

TRACING THE MONEY: Private Equity, Private Credit, and the Data Center Bubble

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Executive Summary

The relentless expansion of data centers to fuel the artificial intelligence (AI) boom has ignited a firestorm of opposition in communities across the country. While Big Tech claims that AI will multiply productivity, transform society, accelerate scientific and medical breakthroughs, and more, people are experiencing very different realities. A September 2026 poll found that 75 percent of U.S. adults are more concerned than excited about AI.¹ The mad rush to build sprawling AI data center complexes nationwide to benefit Big Tech and Wall Street investors—never mind the environmental and economic costs to local communities—is only increasing opposition. This pushback is likely to grow, as the total number of data centers in the United States is projected to balloon to 7,000 when the buildout is done,² a 67 percent increase from 2025.³

The data center boom is extremely resource intensive. Already, the land required for these enormous campuses—ranging from 40 acres for a small center to 1,000 acres for a hyperscale center⁴—is crowding out essential uses like farming and housing.⁵ One company, Stream Data Centers, now owned by the private equity firm Apollo Global Management,⁶ razed an entire neighborhood in Elk Grove Village, Illinois to erect a data center.⁷ In addition to cannibalizing valuable land, data centers also deplete the water table,⁸ drive up utility bills,⁹ and emit greenhouse gases warming the planet.¹⁰

Private equity has been a largely hidden backer in the controversial AI boom and data center land rush. This first, comprehensive assessment of private equity ownership, investment, and private credit lending in the data center landscape uncovers that a set of giant private equity firms—interconnected with Big Tech companies—are behind a major portion of these developments.¹¹ It identifies the U.S. facilities that have private equity backing, explores the harms of these projects on the ground, and highlights places where people are organizing to fight back.

Key Findings

Private equity firms are investing billions of dollars to finance this data center buildout, and Big Tech firms are especially reliant on these Wall Street investors. We examined the private equity industry's purchase of data center companies, investment in data center firms and facilities, and provision of private credit to data center operations as of the end of 2025¹² and found that:

1. Private equity firms own or back an estimated 25 percent to 30 percent of active U.S. data centers

As of December 2025, 78 private equity firms backed an estimated 13 to 17 gigawatts (GW) of active data center capacity across 670 data centers or campuses. These private equity-owned or -financed data centers make up an estimated 25 percent to 30 percent of the 54 GW of total U.S. active data center capacity.¹³

2. Private equity is backing half of the planned data center expansion

Private equity-owned or -financed companies have announced or initiated at least another 26.8 GW of U.S. data center capacity in development, under construction, or actively planned, amounting to over half of the total 50 GW of data centers in the pipeline **by 2030**.

3. In several states, private equity is backing large portions of data center capacity and expansion

Private equity firms own one third of the active data center capacity in Texas.¹⁴ In Arizona, private equity controls almost half of current data center capacity and one third of planned expansion in the state.¹⁵ In Virginia, private equity controls nearly one quarter of online capacity and over 10 percent of projects in development.¹⁶

4. The five largest private equity firms backing data centers control nearly 20 percent of existing capacity and 30 percent of planned capacity

The five largest private equity data center owners in the United States (by total active and planned capacity) are Brookfield Asset Management, Ares Management, Blue Owl Capital, DigitalBridge, and Apollo. These firms control or hold investments in 17 percent of existing capacity and 30 percent of planned capacity.

Tax giveaways to data center developments deprive states and localities of billions in much needed revenue in a time of draconian federal cuts. The state of Georgia lost \$2.5 billion in tax receipts in just one year.¹⁷ At the national level, as the share of economic activity and capital expenditure routed to this sector swells, overinvestment in AI may lead to financial instability if claims about usage and uptake fall short of projections or if data centers continue to meet with mass resistance. The prevalence of private equity financing for data centers—mostly drawing capital from public pension funds and university endowments—and the recent spate of AI companies vying for public listing raises significant concerns about how much exposure regular people have to this highly speculative sector through their retirement savings. If this bubble eventually pops, we risk repeating the hardships of the 2008 financial crisis, where Wall Street got rich from their gains and were bailed out, while communities and workers suffered the consequences of the financial industry's greed.

¹ SSRS. CNN AI Poll. September 24, 2026.

² American Edge Project, "[America's AI Surge: Powering Investment, Jobs, and Growth in Every State.](#)"

³ American Edge Project, "[America's AI Surge: Powering Investment, Jobs, and Growth in Every State.](#)"

⁴ Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation. "Data center impacts on agriculture." Available <https://wfbf.com/policy/current-issues/state-agricultural-issues/data-center-impacts-on-agriculture/>. Accessed April 19, 2026.

⁵ Rowe, Niamh. "[US farmers are rejecting multimillion-dollar datacenter bids for their land: 'I'm not for sale.'](#)" *Guardian*. February 21, 2026.

⁶ Available <https://www.apollo.com/insights-news/pressreleases/2025/11/apollo-funds-complete-acquisition-of-stream-data-centers-3179224>

⁷ Parker, Will. [Big tech is buying up America's land---and home builders can't compete.](#) *Wall Street Journal*. February 17, 2026.

⁸ Coletti, Leonardo et al. "[AI is draining water from areas that need it most.](#)" *Bloomberg News*. May 8, 2025.

⁹ Saul, Josh et al. [AI data centers are sending power bills soaring.](#) *Bloomberg News*. September 29, 2025.

¹⁰ Shehabi, Arman et al. Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. "[2024 United States Data Center Energy Usage Report.](#)" December 2024

¹¹ Sam, Cedric et al. "[A guide to the circular deals underpinning the AI boom.](#)" *Bloomberg Technology*. March 11, 2026; Guevarra, Joyce, Kelly Morgan, and Shambhavi Gupta. "[Private equity investment surge sends US data center deals to 5-year high.](#)" *S&P Global*. May 12, 2026.

¹² Company ownership as of December 2025. Facility counts, capacity, status, and location were last verified in April 2026.

¹³ International Energy Association. Energy and AI: Energy for AI. June 16, 2025. Available <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/data-tools/energy-and-ai-observatory?tab=Energy+for+AI>. Accessed May 27, 2026.

¹⁴ Aterio Data Products. "[U.S. data centers and power demand.](#)" August 25, 2026.

¹⁵ Aterio. "US [data center Inventory by State.](#)" 2026. Available at <https://www.aterio.io/insights/us-data-centers/by-state>. Accessed June 4, 2026. ; Cleanview. "[Data Centers in Arizona.](#)" 2026. Available at <https://cleanview.co/data-centers/arizona>. Accessed June 4, 2026.

¹⁶ Cleanview. "[Data Centers in Virginia.](#)" August 2026.

¹⁷ Leroy, Greg et al. Good Jobs First. [Data Center Tax Abatements: Why States and Localities Must Disclose These Soaring Revenue Losses.](#)" April 2026.