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2025 AI-Ready Governance Report

Risk, ROI, and the reality of governing AI

A survey report from OneTrust

EBOOK | 2025

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Executive summary

AI is exposing the gaps in traditional governance.

AI has changed *how* organizations govern and *what* they govern.

It's already reshaping entire industries, and we're only at the beginning. Soon, AI will be ubiquitous. But while AI has evolved at lightning speed, the tools and frameworks we use to govern haven't kept up. These systems weren't built to handle technology that processes vast amounts of unstructured data and makes decisions at machine speed. Teams are working to manage an influx of risk from systems that operate autonomously. Meanwhile, they face pressure to deploy AI quickly to stay competitive.

To understand how governance leaders are approaching this age of AI, we conducted a survey of 1,250 governance-focused IT decision-makers at companies with more than $100 million in annual revenue in Europe and North America.

Respondents were asked about the impact of AI on their daily workloads, the gaps AI has revealed in their current governance frameworks, their approach to strengthening AI oversight, and their investment priorities for building responsible AI governance.

Key findings reveal that AI is not just changing operations, it's fundamentally disrupting governance itself.

- As an organization's AI footprint expands, so do its oversight requirements. Businesses are dedicating 37% more time managing AI-related risk compared to 12 months ago.
- This rapid growth hasn't come without growing pains. Nearly three-quarters of leaders (73%) report that AI has exposed critical gaps in visibility, collaboration, and policy enforcement. 75% say AI exposes the limitations of legacy governance processes.
- These aren't abstract concerns. 82% of respondents say AI risks are actively accelerating their governance modernization timelines.
- And with recognition from the highest levels, the drive for modernization is converting into significant financial commitment. More than half of organizations (55%) expect governance budget increases to exceed 20% in the next year.

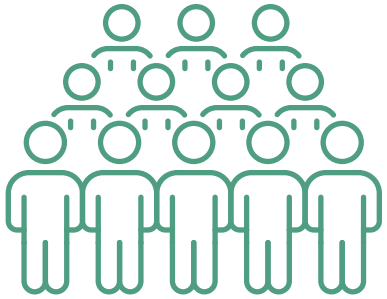
What emerged was a clear picture. AI adoption is forcing a complete rethink of how organizations govern their data and AI. Legacy systems can't handle the growing volume of AI risks, and they're creating bottlenecks that stop businesses from capturing AI's value. But the stakes are too high to ignore.

Organizations are making substantial investments to modernize their governance systems and ensure oversight becomes a core driver of AI ROI, and not an innovation roadblock. They're building AI-ready governance that allows them to govern well and move fast.

Executive summary

OneTrust commissioned Sapio Research to interview IT leaders responsible for governance in their organizations across privacy, risk, information security, data analytics.

Respondents spanned five markets — North America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain — and a variety of industries, including financial services, information technology, manufacturing, retail, telecom, and more.



1,250 IT leaders

Maturity across AI adoption, ROI measurement

Enterprise AI reaches critical mass

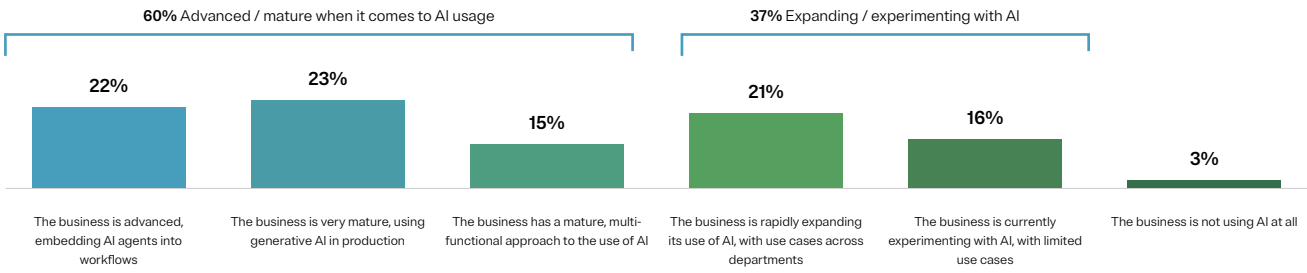
The data reveals that AI adoption has moved well beyond experimental phases, with 60% of organizations reporting advanced or mature usage across their operations.

This widespread adoption aligns with real-world trends we're seeing across industries. From financial services using AI for fraud detection to healthcare systems deploying AI for diagnostic imaging, AI is becoming embedded into every aspect of business.

The fact that nearly a quarter of organizations (23%) are already using generative AI in production reflects the rapid enterprise adoption following the breakthrough success of tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and other large language models that have transformed from consumer novelties to business-critical infrastructure in just two years.

Which of the following best describes your organization's current use of AI?

Country	N. America	Germany	UK	France	Spain
%	76%	58%	55%	43%	42%



60%

The majority (60%) of AI usage is advanced or mature.

37%

Are also expanding or experimenting with AI, demonstrating how AI is becoming embedded across organizations

The 37% of organizations still expanding or experimenting with AI represents the next wave of adoption that will likely accelerate governance challenges. As these companies move from pilot projects to production deployments, they'll encounter the same integration gaps, timing mismatches, and oversight challenges that our survey found more advanced adopters are already grappling with.

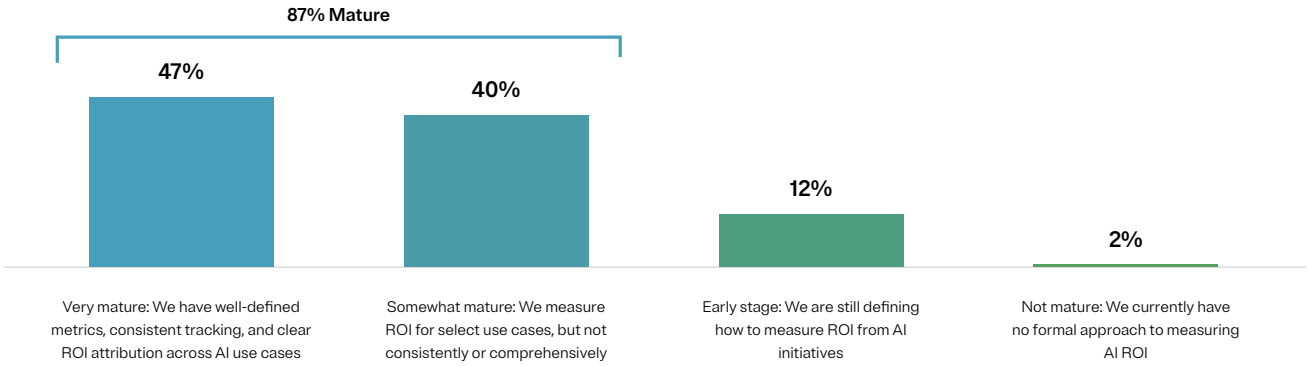
Maturity across AI adoption, ROI measurement

North America leads in advanced AI adoption (76%), outpacing the EU (48%) and UK (55%)

This adoption curve also suggests that governance solutions being developed today must be scalable enough to handle not just current AI deployments, but the significant expansion coming as the remaining third of organizations mature their AI capabilities.

How mature is your business in measuring the value and ROI of its AI system?

Country	N. America	Germany	UK	France	Spain
%	91%	90%	84%	81%	79%



Organizations' ROI measurement maturity follows adoption

When asked about their maturity in measuring AI ROI, the responses align with adoption patterns, showing that organizations have moved AI beyond experimental use. With 87% claiming maturity in measuring AI returns, companies are clearly treating AI as a measurable business asset rather than just an IT experiment. This level of measurement sophistication makes sense given 60% reported advanced or mature AI usage. You can't effectively manage what you can't measure.

9 in 10

Organizations consider themselves to be mature when measuring AI ROI, with only **12%** still defining their approach

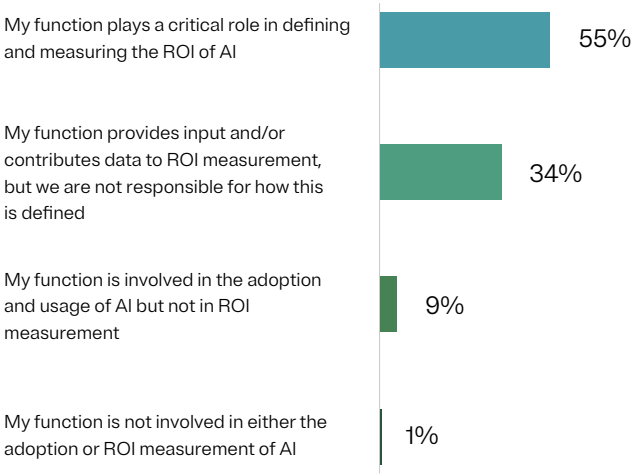
However, the 40% with inconsistent or incomplete measurement approaches reveals a significant challenge. These organizations are advanced enough in AI adoption to need comprehensive oversight but lack the measurement consistency required for effective governance. Without standardized ways to track AI performance, it becomes nearly impossible to assess whether governance investments are working or determine which initiatives deserve continued attention.

Maturity across AI adoption, ROI measurement

How governance teams contribute to AI ROI

AI ROI measurement has become a cross-functional effort, with nearly all respondents actively contributing to the assessment process. This presents a significant opportunity for governance teams to demonstrate their strategic value beyond traditional compliance roles.

To what extent does your function contribute to your organization's assessment of the return on investment (ROI) of AI?



89% Of functions are actively involved in the definition and measurement of AI ROI

When governance teams align their work to the organization's most important data and AI initiatives, they can quantify how their oversight activities protect and enhance AI investments. By actively participating in ROI measurement, governance teams directly connect their oversight activities to business outcomes, showing how effective governance enables rather than hinders AI value creation.

The alignment between board-level recognition and operational urgency creates a powerful foundation for governance transformation. When asked about the impact of their organization's adoption of AI on their team, 78% of respondents agreed that at a board and executive level, governing AI is considered critical to delivering return on investment of its adoption.

78% agreed

That their organization's highest levels of leadership consider **AI governance** critical to delivering AI ROI

Findings show there is clear, strategic consensus from the top down. This executive buy-in helps explain the substantial budget increases and optimism documented throughout this report. When boards understand that governance directly impacts AI returns, funding decisions become straightforward.

Maturity across AI adoption, ROI measurement

Integration of responsible AI policies

Organizations appear to have made significant progress in embedding AI policies operationally. More than half (52%) claim their AI policies are fully embedded with consistent enforcement across departments, while slightly less have achieved partial integration. This mirrors both overall AI adoption and AI ROI measurement maturity metrics.

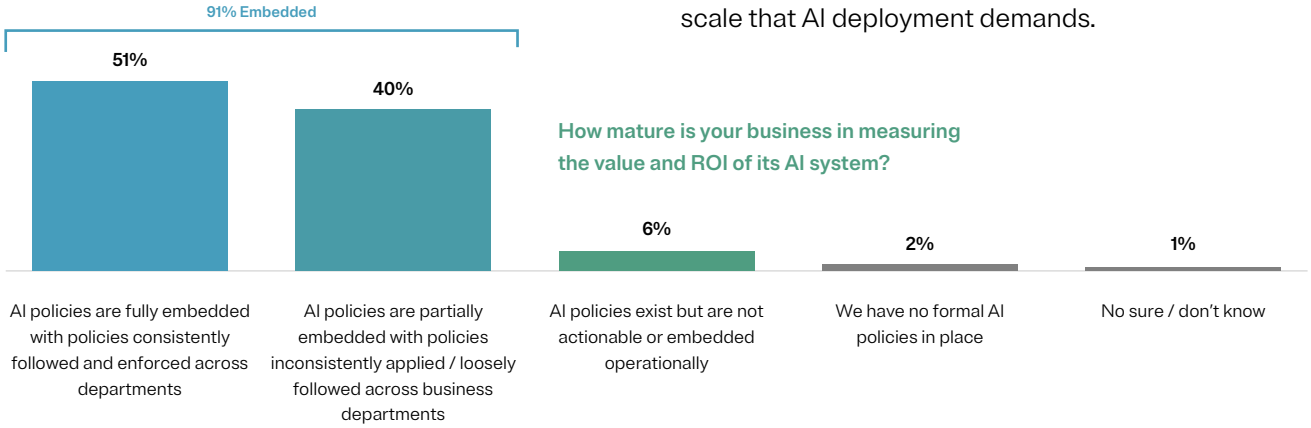
91% Report AI policies are integrated or partially embedded into business processes

The fact that only eight percent have policies that exist but aren't actionable, or lack formal policies entirely, indicates that most companies recognize the importance of making governance practical and enforceable.

However, the 40% with only partial or inconsistent policy application reveals a critical gap between intention and execution. When AI policies are "loosely followed" or applied inconsistently, it creates exactly the kind of fragmented oversight that makes effective AI governance difficult. This partial integration may explain why organizations continue to struggle with timing mismatches and visibility gaps. Having policies on paper doesn't guarantee they can be effectively enforced at the speed and scale that AI deployment demands.

Our takeaway

Organizations have clearly made progress in AI adoption, measurement, and policy integration, but gaps remain in consistent execution and comprehensive oversight

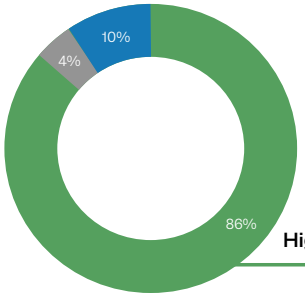


AI risk reality check: How governance teams are using resources

Managing AI risk takes even more time

Organizations are dedicating considerably more time to managing AI-related risks. On average, the time spent on this task has increased by nearly 37% compared to last year. This increase is a direct reflection of the growing volume and complexity of AI systems, and the need for continuous monitoring and management to mitigate potential risks.

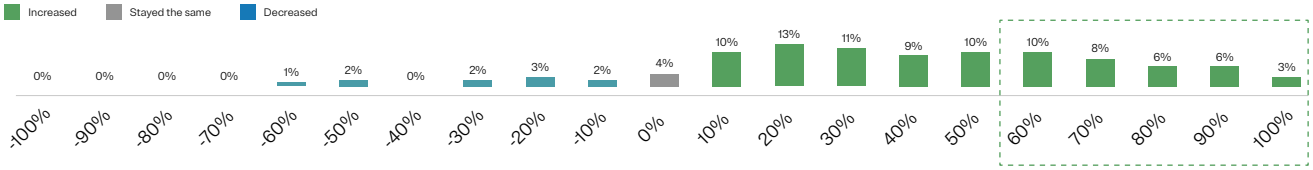
Over
40%
of respondents said they spent 50% more time managing AI risk than last year



Compared to 12 months ago, by what percentage has the time your function spends managing AI-related risk increase or decreased, if at all?

Highest area in North America (91%)

37% Average increase



33% 60% or more

Those using 4+ tools to manage risk across all areas are also more likely to say the time they spend managing AI-related risk has increased by more than 50% (56%) compared to those using only 1 tool (23%)

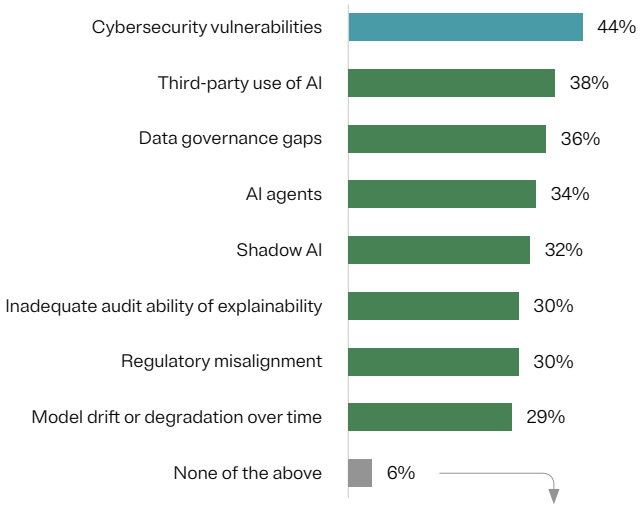
Our findings also showed that companies with advanced AI adoption spent double the time managing AI risk than experimenting organizations. As AI becomes more deeply embedded in business operations, the complexity and scope of oversight requirements grow exponentially. Companies working to mature their AI use and scale across functions should expect a progressive increase in the time they spend managing AI risk.

AI risk reality check: How governance teams are using resources

What risks are organizations underestimating?

Growing adoption brings a host of risks that many organizations may not fully grasp. When nearly all governance professionals believe their own organizations are underestimating risk in one form or another, it signals a dangerous gap between AI deployment speed and risk awareness.

Which of the following AI-related risks do you think your organization is currently underestimating, if any?



**Multiple responses permitted*

94%
are currently underestimating at least one AI-related risk

44%
of respondents consider cybersecurity vulnerabilities the biggest risk their organization is underestimating

Governance teams appear to be more concerned about operational and ecosystem risk than compliance or technical performance issues. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities and third-party AI use are raising more red flags than regulatory misalignment and model drift.

Public sector, education, construction, and agriculture companies ranked shadow AI as the biggest risk their organizations may be underestimating (44%)

In other words, teams may be feeling better equipped to manage the risks they know, like regulatory and technical challenges, than risks they don't — like expanding attack surfaces and an explosion of third-party AI use.

Our takeaway

As AI deployments scale and mature across enterprises, the governance workload has effectively multiplied. This new operational reality is driving organizations to allocate more time and resources specifically to governing AI, while revealing that the full extent of many AI risks may not be fully understood yet.

Under the hood: What's slowing down the governance machine

Challenges of enforcing AI governance

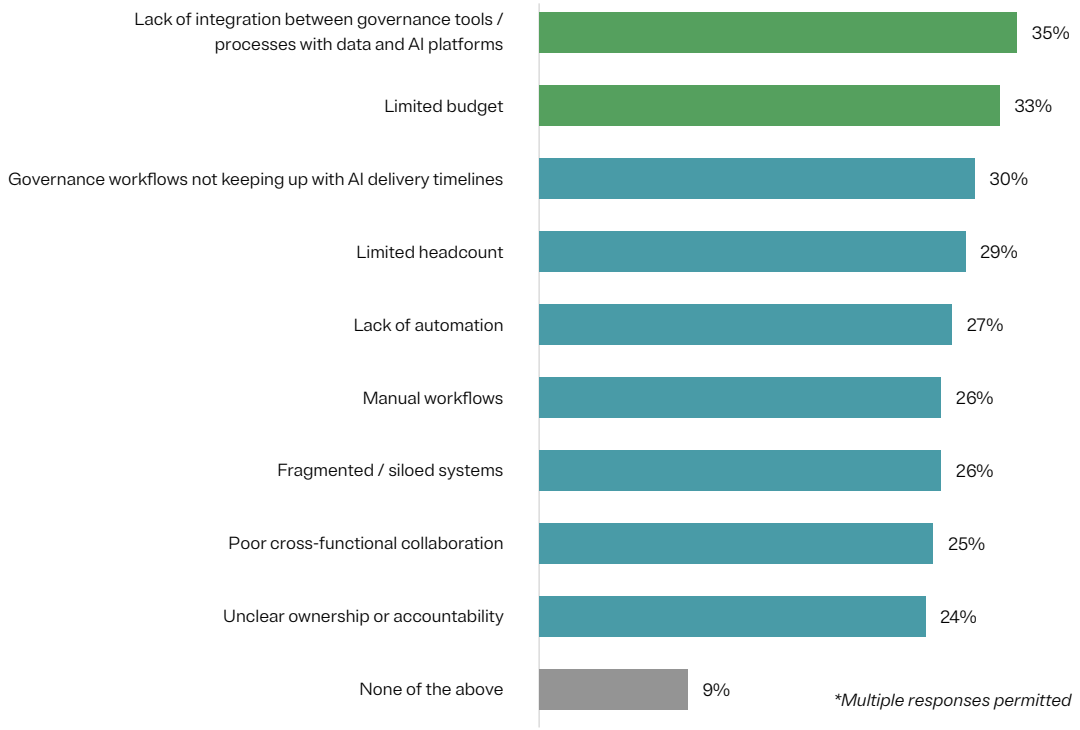
The top enforcement challenges identified by respondents reveal a core infrastructure problem. Lack of integration between governance tools and AI platforms (35%) and limited budgets (33%) highlight that organizations are struggling with fragmented systems that can't communicate effectively.

This integration gap reinforces earlier findings about the need for automation. When governance tools operate in isolation from the AI systems they're meant to oversee, enforcement becomes a manual process that can't keep pace with AI deployment.

30%

Nearly a third of respondents report that governance workflows can't keep up with AI delivery timelines.

Which of the following challenges does your organization face in enforcing AI governance at scale?



This creates a vicious cycle where governance either becomes a bottleneck that slows innovation or gets bypassed entirely by business teams under pressure to deploy AI quickly. These findings align with respondents' priority of increasing governance automation. Respondents clearly recognize that human-intensive oversight models are unsustainable at enterprise AI scale.

Under the hood: What's slowing down the governance machine

Factors adding cost, complexity, and delays to AI governance

When asked which factors add cost, complexity, or delays to meeting AI governance requirements, respondents identified a critical timing mismatch between AI development speed and governance processes.

Nearly half of respondents cite late governance reviews as the primary barrier, highlighting how traditional oversight models designed for slower, predictable technology rollouts break down when applied to AI's rapid iteration cycles

Manual compliance reviews and approval bottlenecks rank among the biggest concerns of governance teams likely because legacy systems and outdated workflows can't match AI's breakneck pace of evolution and deployment. What's particularly telling is that organizational issues like unclear ownership and disconnected teams rank lower than process-related problems. This indicates

Which of the following factors, if any, add cost, complexity, or delays to your organization's ability to meet governance requirements for AI initiatives?

**Multiple responses permitted*

teams are facing something larger than a people or structure issue, but a mismatch between AI speed and the cadence of traditional governance.

Organizations are essentially trying to govern 21st-century technology with 20th-century processes, and the friction is becoming impossible to ignore.

Under the hood: What's slowing down the governance machine

Too many tools? System sprawl threatens effective governance

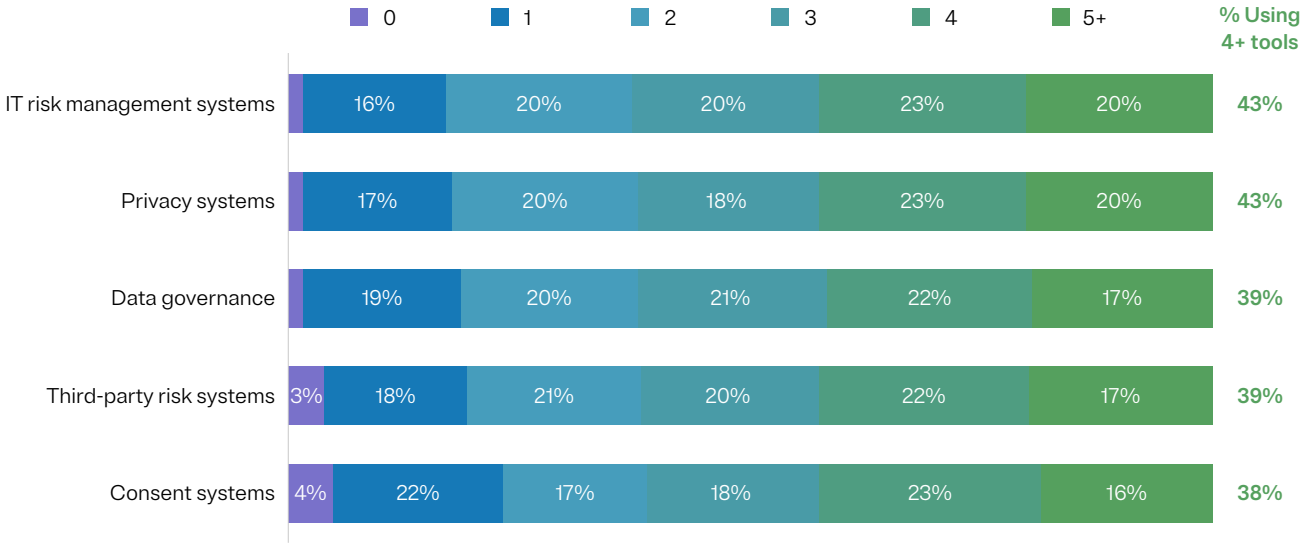
When respondents were asked about their AI governance tech stack, the data revealed a fragmented landscape. It also may explain many of the integration and execution challenges organizations face.

When governance teams juggle multiple disconnected systems across different risk domains, it becomes nearly impossible to maintain the real-time visibility and automated oversight that AI governance demands.

Organizations are using an average of 3 different systems to manage risk in each governance area

This tool sprawl directly contributes to the timing and efficiency problems plaguing AI governance efforts. Managing risk across multiple systems requires manual coordination and separate reporting processes, burdening teams with exactly the kind of human-intensive workflows that can't keep pace with AI deployment speeds.

How many different systems or solutions does your organization currently use to manage risk in each of the following areas?



As AI adoption scales, the inefficiencies of managing multiple separate systems will become exponentially more problematic. These findings create a compelling business case for platform consolidation and integrated solutions.

Those using 4+ tools to manage risk across all areas are also more likely to say the time they spend managing AI related risk has increased by more than 50% compared to those using only 1 tool (23%)

Under the hood: What's slowing down the governance machine

Advanced AI adoption amplifies governance complexity

More AI often means more risk and governance challenges. Advanced adopters of technology often have the reputation of figuring out challenges early. Because they have experience, they can problem-solve and course-correct more quickly. AI, however, bucks that trend.

86%

of advanced AI users claim gaps in visibility, collaboration, and policy enforcement versus 58% in the experimenting phase.

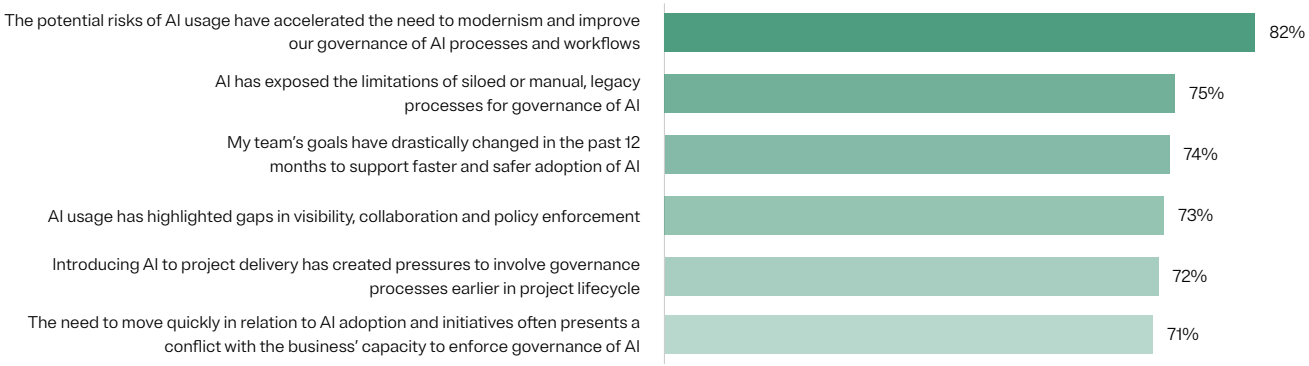
90%

of advanced adopters say AI has exposed the limitations of siloed or manual, legacy processes for governance of AI versus 63% in the experimenting phase.

For governance teams, adaptation is essential

When asked about AI's impact on their governance responsibilities, respondents paint a clear picture of an industry in transition. An overwhelming number of respondents agree that AI risks have accelerated the need to modernize governance processes, reinforcing the central theme throughout this report that legacy systems simply can't handle AI's demands. This validates the urgency behind the substantial budget increases our findings also identified, with organizations recognizing they need fundamental transformation rather than incremental improvements.

Considering the impact of AI usage on your team, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?



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Under the hood: What's slowing down the governance machine

The data also reveals the human dimension of this governance transformation. Nearly three-quarters of teams report that their goals have drastically changed to support faster AI adoption, while many feel pressure to involve governance processes earlier in project lifecycle.

The rate at which organizations are prioritizing proactive governance (instead of reactive oversight) aligns with earlier findings about embedding policies into AI workflows and automating governance processes. The core tension driving all modernization efforts is clear: organizations need governance systems that can operate at AI speed without sacrificing oversight quality.

Our takeaway

Governance challenges intensify rather than diminish as organizations become more sophisticated AI users. More than an organizational or structural issue, the root cause is a mix of outdated infrastructure and too many disconnected tools and manual processes that can't match AI's operational speed.

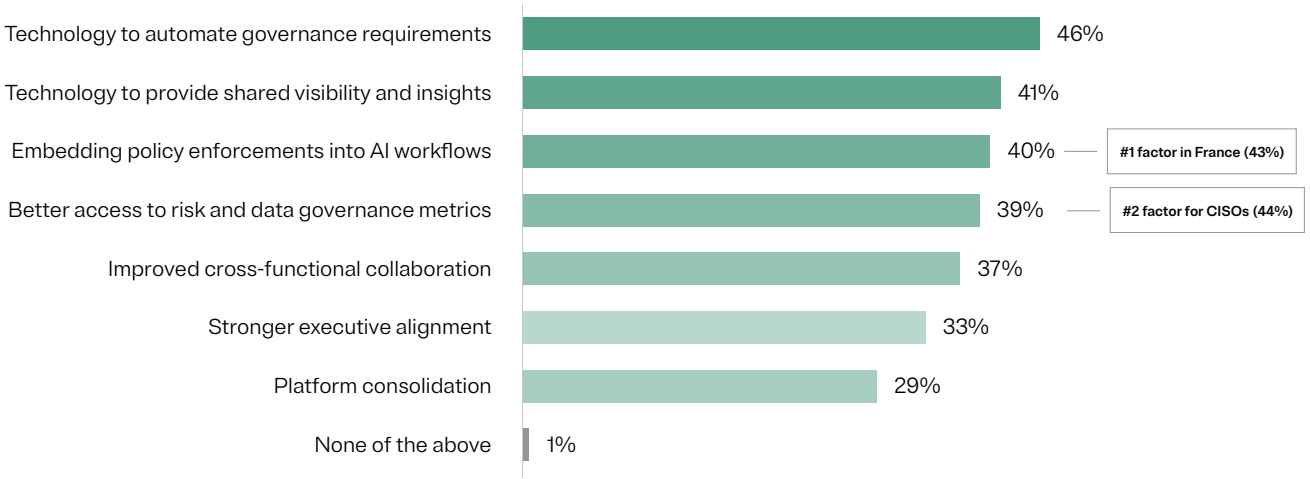
The go-forward plan: What governance teams need to modernize

Critical factors needed to improve AI governance

With limited resources and competing priorities, organizations must identify which governance investments will deliver the greatest impact. We asked leaders to pinpoint the most critical areas for improving AI governance and risk management over the next year.

Over the next 12 months, technology to automate governance requirements is considered most critical (46%) to improve AI governance and risk management, suggesting a strong emphasis on reducing manual processes and increasing efficiency

Of the following, which do you believe are most critical to improving your organization's overall AI governance and risk management in the next 12 months?



The results reveal how organizations are weighing AI governance challenges. Nearly half of respondents prioritize technology to automate governance requirements — more evidence that leaders have concluded manual oversight processes simply can't scale with expanding AI deployments. Only slightly fewer respondents are looking for technology focused on visibility.

This technology-first mindset represents a departure from traditional governance approaches that relied heavily on human processes and cross-functional coordination. Instead of trying to add more people or improve collaboration to handle AI oversight, organizations are betting that automated systems will help them match the speed and complexity of the technology they're trying to govern.

The go-forward plan: What governance teams need to modernize

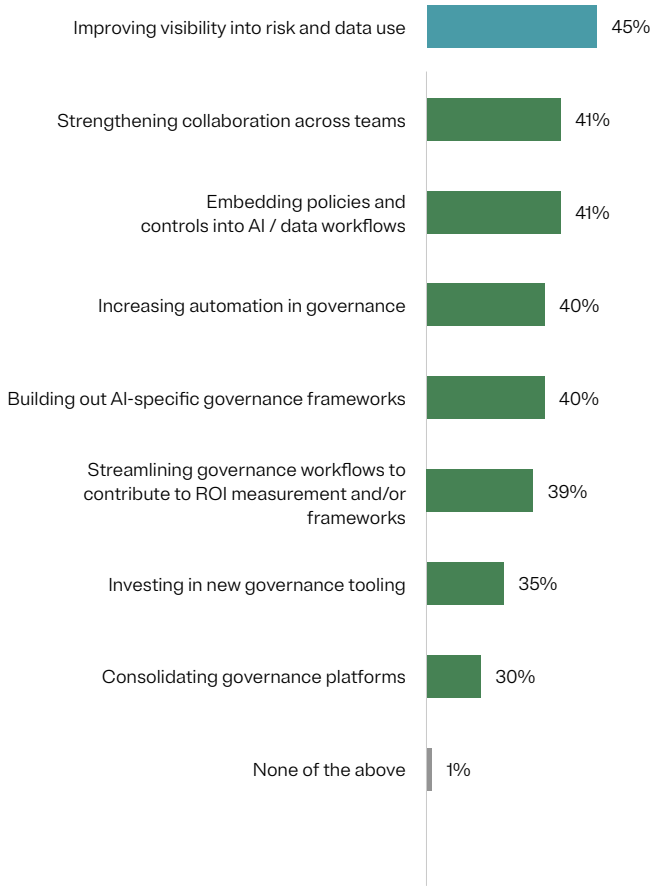
Governance priorities for the next 12 months

Organizations are prioritizing visibility as the foundation of effective AI governance. This focus stems from a foundational principle: you can't govern what you can't see. As AI systems process vast amounts of data and begin to make autonomous decisions across the enterprise, traditional monitoring approaches fall short.

Organizations recognize that without clear visibility into how AI systems operate, what data they access, and what risks they generate, any governance effort becomes reactive rather than proactive.

As challenges in managing AI risk and governance rise, improving visibility into risk and data use (45%) is the top governance related priority for organizations in the next 12 months

Which of the following, if any, reflect governance related priorities of your organization for the next 12 months?



**Multiple responses permitted*

The next tier of priorities reveals a strategic shift toward embedding governance directly into AI operations. Strengthening collaboration across teams (41%) and embedding policies and controls into AI workflows (41%) tie for second place, indicating that organizations are moving beyond siloed oversight models.

Our takeaway

Rather than treating governance as an external checkpoint, leaders are working to build guardrails directly into the systems and processes where AI operates. Organizations believe effective governance must be woven into the fabric of AI development and deployment, not bolted on afterward.

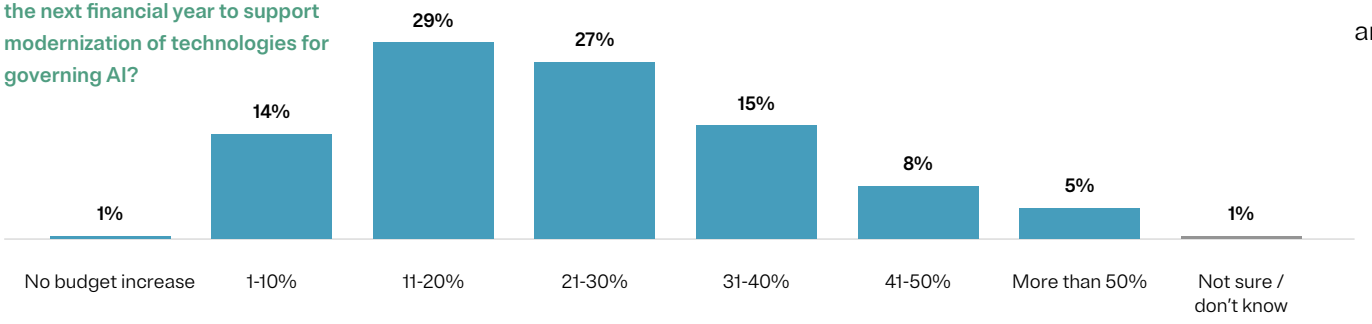
Investing in a responsible future

Financing AI governance modernization

The financial commitment to AI governance modernization is nearly universal and substantial. The data showed an overwhelming 98% of organizations plan to increase their governance budgets in the next financial year, with an average increase of 24%. This level of investment signals that leaders view governance modernization not as a compliance expense, but as a strategic imperative essential for successful AI adoption.

The fact that virtually no organizations are maintaining flat budgets suggests that the governance challenges identified earlier are compelling enough to drive action across the board.

By how much is your organization planning to increase its budget in the next financial year to support modernization of technologies for governing AI?



98%

As organizations look ahead to find effective ways of improving AI governance, nearly all plan to increase their budget in the next financial year to support modernization of technologies

The scale of planned increases reveals that organizations believe transformational change is necessary. More than half of respondents are planning significant budget increases, with more than a quarter committing to increases exceeding 30%. This willingness to make substantial investments aligns with earlier findings about integration gaps, timing mismatches, and automation deficits. Organizations are putting serious money behind solutions to these challenges.

Governance budget, however, appears to follow the growth of AI adoption, not pre-empt it. Advanced AI adopters are expecting budget increases of 29% for AI governance modernization, while experimenting organizations are increasing spend by 21%.

This budget pattern shows organizations are investing in governance reactively rather than proactively and explains why mature AI users face more governance challenges. They're retrofitting oversight onto established operations instead of building it from the start. Advice for governance teams: advocate for proactive investment during experimentation. It's easier to establish governance foundations early on than to fix fragmented systems and processes later.

Investing in a responsible future

The view from the top: A positive perspective

Despite the significant challenges organizations face in AI governance, leaders remain remarkably optimistic about their ability to address them.

This high level of confidence suggests that while leaders acknowledge current gaps and obstacles, they view these as solvable problems rather than insurmountable barriers.

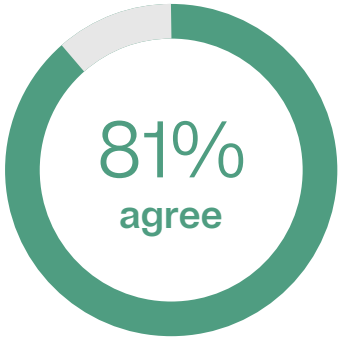
A similar percentage of respondents expressed confidence in their ability to manage the core aspects of AI governance. Over 80% of respondents feel assured in their ability to: identify what data is being used in AI systems and for what purpose, ensure compliance with laws and regulations, advise on AI-related risk, and ensure human oversight. Respondents were least confident about their ability to trade data from collection through to activation in AI systems (76%).

This optimism likely stems from the substantial investments organizations are making in governance modernization. Earlier findings showed that over half of organizations expect governance budget increases exceeding 20%, with advanced AI adopters planning even larger investments.

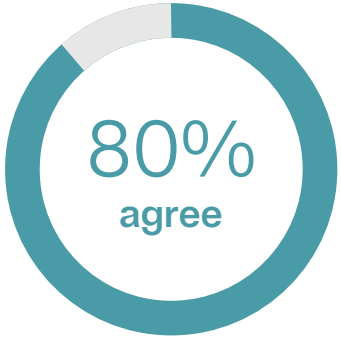
Leaders may feel confident because they have concrete plans and resources allocated to address the integration gaps, timing mismatches, and automation deficits they've identified. The path toward modernization isn't just wishful thinking, but strategic commitment backed by real financial resources.

Our takeaway

The alignment between confidence levels and investment priorities suggests a clear path forward. Organizations have identified solutions such as automation, integration, and embedded governance that directly address their biggest challenges. When leaders see a clear roadmap from problem to solution and have the budget to execute that roadmap, confidence naturally follows.



"Over the next 12 months, I am confident my organization's governance and risk management processes and tools will provide appropriate oversight and control for AI adoption and use"



"Over the next 12 months, I am confident that my organization is well-equipped to keep up with AI governance and the responsible use of AI"

The road ahead

AI isn't coming, it's already here, changing how we work, compete, and even think. The question isn't if your organization will use AI, but how you'll make sure it's done responsibly, effectively, and in a way that builds trust. That's where AI-ready governance comes in. Not as a red-tape exercise, but as the backbone of sustainable innovation. Our research shows that governance leaders understand this reality and are responding with the urgency, investment, and strategic thinking the moment demands.

Real governance isn't about a single policy or a one-time training session. It's about building systems where AI decisions are transparent, accountable, and human-centered. The organizations in our survey are making this shift — moving from manual, reactive oversight to automated, embedded governance that operates at machine speed. They're evolving from siloed compliance functions to integrated systems that provide real-time visibility across the AI lifecycle. Most importantly, they're transforming from roadblocks that slow innovation to enablers that help deliver AI's full value safely and responsibly.

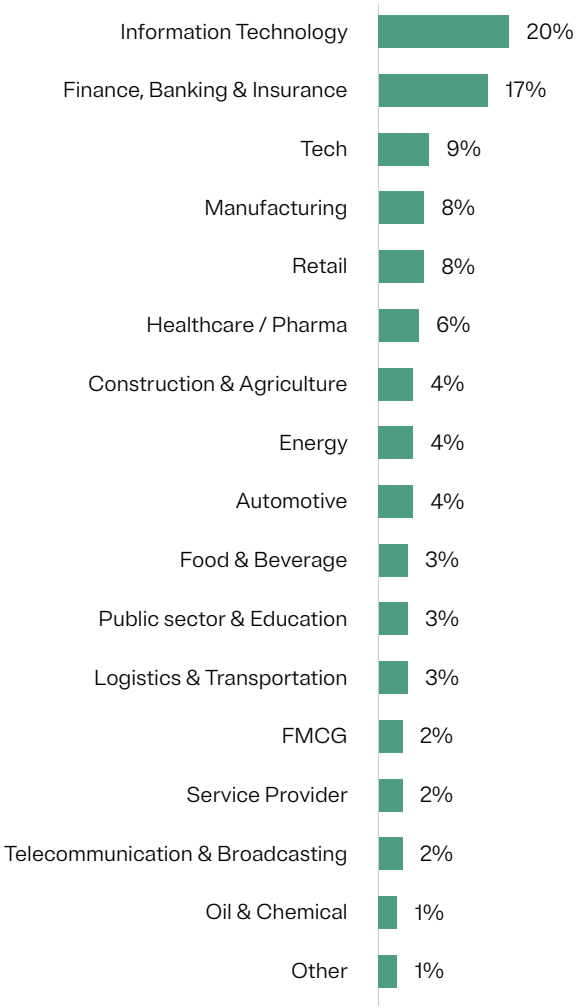
When you've got the right governance framework in place, compliance, risk monitoring, and strategic insights become faster, sharper, and more resilient to change. AI governance shouldn't be seen as a hurdle—it's your competitive advantage. It's what lets you say "yes" to bold AI projects without crossing your fingers and hoping nothing goes wrong. The near-universal commitment to budget increases we found demonstrates that leaders recognize governance as the foundation that allows them to govern well and move fast.

With AI-ready governance embedded in your organization's DNA, you can innovate with confidence, adapt with agility, and grow with integrity. AI is powerful. With AI-ready governance, so are you.

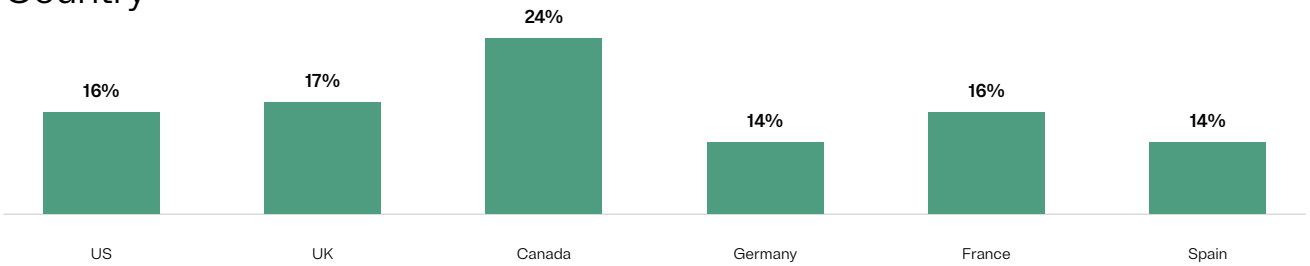
Detailed demographics

Here's a breakdown of this survey's 1,250 respondents and their industries, geographies, annual company revenue, and titles.

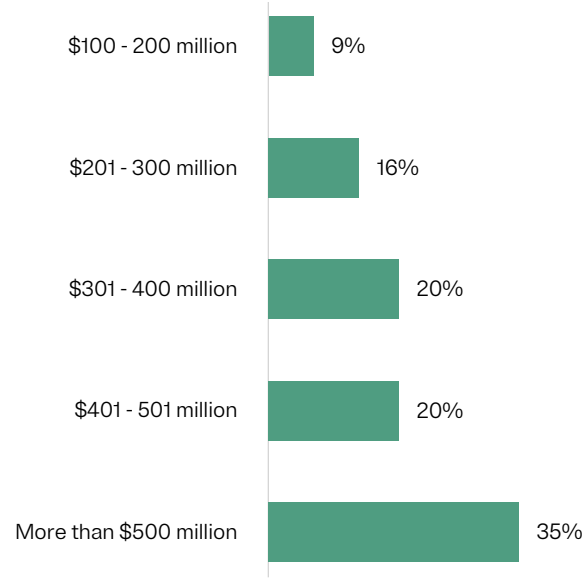
Sector



Country

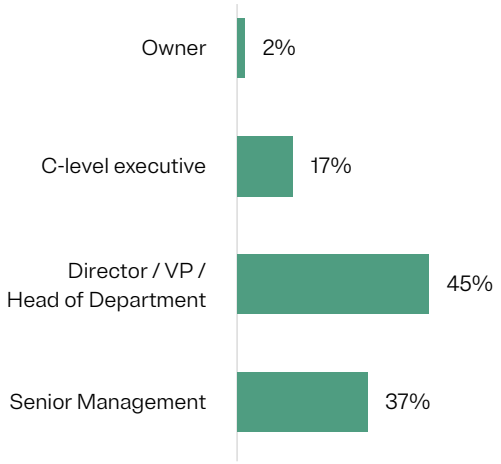


Turnover

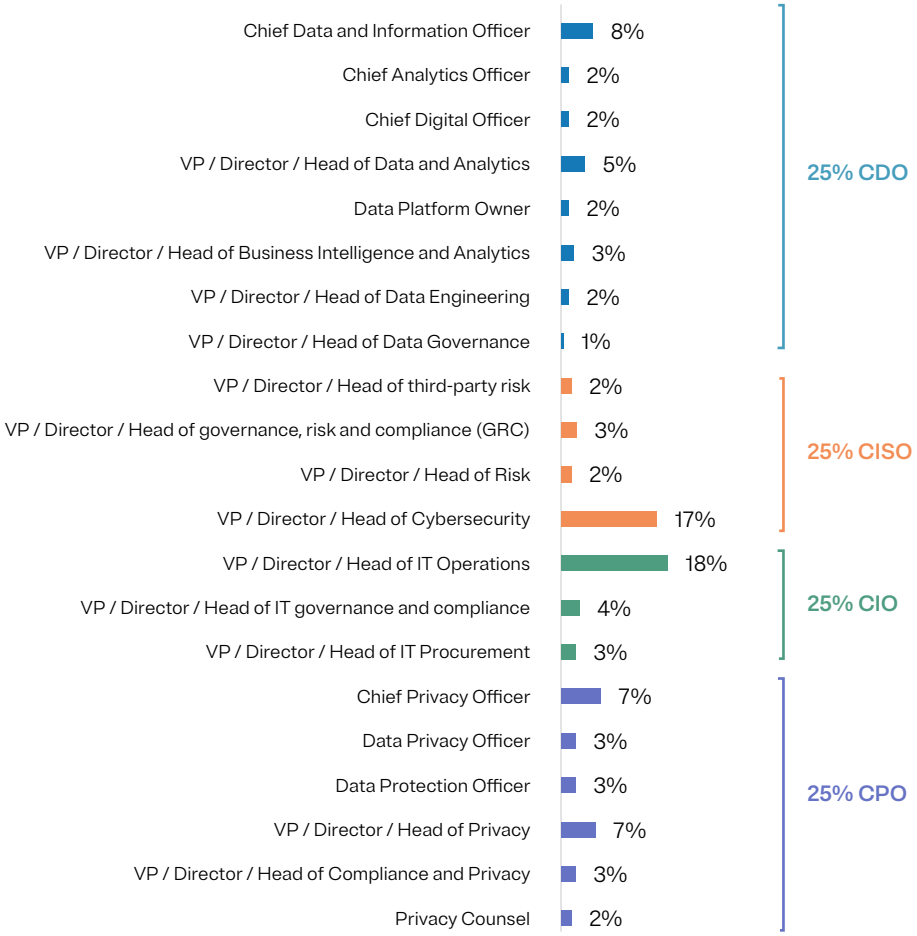


Detailed demographics

Position level



Sector



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