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From Progress to Power: How Narratives of Technological Salvation Shape Modern Political Realities

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Abstract

Purpose. Governments and technology companies often present technology as the solution to society's greatest problems. This study examines how people respond to such narratives of technological salvation, and whether belief in them relates to willingness to transfer power through surveillance, privacy trade-offs, or automated governance.

Method. A cross-sectional online survey of 51 respondents aged 15–60 measured 21 attitudes on a five-point Likert scale. Two indices were formed: technological salvation optimism (5 items, $\alpha = .59$) and critical awareness of technological power (6 items, $\alpha = .75$). Analyses included Wilcoxon tests, Spearman correlations with false discovery rate correction, regression, Mann–Whitney comparisons by age group, and a sensitivity analysis.

Findings. Respondents were critical optimists. Salvation optimism was modestly above neutral ($M = 3.27$), while critical awareness was far higher ($M = 3.96$; $r = .72$ for the difference), and over half scored above neutral on both. Over 90% saw technology as a double-edged sword whose impact depends on who controls it, 78% regarded leaders' salvation claims as rhetoric, and only 25% supported government access to citizens' data. Yet greater optimism predicted greater willingness to accept reduced privacy for guaranteed safety ($\beta = .33$, $p = .022$). The strongest association linked awareness of fiction's influence on views of technology to scepticism of political salvation claims ($\rho = .51$, $q = .002$). Younger and older respondents did not differ significantly.

Implications. Public trust in technology is conditional on control and accountability. Salvation narratives appear most persuasive when framed around personal benefit, and narrative and media literacy may help citizens recognise them.

Keywords: technological solutionism; techno-optimism; surveillance; privacy; technocracy; sociotechnical imaginaries; political attitudes

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Few ideas are as politically powerful as the promise that technology will save us. Governments present artificial intelligence, digital identity systems, and surveillance infrastructure as solutions to climate change, poverty, crime, and pandemics. Technology companies describe their products as tools for empowerment and progress. These narratives of *technological salvation* do more than describe the future: they justify present decisions about who collects data, who makes decisions, and how much privacy citizens are asked to give up.

Scholars have long argued that such narratives carry political weight. Technologies are not neutral tools but arrangements of power (Winner, 1980), and the stories societies tell about technology shape which futures seem possible and desirable (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015). Critics describe a habit of "solutionism" in which complex social problems are recast as technical ones (Morozov, 2013), and a business model in which personal data is turned into behavioural prediction and control (Zuboff, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Much of this argument is theoretical or historical. Less is known about how ordinary people respond to salvation narratives: whether they accept them, resist them, or hold both views at once. It matters because public acceptance is what allows promises of progress to be converted into political power, for example by trading privacy for a promise of safety or by handing decisions to automated systems.

1.3 Research gap

Survey research has examined trust in algorithms (Logg et al., 2019) and the trade-off between civil liberties and security (Davis & Silver, 2004), but these topics are usually studied separately. Few studies measure, in one instrument, belief in technology's problem-solving promise, awareness of the power held by those who control technology, and willingness to accept surveillance or automated governance. Evidence from countries rapidly expanding their digital public infrastructure, such as India, is especially scarce.

1.4 Research questions

1. **RQ1.** How strongly do respondents endorse narratives of technological salvation, and how critically do they view the political power of technology?
2. **RQ2.** Do optimism about technology and critical awareness of its power exclude each other, or do people hold both at once?
3. **RQ3.** Is optimism about technological salvation associated with willingness to accept surveillance and trade privacy for safety?
4. **RQ4.** How do beliefs about narratives, such as the influence of fiction and the perceived objectivity of technology, relate to scepticism of salvation claims?
5. **RQ5.** Do younger (15–25) and older (26–60) respondents differ in these views?

1.5 Scope

The study is a cross-sectional survey of 51 respondents aged 15 to 60, collected between November 2025 and January 2026. It measures stated attitudes rather than behaviour, and is exploratory rather than representative.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Narratives of technological salvation

The belief that technology can redeem society has deep roots. Historians have traced how new technologies, from railways to electricity, were greeted with a sense of awe and promise of social transformation, the "technological sublime" (Nye, 1994). Mosco (2004) showed the same pattern in the "digital sublime" of the internet era, in which cyberspace was cast as the end of history, geography, and politics. Jasanoff and Kim (2015) describe these shared visions of desirable futures as *sociotechnical imaginaries*: collectively held, institutionally stabilised ideas about what technology can achieve, which shape national policies and investment.

Critics argue that such imaginaries can narrow political debate. Morozov (2013) called the tendency to recast complex social and political problems as technical puzzles "solutionism". Earlier, Ellul (1964) war-

ned that technique tends to become autonomous, setting its own goals around efficiency.

2.2 Technology, power, and control

Winner (1980) argued that artifacts "have politics": their design can embed and enforce particular arrangements of authority. Zuboff (2019) extended this to the digital economy, arguing that platform companies harvest behavioural data to predict and shape behaviour, concentrating unprecedented power in private hands. Scott (1998) showed how states pursuing "high-modernist" schemes of rational planning have often overridden local knowledge and freedom. These works suggest that promises of progress can serve as justifications for concentrating power, whether in corporations or governments.

2.3 Expertise, technocracy, and trust in algorithms

Technocracy, the idea that experts and rational systems should govern rather than politicians, is an old political ideal with a long critical literature (Fischer, 1990). Today it reappears in proposals for algorithmic or AI-assisted governance. Experimental studies give mixed evidence on how far people trust algorithms: people sometimes abandon algorithms after seeing them err (Dietvorst et al., 2015), yet in many tasks they prefer algorithmic to human judgement (Logg et al., 2019). Perceived objectivity is one proposed reason for algorithm appreciation.

2.4 Security, surveillance, and the privacy trade-off

Surveillance studies examine how monitoring shapes social life and power relations (Lyon, 2007). Public opinion research after the September 2001 attacks found that people's willingness to trade civil liberties for security depended on perceived threat and trust in government (Davis & Silver, 2004). Solove (2011) argued that framing privacy and security as a zero-sum trade-off is itself misleading and tends to favour security claims. Promises of personal safety from technology may therefore be a key route through which salvation narratives translate into acceptance of surveillance.

2.5 Media and fictional narratives

Cultivation theory proposes that repeated exposure to media portrayals shapes people's beliefs about social reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Science fiction films and novels provide some of the most widely shared images of technology's promise and danger, from benevolent machines to dystopian surveillance states. People who are aware of these influences may be more sceptical of real-world salvation claims, though this has rarely been measured.

2.6 Summary and conceptual framework

The literature suggests three linked ideas: salvation narratives promote optimism about technology; critical awareness of technology's power may counter that optimism; and optimism may increase willingness to transfer power, through privacy trade-offs or automated governance. This study tests these links in one survey, treating *technological salvation optimism* and *critical awareness of technological power* as the two central constructs.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study used a cross-sectional, quantitative survey design with primary data, analysed in an exploratory and correlational way. A survey suits the research questions because they concern how widely attitudes are held and how they relate to one another.

3.2 Participants and sampling

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling by sharing an online questionnaire link through the researcher's networks. Responses were collected between 28 November

2025 and 25 January 2026. All 51 respondents gave consent and answered every item, so there were no missing data.

Respondents were aged 15 to 60 (mean 34.7, SD 14.6, median 34). Eighteen were aged 15–25 and 33 were aged 26–60; 12 were under 18. Gender, education, occupation, and location were not recorded. Two respondents chose "Agree" for every attitude item, a pattern that can indicate inattentive responding. They were retained in the main analysis, and all key tests were repeated without them as a sensitivity check (Section 4.7).

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire, administered through Google Forms, contained consent, name (optional in practice), and age questions, followed by 21 attitude statements (Q4–Q24) rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The full wording is given in Appendix A. For analysis, the items were grouped into themes drawn from the literature (Table 1).

Table 1. Survey items grouped by theme

Theme	Items	Example item
Technological salvation optimism	Q4, Q5, Q6, Q14, Q17	"Technology has the potential to solve major global problems."
Critical awareness of technological power	Q7, Q9, Q10, Q13, Q20, Q23	"Social media platforms are designed more to control users than to empower them."
Security and surveillance	Q8, Q11, Q12, Q16	"I would accept reduced privacy if technology guaranteed my personal safety."
Ambivalence and contingency	Q15, Q21	"Technology is best understood as a double-edged sword."
Narratives, objectivity, and agency	Q18, Q19, Q22, Q24	"Fictional narratives strongly shape how people view technology as a solution to societal problems."

3.4 Composite measures and reliability

Two composite indices were formed as item means. **Technological salvation optimism (TSO)** combined five items expressing belief in technology's capacity to improve or govern society (Q4, Q5, Q6, Q14, Q17). **Critical awareness of technological power (CATP)** combined six items expressing concern about dependence on technology and about who holds power through it (Q7, Q9, Q10, Q13, Q20, Q23).

CATP showed acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$; Cronbach, 1951). TSO was lower ($\alpha = .59$), which is marginal and is treated as a limitation; findings involving TSO are therefore interpreted cautiously and checked at the item level. The security and surveillance items did not form a reliable scale ($\alpha = .41$) and were analysed individually, with Q16 (accepting reduced privacy for safety) and Q11 (government access to data) as the key outcome items for RQ3.

3.5 Data analysis

Likert responses were coded 1–5. Analyses were run in Python (pandas, SciPy, statsmodels) with $\alpha = .05$.

1. **Descriptive statistics.** Mean, standard deviation, median, and percentage agreeing (4 or 5) and disagreeing (1 or 2) for every item.

2. **Level of endorsement (RQ1).** One-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank tests compared each index with the scale midpoint (3), and a paired Wilcoxon test compared CATP with TSO. Effect sizes are reported as $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$.
3. **Correlation (RQ2–RQ4).** Spearman's rank correlations, suited to ordinal data. Fourteen planned correlations were corrected for multiple testing with the Benjamini–Hochberg false discovery rate (FDR) procedure (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995).
4. **Regression (RQ3).** Ordinary least squares regression predicted willingness to trade privacy for safety (Q16) from TSO, CATP, and age, treating Likert scores as approximately interval (Norman, 2010), with heteroscedasticity-robust (HC3) standard errors as a check.
5. **Group comparison (RQ5).** Mann–Whitney U tests compared the 15–25 and 26–60 age groups on both indices and all 21 items, with FDR correction.
6. **Sensitivity analysis.** All main tests were repeated excluding the two straight-line responders.

Because the hypotheses were not registered before the data were collected, all tests are framed as null-hypothesis tests of the research questions and the study is presented as exploratory.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Participation was voluntary, and every respondent confirmed consent before answering. Names were removed before analysis and replaced with numeric IDs, and no individual is identifiable in this report. Twelve respondents were under 18; future data collection should also obtain parental consent for minors.

4. Results

4.1 Respondents

The 51 respondents ranged from 15 to 60 years old, with the largest group aged 41–60 (22; 43%) and the next largest aged 15–18 (13; 25%) (Figure 1).

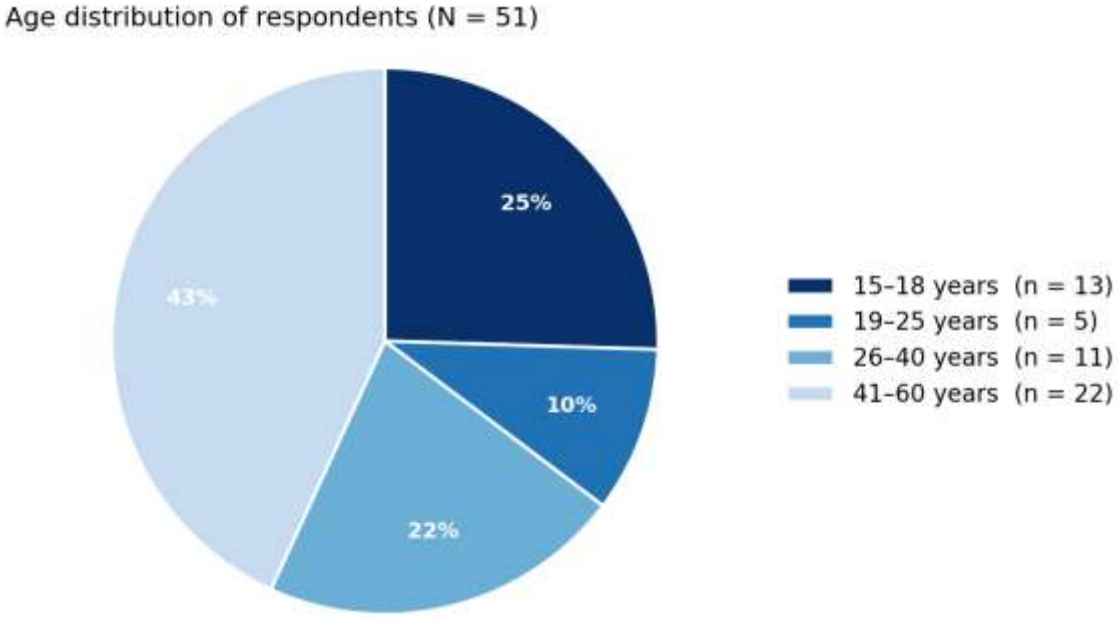


Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents (N = 51).

4.2 Responses to individual items

Respondents agreed most strongly with statements describing technology as a mixed blessing and warning about dependence on it (Table 2, Figure 2). Over 90% agreed that technology is a double-edged sword

(Q15), that its impact on freedom depends on who controls it (Q21), that people rely too much on technology for support (Q7), and that humans are becoming too dependent on it for important decisions (Q13). Large majorities also believed that social media is designed to control users (80%), that leaders' claims that technology will secure humanity's future are mostly rhetoric (78%), and that governments adopt new technologies for geopolitical advantage (82%).

Support for handing power to technology or the state was much weaker. Only 27% would feel comfortable in a fully AI-run society (Q4), 35% would accept reduced privacy for guaranteed safety (Q16), and just 25% agreed that governments should access citizens' data for national security (Q11), the lowest-rated item, with 57% disagreeing. Opinion was evenly split on whether AI should replace politicians if it could make more rational decisions: 43% agreed and 43% disagreed (Q17; Figure 3). Yet 76% said that in a crisis they trust technology and scientific expertise more than political leaders (Q6).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for all 21 items, ranked by mean (N = 51)

Item	Statement (abbreviated)	M	SD	% agree	% disagree
Q15	Technology is a double-edged sword	4.41	0.64	92.2	0.0
Q13	Humans too dependent on technology for important decisions	4.22	0.76	90.2	2.0
Q21	Impact on political freedom depends on who controls it	4.12	0.52	92.2	0.0
Q7	People rely too much on technology for emotional or social support	4.10	0.76	90.2	3.9
Q9	Social media designed more to control than empower users	4.08	0.84	80.4	5.9
Q19	People trust technology because they see it as objective	3.92	0.80	82.4	5.9
Q23	Leaders' "secure humanity's future" claims are mostly rhetoric	3.92	0.72	78.4	3.9
Q22	Governments adopt technology for geopolitical advantage	3.90	0.64	82.4	3.9
Q20	Excessive technological control more dangerous than excessive government power	3.84	0.81	74.5	7.8
Q24	Fiction strongly shapes views of technology as a solution	3.84	0.70	74.5	3.9
Q6	In crises, trust technology and experts more than political leaders	3.78	0.92	76.5	9.8
Q18	Confident I can recognise when technology influences my opinions	3.73	0.70	66.7	3.9
Q10	Technology companies hold more power than governments or citizens	3.61	1.06	56.9	19.6
Q8	Surveillance and safety technology makes me feel secure	3.57	0.85	58.8	9.8
Q12	Digital surveillance is weakening democracy	3.41	0.94	49.0	19.6

Item	Statement (abbreviated)	M	SD	% agree	% disagree
Q5	Technology can solve major global problems	3.37	1.02	54.9	25.5
Q14	Hopeful about human freedom in a technology-driven world	3.18	1.03	41.2	25.5
Q17	AI should replace politicians if more rational and effective	3.08	1.21	43.1	43.1
Q16	Would accept reduced privacy if safety were guaranteed	2.96	1.11	35.3	39.2
Q4	Comfortable living in a fully automated, AI-run society	2.92	0.98	27.5	37.3
Q11	Governments should access citizens' data for national security	2.51	1.22	25.5	56.9

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. % agree = 4 or 5; % disagree = 1 or 2.

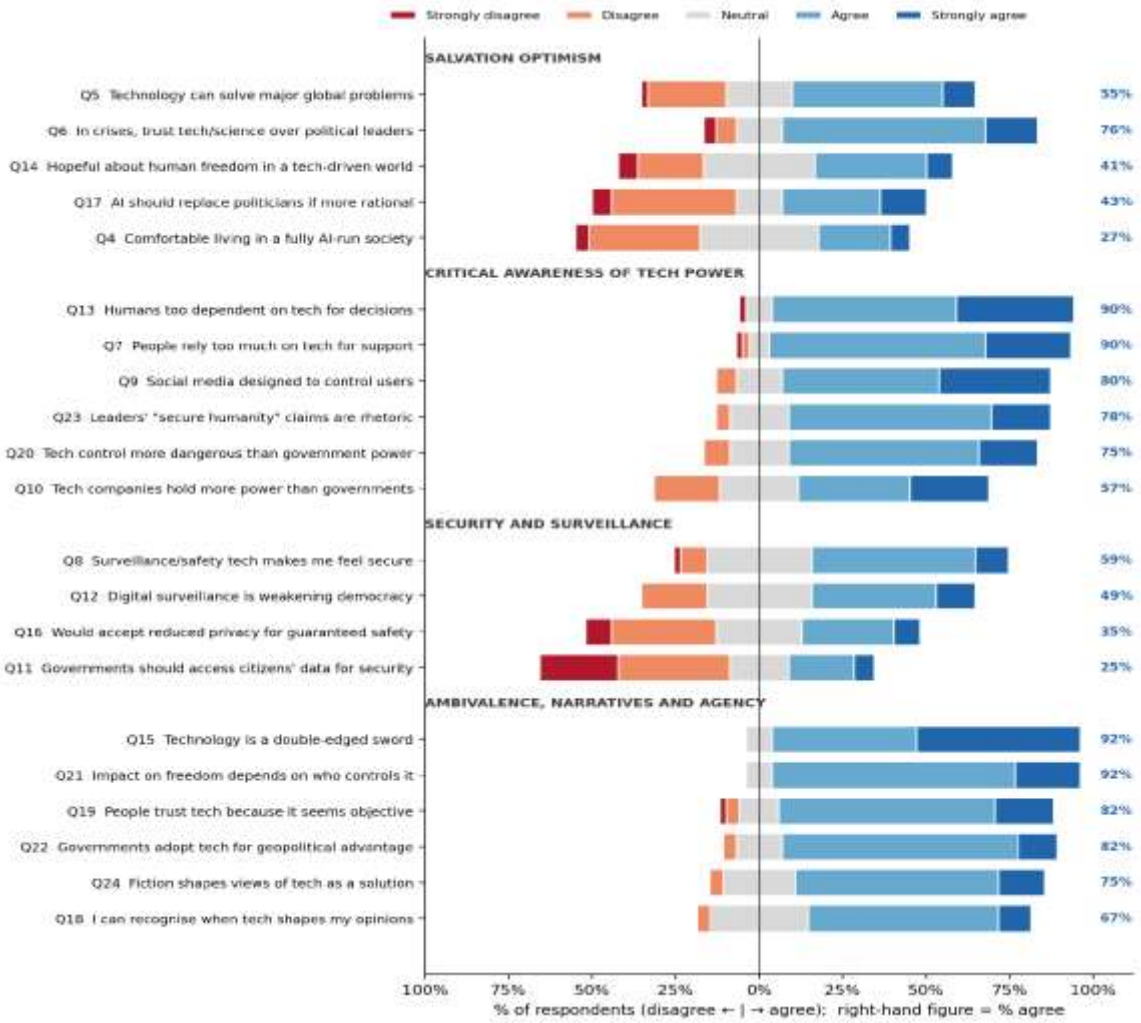


Figure 2. Distribution of responses to all 21 items, grouped by theme and centred on the neutral point (N = 51).

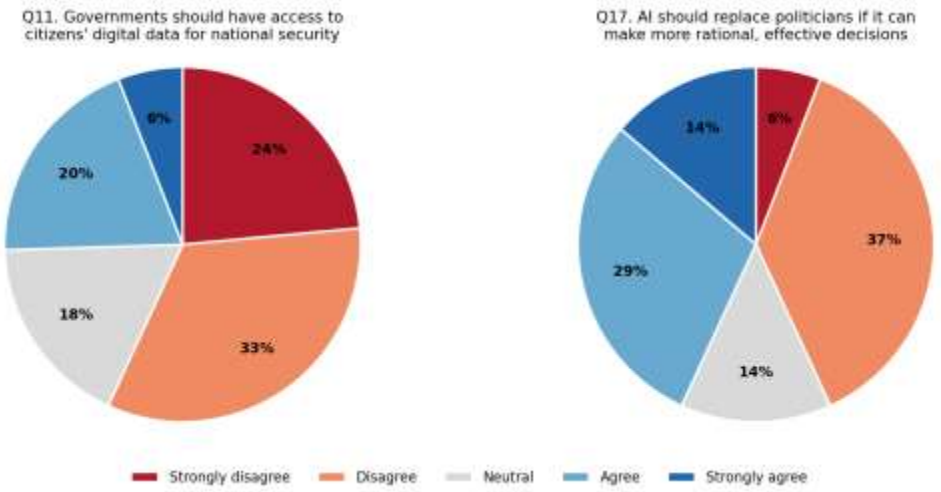


Figure 3. Responses to two items on transferring power: government access to citizens' data (Q11) and AI replacing politicians (Q17) (N = 51).

4.3 Salvation optimism and critical awareness (RQ1)

Respondents were moderately optimistic about technology but considerably more critical of its power (Figure 4). Technological salvation optimism ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.64$) was modestly but significantly above the neutral midpoint, Wilcoxon $W = 299$, $p = .005$, $r = .39$. Critical awareness of technological power ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.55$) was far above the midpoint, $W = 6.5$, $p < .001$, $r = .84$, and 47 of 51 respondents (92%) scored above neutral. Critical awareness was significantly higher than salvation optimism within respondents, $W = 90$, $p < .001$, $r = .72$.

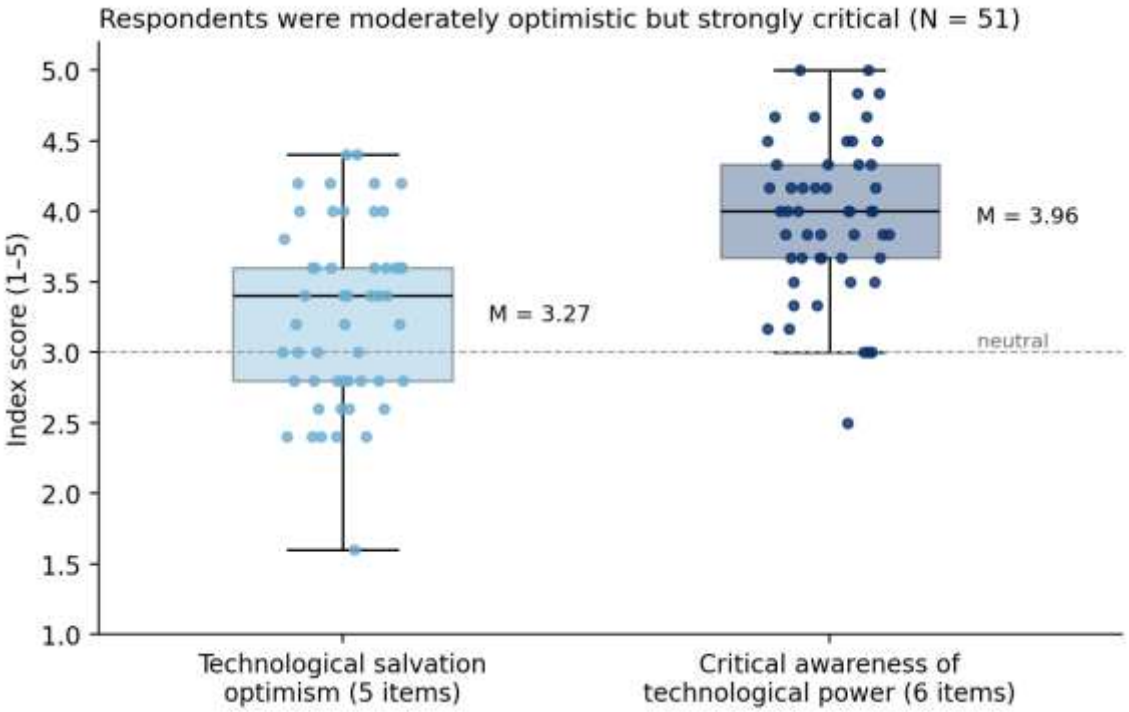


Figure 4. Distribution of technological salvation optimism and critical awareness of technological power scores. Boxes show the interquartile range; dots show individual respondents (N = 51).

4.4 Optimism and critical awareness together (RQ2)

Optimism and critical awareness did not exclude each other. The two indices were weakly *positively* correlated, ρ = .24, p = .088, rather than negatively as a simple optimist-versus-sceptic divide would predict. Twenty-seven respondents (53%) scored above neutral on both indices at once. This ambivalence is also visible in the items: 92% agreed that technology is a double-edged sword (Q15) and 92% that its effect on freedom depends on who controls it (Q21).

4.5 Salvation optimism and the privacy trade-off (RQ3)

Greater salvation optimism was associated with greater willingness to accept reduced privacy for guaranteed personal safety, ρ = .30, p = .033 (Figure 5). After FDR correction across the 14 planned correlations, this association was no longer significant (q = .094), so it was examined further in a regression controlling for critical awareness and age (Table 3). The model was significant, R^2 = .18, adjusted R^2 = .13, F(3, 47) = 3.44, p = .024. Salvation optimism was the only significant predictor (β = .33, p = .022; robust p = .011); critical awareness and age were not.

In contrast, optimism was unrelated to support for government access to citizens' data (Q11; ρ = .05, p = .73) and to feeling secure because of surveillance technology (Q8; ρ = .13, p = .36). Respondents who believed technology could make them safer were more willing to give up privacy for *personal* safety, but not to hand data to the state in the name of national security.

Table 3. Regression predicting willingness to accept reduced privacy for safety (Q16), N = 51

Predictor	b	β	p	p (robust HC3)
Technological salvation optimism	0.58	.33	.022	.011
Critical awareness of technological power	0.40	.20	.148	.151
Age (years)	0.01	.16	.254	.266

Note. R^2 = .18, adjusted R^2 = .13, F(3, 47) = 3.44, p = .024.

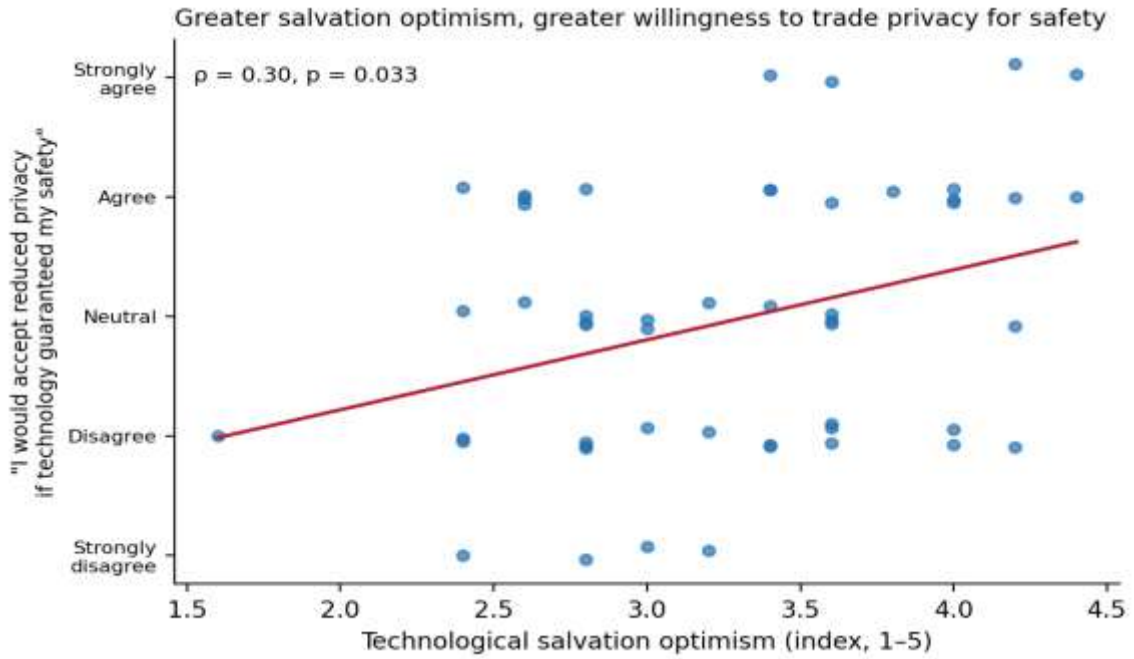


Figure 5. Salvation optimism against willingness to accept reduced privacy for guaranteed safety, with a fitted regression line. Points are jittered vertically for visibility (N = 51).

4.6 Narratives, objectivity, and scepticism (RQ4)

The strongest and most robust association in the study linked awareness of fiction's influence to scepticism of salvation claims. Respondents who agreed that fictional narratives shape how people view technology as a solution (Q24) were much more likely to regard leaders' claims that technology will "secure humanity's future" as political rhetoric (Q23), $\rho = .51$, $p < .001$, $q = .002$ (Table 4, Figure 6). Awareness of fiction's influence was also associated with overall critical awareness ($\rho = .34$, $p = .015$, $q = .094$), but not with salvation optimism ($\rho = .12$).

Those who believed people trust technology because it seems objective (Q19) were *less* willing to trade privacy for safety ($\rho = -.32$, $p = .023$, $q = .094$). Younger respondents were somewhat more optimistic about technological salvation (age and TSO, $\rho = -.31$, $p = .029$, $q = .094$). These three associations were significant before correction but not after, and are treated as tentative.

Table 4. Planned correlations (Spearman's ρ) with FDR correction, N = 51

RQ	Pair	ρ	p	q (FDR)
RQ3	Salvation optimism – Accept reduced privacy (Q16)	.30	.033	.094
RQ3	Salvation optimism – Government data access (Q11)	.05	.734	.790
RQ3	Salvation optimism – Surveillance makes me secure (Q8)	.13	.362	.559
RQ3	Critical awareness – Accept reduced privacy (Q16)	.26	.064	.149
RQ3	Critical awareness – Government data access (Q11)	.15	.283	.494
RQ3	Critical awareness – Surveillance makes me secure (Q8)	−.09	.540	.687
RQ4	Fiction shapes views (Q24) – Claims are rhetoric (Q23)	.51	< .001	.002
RQ4	Fiction shapes views (Q24) – Salvation optimism	.12	.399	.559
RQ4	Fiction shapes views (Q24) – Critical awareness	.34	.015	.094
RQ4	Tech seen as objective (Q19) – Salvation optimism	.06	.676	.789
RQ4	Tech seen as objective (Q19) – Accept reduced privacy (Q16)	−.32	.023	.094
RQ4	Can recognise tech influence (Q18) – Critical awareness	.22	.114	.228
RQ5	Age – Salvation optimism	−.31	.029	.094
RQ5	Age – Critical awareness	−.02	.907	.907

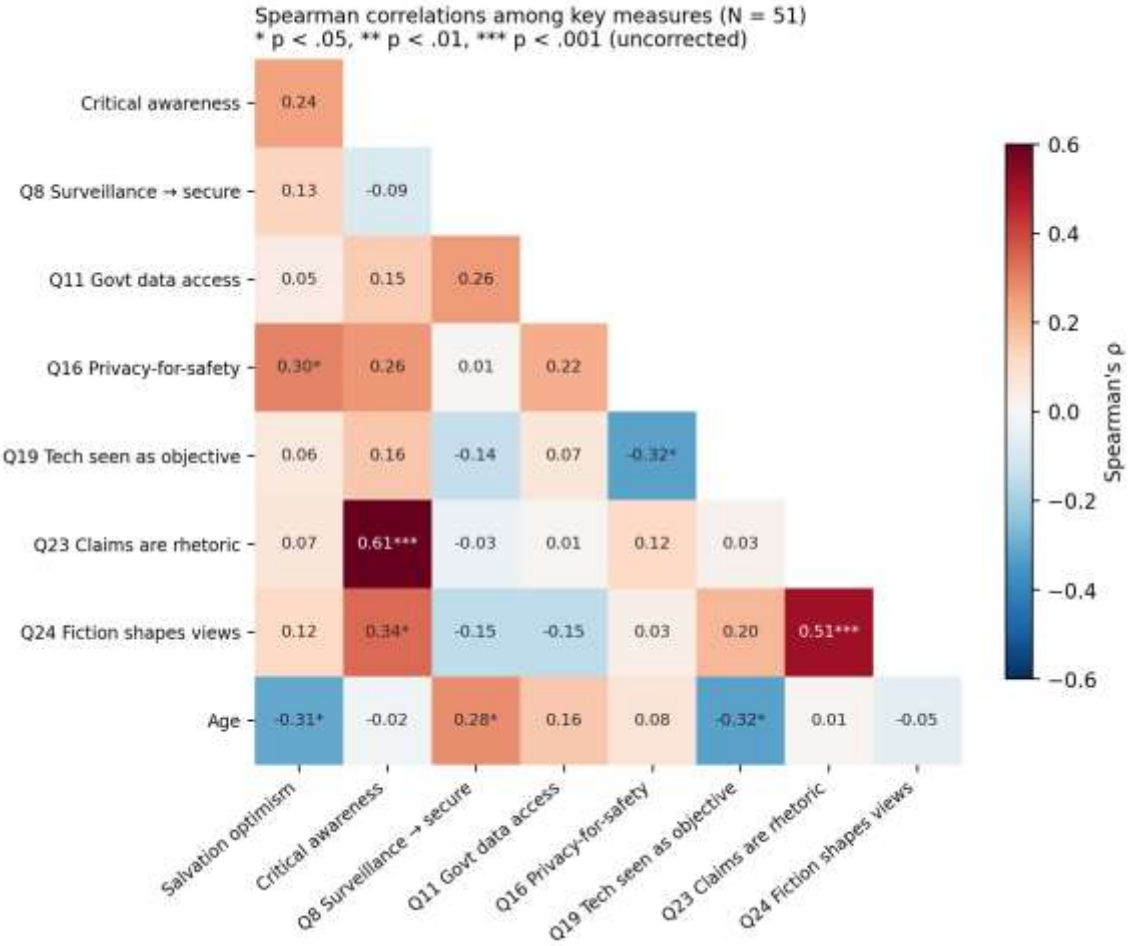


Figure 6. Spearman correlations among the two indices, key items, and age (N = 51). Stars show uncorrected significance; Table 4 gives FDR-corrected values.

4.7 Age differences and sensitivity analysis (RQ5)

Younger (15–25, n = 18) and older (26–60, n = 33) respondents did not differ significantly on either index or any item after FDR correction (all $q \geq .37$). The largest uncorrected differences were that older respondents more strongly agreed that excessive technological control is more dangerous than excessive government power (Q20: M = 4.03 vs 3.50, p = .016), while younger respondents were slightly more comfortable with an AI-run society (Q4: 3.22 vs 2.76, p = .084) and less supportive of government data access (Q11: 2.17 vs 2.70, p = .085).

Excluding the two straight-line responders (n = 49) left the main conclusions unchanged. Critical awareness remained far above salvation optimism ($p < .001$), salvation optimism remained above neutral (p = .012), the fiction–rhetoric correlation was unchanged ($\rho = .51$, $q = .003$), and salvation optimism still predicted acceptance of reduced privacy in the regression ($\beta = .30$, p = .041; robust p = .024), although the simple correlation weakened ($\rho = .26$, p = .077).

4.8 Summary of statistical tests

Table 5. Null hypotheses tested and decisions ($\alpha = .05$)

RQ	Null hypothesis (H_0)	Test	Result	Decision
RQ1	Salvation optimism equals the neutral midpoint	One-sample Wilcoxon	W = 299, p = .005, r = .39	Rejected

RQ	Null hypothesis (H_0)	Test	Result	Decision
RQ1	Critical awareness equals the neutral midpoint	One-sample Wilcoxon	$W = 6.5$, $p < .001$, $r = .84$	Rejected
RQ1	Critical awareness and salvation optimism are equal	Paired Wilcoxon	$W = 90$, $p < .001$, $r = .72$	Rejected
RQ2	Optimism and critical awareness are unrelated	Spearman's ρ	$\rho = .24$, $p = .088$	Retained (no negative relationship found)
RQ3	Salvation optimism is unrelated to accepting reduced privacy	Spearman's ρ with FDR; regression	$\rho = .30$, $q = .094$; $\beta = .33$, $p = .022$	Rejected in regression; tentative after FDR
RQ3	Optimism or critical awareness is unrelated to government data access or feeling secure (4 tests)	Spearman's ρ with FDR	All $q \geq .49$	Retained
RQ4	Belief that fiction shapes views is unrelated to seeing salvation claims as rhetoric	Spearman's ρ with FDR	$\rho = .51$, $q = .002$	Rejected
RQ4	Other narrative and objectivity associations are zero (5 tests)	Spearman's ρ with FDR	All $q \geq .094$	Retained (two tentative: Q24–CATP, Q19–Q16)
RQ5	Younger and older respondents do not differ (23 tests)	Mann–Whitney U with FDR	All $q \geq .37$	Retained
RQ5	Age is unrelated to salvation optimism	Spearman's ρ with FDR	$\rho = -.31$, $q = .094$	Retained (tentative)

Note. With N = 51, small effects may go undetected; a retained null means no effect was detected, not that none exists.

5. Discussion

5.1 Critical optimists, not believers

The central finding is that respondents did not accept narratives of technological salvation uncritically. They were mildly optimistic about technology's potential, but far more aware of its power to control, manipulate, and create dependence. Rather than splitting into optimists and sceptics, most held both views at once: over half scored above neutral on both indices, and nine in ten described technology as a double-edged sword whose effects depend on who controls it.

This pattern can be called *critical optimism*. It fits Winner's (1980) argument that the politics of technology lie in its arrangements of control rather than in the artifacts themselves, and it suggests that the public intuitively shares this view. It also qualifies the image of a public captured by sociotechnical imaginaries

(Jasanoff & Kim, 2015): respondents recognised the rhetorical function of salvation claims, with 78% regarding leaders' promises that technology will "secure humanity's future" as mainly political rhetoric.

5.2 Where salvation narratives still exert power

Critical awareness did not fully neutralise the political pull of salvation narratives. Respondents who were more optimistic about technology were more willing to accept reduced privacy in return for guaranteed personal safety, and this held after controlling for critical awareness and age. This is the mechanism the title points to, *from progress to power*: belief in technology's promise lowers resistance to giving up a protected sphere of personal life. It fits Solove's (2011) concern that framing privacy and security as a trade-off tends to favour security, and Davis and Silver's (2004) finding that people trade liberties for security when they feel protected by the trade.

The limits of this effect are equally important. Optimism did not translate into support for government access to citizens' data, which was the least popular statement in the survey. Respondents distinguished between technology that serves their own safety and data that serves the state. Salvation narratives framed around personal benefit may therefore be more politically persuasive than those framed around national security.

5.3 Trust in expertise and the technocratic temptation

Three in four respondents trusted technology and scientific expertise more than political leaders in a crisis, and opinion was evenly split on replacing politicians with AI. This suggests considerable dissatisfaction with political leadership and a real appetite for technocratic alternatives (Fischer, 1990). Yet only a quarter would be comfortable in a fully AI-run society. The appeal appears to lie in expertise as a corrective to politics, not in handing over control entirely. Notably, respondents who believed people trust technology because it seems objective were *less* willing to trade privacy, which suggests that recognising the "objectivity" narrative may itself protect against it.

5.4 Fiction as a lens for scepticism

The most robust association linked awareness of fiction's influence to scepticism of salvation rhetoric. Respondents who believed that novels, films, and media shape views of technology were much more likely to see leaders' promises as rhetoric. Cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) suggests media shape beliefs; this finding suggests that *awareness* of that shaping may act as a form of media literacy that carries over to political claims. Because the data are correlational, the direction is uncertain: sceptical people may also be more likely to notice fiction's influence.

5.5 Generational patterns

Younger respondents tended to be more optimistic about technological salvation, though this did not survive correction for multiple tests, and no item differed significantly between age groups. Older respondents leaned towards seeing technological control as more dangerous than government power. These tentative patterns are worth testing in a larger sample, since generational differences in technological optimism would shape how future publics respond to salvation narratives.

5.6 Implications

For policymakers, the findings suggest that public trust in technology is conditional on who controls it, so governance, accountability, and transparency about data use matter as much as technical promise. For educators, the link between narrative awareness and scepticism supports teaching media and digital literacy that examines how technology is portrayed, not just how it works. For citizens, the willingness to trade privacy for safety among optimists is a reminder that the most persuasive promises are those framed around personal benefit.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

This study surveyed 51 respondents to examine how narratives of technological salvation relate to political attitudes. Respondents emerged as critical optimists: mildly hopeful about technology's potential, but strongly aware of its power to control and create dependence, and convinced that its effects depend on who controls it. Most regarded leaders' promises of technological salvation as rhetoric, and few supported giving governments access to citizens' data. Yet salvation narratives still exerted influence where they promised personal benefit: greater optimism predicted greater willingness to trade privacy for guaranteed safety. The clearest single finding linked awareness of fiction's influence on views of technology to scepticism of political salvation claims, pointing to narrative literacy as a possible safeguard.

6.2 Limitations

Six limitations should be noted. First, the sample is small (N = 51) and was recruited through personal networks, so it is not representative of any wider population. Second, the salvation optimism index had marginal reliability ($\alpha = .59$), so findings involving it are tentative, and the security items did not form a reliable scale. Third, the data are cross-sectional and correlational, so no causal conclusions can be drawn. Fourth, demographic data beyond age, such as gender, education, and location, were not collected. Fifth, several associations were significant before but not after correction for multiple testing; the regression finding on privacy should be confirmed in a larger sample. Sixth, the items measure stated attitudes, which may differ from how people behave when actually asked to share data.

6.3 Future research

Future work could use a larger, more diverse sample with demographic information, and develop a fuller, validated measure of salvation optimism. Experiments that expose participants to salvation narratives framed around personal safety or national security would test whether framing causally changes willingness to give up privacy. Comparing countries at different stages of digital infrastructure development, and examining real data-sharing behaviour rather than stated attitudes, would further test the critical-optimism pattern identified here.

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