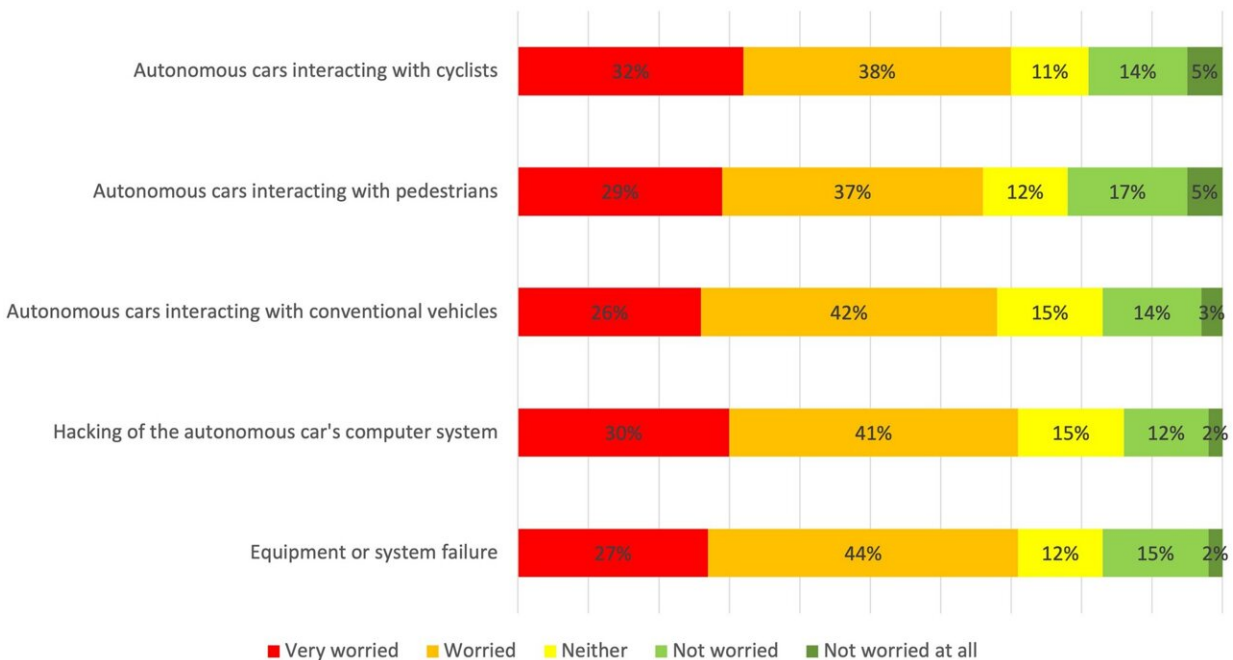# People fear AI tech, but not enough to avoid autonomous cars

May 22 2023, by Thomas Deane

Fears and concerns in relation to cars fully controlled by AI, expressed through a survey of 1,233 adults. Credit: *AI & SOCIETY* (2023). DOI: 10.1007/s00146-022-01598-6

A significant percentage of people fear AI tech, but not enough to avoid using autonomous cars when they become available. That is according to new research that goes against the "Frankenstein complex," where humans are predicted to be hostile to robots and AI because they are

afraid of them.

Researchers from Trinity surveyed 1,233 adults to discover more about their attitudes to using AI tech (specifically autonomous cars).

Among the key results, highlighted in a recently published article in the journal *AI & Society*, were:

- Well over 50% of respondents were either "very worried" or "worried" about the use of autonomous cars
- Specific fears included AI-driven cars interacting with cyclists; pedestrians; other vehicles; being the victim of hacking attempts; or experiencing systems failures
- Women were more fearful than men (over 30% of women were "very worried" across all five specific fear categories, while approximately 20% of men were)
- Fewer respondents would reject the use of autonomous cars when they are available (39%, versus 39% who would use them, and 22% of respondents are neutral)

These results are somewhat surprising, but the researchers believe the rational side of people's thinking is leading some people who harbor fears to reject those for the benefits provided by autonomous cars.

For example, the researchers asked the respondents what they would like about an autonomous car, and many outlined that they could see a host of individual, urban, and global social and environmental benefits.

Federico Cugurullo, Assistant Professor in Smart and Sustainable Urbanism from Trinity's School of Natural Sciences, said, "I believe what we are seeing here is the rationality of the human mind; people harbor very reasonable fears about AI-driven cars, but they can also see the many advantages they promise, such as removing stress from driving,

freeing up time to complete work, increasing mobility for people who may not drive, reducing congestion, lowering [carbon emissions](link), and ultimately saving lives.

"There is no greater fear than the fear of the unknown, but it appears plenty of people are not acting in the way predicted by the Frankenstein Complex. We believe this is because nowadays individuals see more benefits than risks in real-life AI tech. Tension still exists but because we are all getting more and more used to AI in our everyday lives, we are quickly becoming familiar with it. Many people are learning to conquer their fears around AI. They see AI not as a monster, like in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, but rather as a useful tool to improve their lives and their city."

The survey from which the data came was conducted in Dublin in 2018. At this time an autonomous bus was tested in the city center, as part of the European Mobility Week organized by the European Commission, and a fully autonomous vehicle was made available to the [general public](link), under the supervision of the Dublin City Council, for people to experience for free a ride operated by AI.

In addition, in the same year, Ireland's Road Safety Authority hosted an international conference in Dublin, titled "Connected and Autonomous Vehicles." The conference got significant media attention in Dublin and promoted AI as the way forward to achieve [road safety](link), denouncing [human error](link) as the primary cause of car accidents in the world.

We are still a long way from a fully autonomous urban transport system in Ireland, but in Dublin people have a huge interest in autonomous vehicles. Many will embrace this technology as soon as it becomes available, and that is only a matter of time.

More information: Federico Cugurullo et al, Fear of AI: an inquiry

into the adoption of autonomous cars in spite of fear, and a theoretical framework for the study of artificial intelligence technology acceptance, *AI & Society* (2023). DOI: 10.1007/s00146-022-01598-6

Provided by Trinity College Dublin