  
Sarasota County, FL

# Data Centers National Survey Report

## Why we ran this survey

### The Conversation is moving – Fast

Five months ago, most residents couldn't define a data center. Now council chambers are being overrun, ballot measures to block construction are gathering signatures, and state legislatures are advancing bills to constrain development. Leaders are being asked to make decisions on a 12-month-old debate

### Local Governments are on the front line

Hyperscale activity, grid pressure, and water concerns are converging here faster than in most states. The economic upside is real — and so is the organized opposition. Every Florida city and county manager will face a version of this decision in the next 24 months

### The loudest voices aren't the whole community

The residents who show up, post, and organize are visible. The broader population is not. Without structured research, leaders are responding to sentiment they can't fully see — and risk over-indexing on the people in the room

Zencity surveyed **1,909 Americans**, including an oversample of **437 Florida residents** (April 2026), to give local leaders an evidence-based view of where the public actually stands.

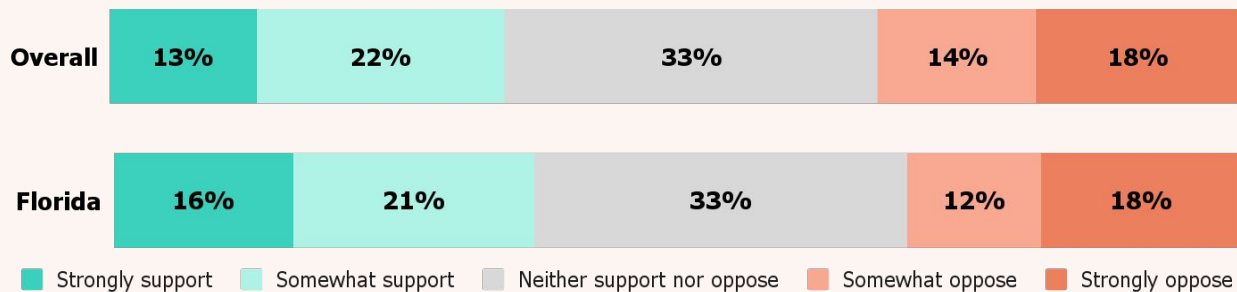
Data Center Survey Results

# National Key Insights & Findings



# Most of the Audience is Undecided

Q: To what extent do you support or oppose building more data centers?



**35% of residents nationally support building more data centers.** Florida leans more favorable at 37% support vs. 30% oppose. With **33% neither supporting nor opposing** — the single largest bloc — the national conversation remains genuinely unsettled, and targeted information campaigns could shift this neutral majority in either direction.

## National Callout:

Support for data centers is highest among younger cohorts aged 18–34 (42%) and Hispanic residents (52%). Opposition is heavily concentrated in the 55+ demographic (46%), highlighting a generational divide.

\*\*Unsettled  
Neither

# Dominant Resident Concerns

Water and electricity concerns dominate

Residents prioritize impacts on water (86%) and electricity (85%) far above jobs (65%) and tax revenue (61%).

Local governments that establish resource stewardship as a standing priority — before any data center proposal — enter the conversation with credibility that project-level promises can't match.

## % Concerned Overall:

Strain on the electrical grid and potential for outages

86%

High water consumption during droughts or shortages

85%

Noise from cooling systems affecting nearby residents

77%

Limited local job creation relative to the size of the facility

72%

Visual impact on community character (e.g., building size, appearance)

69%

# The Trust Gap

Local government is not the trusted voice on data center impacts – 3x less than independent environmental organizations.

Only 1 in 5 residents trust local government officials for accurate information on the impacts of a proposed data center (22%), nearly 3x less than independent environmental organizations (57%). Successful engagement requires third-party validation rather than reliance on developer-led marketing materials.

Developer transparency is a key driver of support.

Residents are more likely to oppose projects when developer involvement feels unclear or revealed late. **Early disclosure** signals transparency and reduces speculation, helping local governments build credibility from the outset rather than trying to recover it later.

## Overall Sources:

Independent environmental organizations



State regulatory agencies



Local news media



Local government officials



The data center company



# Florida Highlights

**Overall, Florida and national results are closely aligned**, with only a few differences regarding local decision making.

That being said:

- **Florida residents are *slightly* more supportive:** Local support in Florida runs at **37%** vs. **35%** nationally, with Hispanic/Latino residents driving that gap at **62% support**
- **Florida residents are more optimistic about AI, and use it more:** **38%** of Florida residents view AI's societal impact positively vs. **33%** nationally, and AI tool usage runs higher than the national average
- **Water is the main condition for opposers:** **39%** of Florida opposers cite a guarantee of **no local drinking water** use as the top requirement to reconsider support, ahead of renewable energy (**5 ppt** higher than national score)
- **Older Floridians are behind on awareness:** **14%** of Florida residents 55+ report knowing "nothing at all" about data centers, compared to **9%** nationally - a targeted communications gap that can be closed with relatively low effort

# Panel Discussion



**Lee Feldman**  
Senior Advisor  
Zencity



**Scott Butler**  
City Manager  
Mesa, AZ



**Jonathan Lewis**  
County Administrator  
Sarasota County, FL



# Scott Butler

**City Manager**  
Mesa, AZ

Mesa, AZ

# Data Center Lessons Learned



Mesa, Arizona, has emerged as a premier, high-growth data center hub, driven by AI demand, renewable energy access, and robust infrastructure. Major projects include Meta's 2.5-million-square-foot campus and a \$600M Google facility,



Google

## Mesa Campus

East Elliot Road & S Sossaman Rd,  
Arizona 85212, USA



Apple Inc.

## Mesa Data Center

3740 South Signal Butte Road,  
Mesa, AZ, USA



# Jonathan Lewis

**County Administrator**  
Sarasota County, FL



# Panel Discussion – Q&A



**Lee Feldman**  
Senior Advisor  
Zencity



**Scott Butler**  
City Manager  
Mesa, AZ



**Jonathan Lewis**  
County Administrator  
Sarasota County, FL

# Thank You

Download the full data center report here



# Appendix

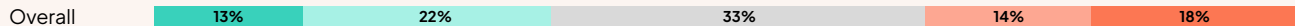
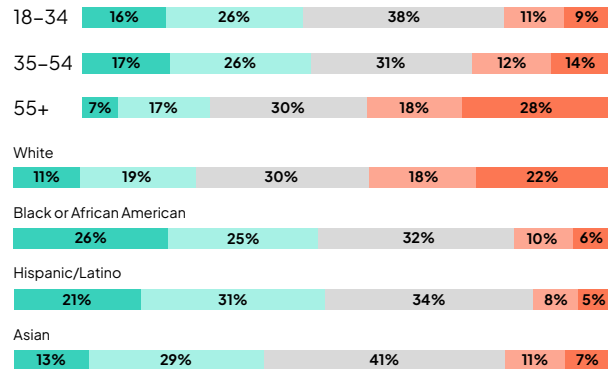


# Opposition Demographic

Opposition is concentrated among older, more educated, and White residents.

Residents aged 55+, college-educated, and White report the highest opposition rates and the highest levels of concern around water and electricity, indicating a strong alignment between demographic profile and resource-related priorities.

## Overall Breakdowns:



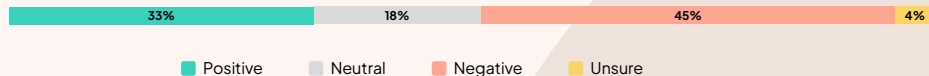
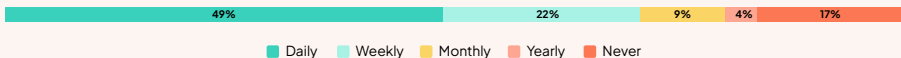
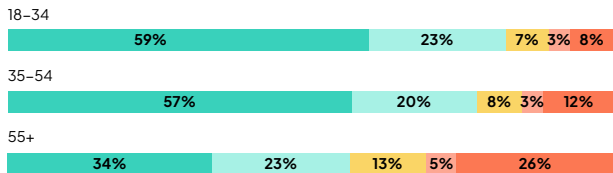
■ Strongly Support  
 ■ Somewhat Support  
 ■ Neither support nor oppose  
 ■ Somewhat oppose  
 ■ Strongly oppose

# AI Usage and Trust

AI familiarity is a strong predictor of resident support.

63% of AI-optimists and 48% of daily AI users support local data center development, compared to just 17% of AI-skeptics and 16% of non-users, a gap that identifies digital outreach as the highest engagement lever available.

## Overall breakdown of any AI tool usage:



## Perception of AI impact Overall Breakdowns:

