New Networks of Capital: The World Rewired

April 2026

HSBC | Opening up a world of opportunity

Introduction

The global economy has been shaped by a cumulative series of major shocks in recent years. The pandemic disrupted supply chains and accelerated digital adoption. More recently, energy price spikes and resulting inflationary pressures have increased costs and created uncertainty. At the same time, headwinds have reshaped trade relationships, strategies, investments and capital reallocation, while rapid advances in AI and other technologies are changing how businesses operate.

Recent world events have become a significant source of uncertainty, and HSBC Global Investment Research's latest forecasts show that annual average global inflation in 2026 will accelerate to 3.5%, with the biggest revisions in Europe and Asia, and global growth will slow from 2.8% in 2025 to 2.5% in 2026[1].

The incremental impact of volatility over the past decade has been lasting. It has created a more unpredictable and faster-moving global economy. According to the survey, global economic volatility is now seen as an anticipated feature of the operating environment (95%), shaping how decision-makers operate and plan for the future.

Findings from this survey show that businesses and institutional investors are not pulling back. Instead, they are actively adjusting their strategies, reallocating capital and identifying new opportunities for growth. 93% of companies plan to increase cross-border trade or investment over the next five years, even as the operating environment reshapes the economic landscape at greater speed.

Businesses and investors are adapting and investing. 72% expect moderate to significant repositioning over the next three years. They are reassessing where they operate, how they invest and how they manage volatility.

We surveyed 3,000 global senior leaders, business owners and institutional investors in 10 markets between 9-16 March 2026 to gain insights on how they are responding to the current climate and how this informs their existing and longer-term plans. *See page 14 for full methodology.*

1. HSBC Global Investment Research: Global Economics Quarterly, 25 Mar 26

A clear shift is emerging in how leaders respond to disruption. 88% are repositioning for the long-term, by recalibrating their capital allocation approach. They are either entering new markets, reshaping supply chains or investing in new technologies.

These changes are already influencing strategy. Globalisation is not retreating; it is rewiring. Trade and investment flows are becoming more regional. At the same time, technology, particularly AI, is becoming a central driver of investment.

As these decisions accelerate, they are beginning to reshape the structure of the global economy. Financial systems are innovating, with digital finance becoming an increasingly prominent form of finance and private capital playing a greater role in how capital is allocated.

Taken together, this points to a global economy that is being reshaped in stages. Cumulative global shocks are changing how businesses think about volatility. Strategies are shifting in response. Over time, these decisions are beginning to reshape how the system itself operates.

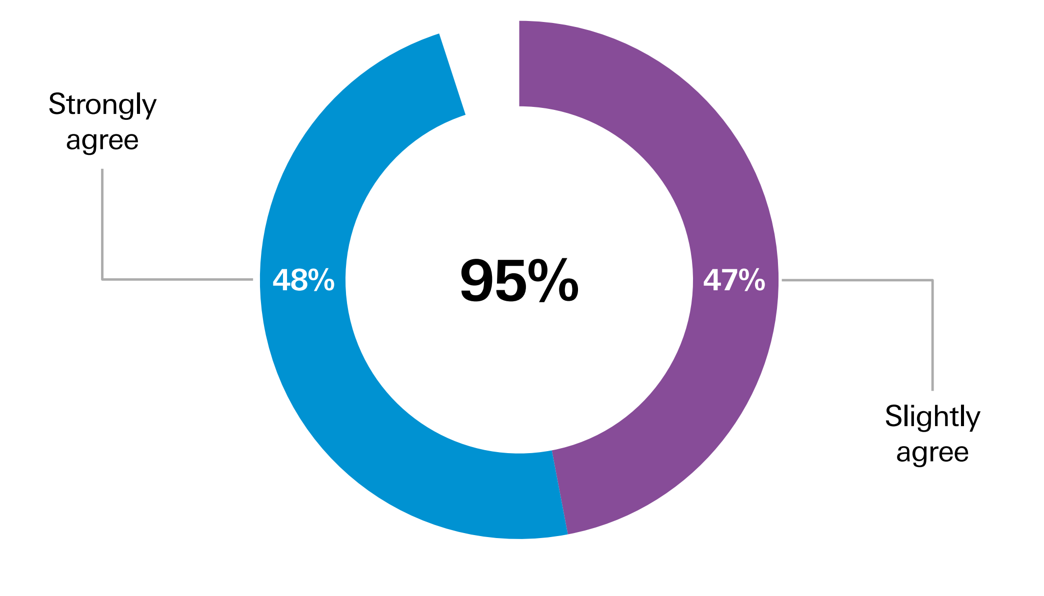
1

Shocks have reset expectations

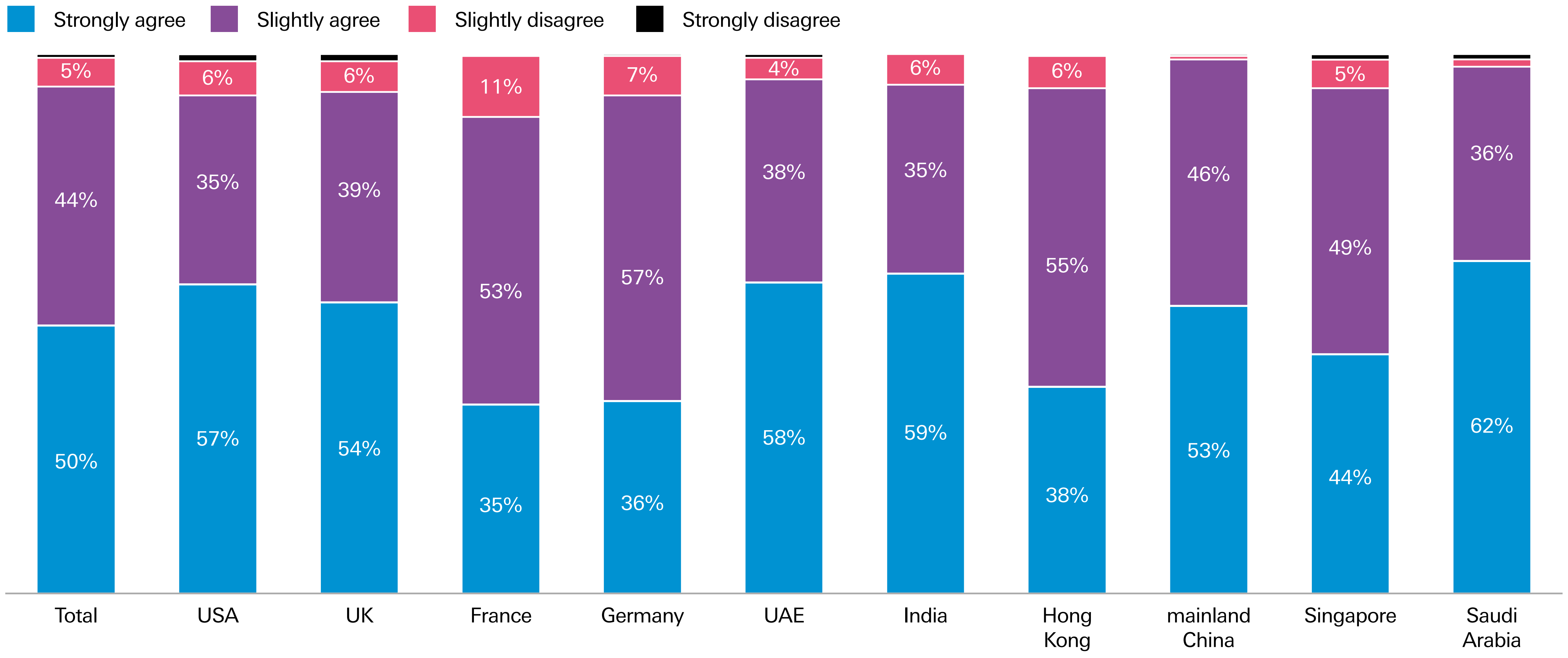
Global volatility is no longer seen as temporary, but as something that will continue to influence how organisations plan, invest and manage risk. In fact, the vast majority (95%) of businesses and investors now view global economic volatility as a feature of the operating environment.

Despite this volatility, sentiment remains conducive. Most decision-makers continue to see strong opportunities for international growth (94%). Many are moving forward by expanding into new markets, reshaping supply chains and adapting their operating models.

Respondents in Saudi Arabia and the UAE appear to be steadfast on their medium-term strategies despite the current situation in the Middle East, with their strong responses on the opportunities for growth in the short and longer term, in line with other markets surveyed. The survey showed that businesses and investors in the UAE (96%) and Saudi Arabia (98%) are turning to supply chain reconfiguration, with 94% of respondents stating that cross border trade and investment will become more regional in pattern.



95% said that global economic volatility is now seen as a feature of the operating environment.

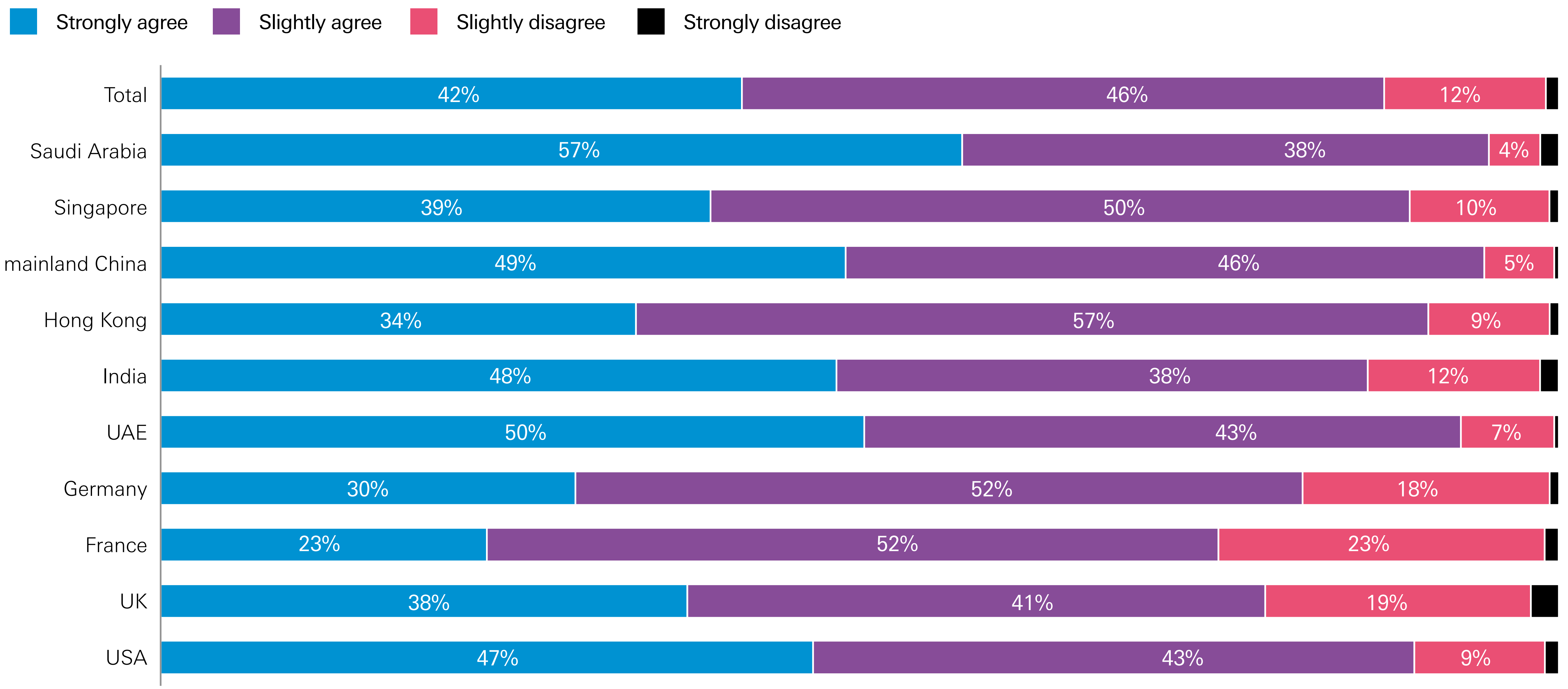


% who agree/disagree that despite volatility, there are significant opportunities for international growth (e.g. from reconfiguring supply chains, reshaping market footprints) *Please note that values under 3% are not displayed on all graphs.

This is supported by a more confident approach to risk. 87% of businesses say they are more willing to take calculated risks in pursuit of growth than they were five years ago. At the same time, over half report that their investment horizon has lengthened compared to three years ago, reflecting a shift toward longer-term positioning.

Many leaders also see this period as a window to reposition their organisation (88%). They are accelerating decisions that might otherwise have taken longer, from rethinking market exposure to redefining strategic priorities.

As a result, expectations have shifted, and organisations are building for a world where change is continuous.



% per market who strongly agree or agree the current economic environment presents a window to reposition their organisation

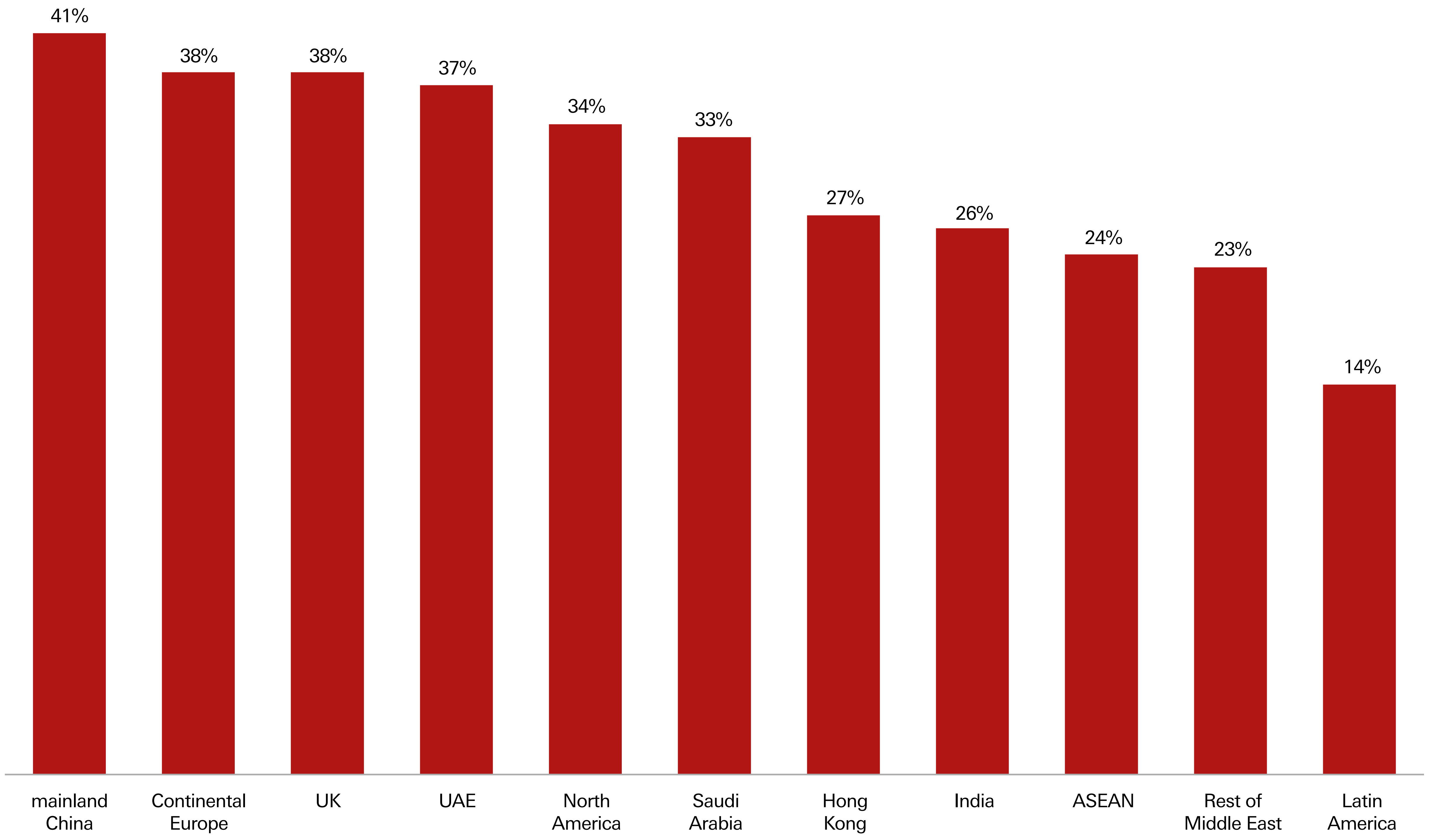
2

Strategies are being reshaped

Businesses and institutional investors are actively reshaping their strategies, particularly in how they engage with global markets and where they invest. 89% are actively increasing capital deployment in high-growth markets.

One of the clearest shifts is the increasing regionalisation of trade and investment. 91% of businesses expect cross-border activity to become more regional in pattern over the next five years. Globalisation remains strong, but its structure is evolving, with greater emphasis on regional networks.

More businesses expect mainland China to increase in importance to their economic relationships than any other market over the next five years, underlining its central role in future growth. Continental Europe and the UK are also seen as key markets for trade, investment and market access.

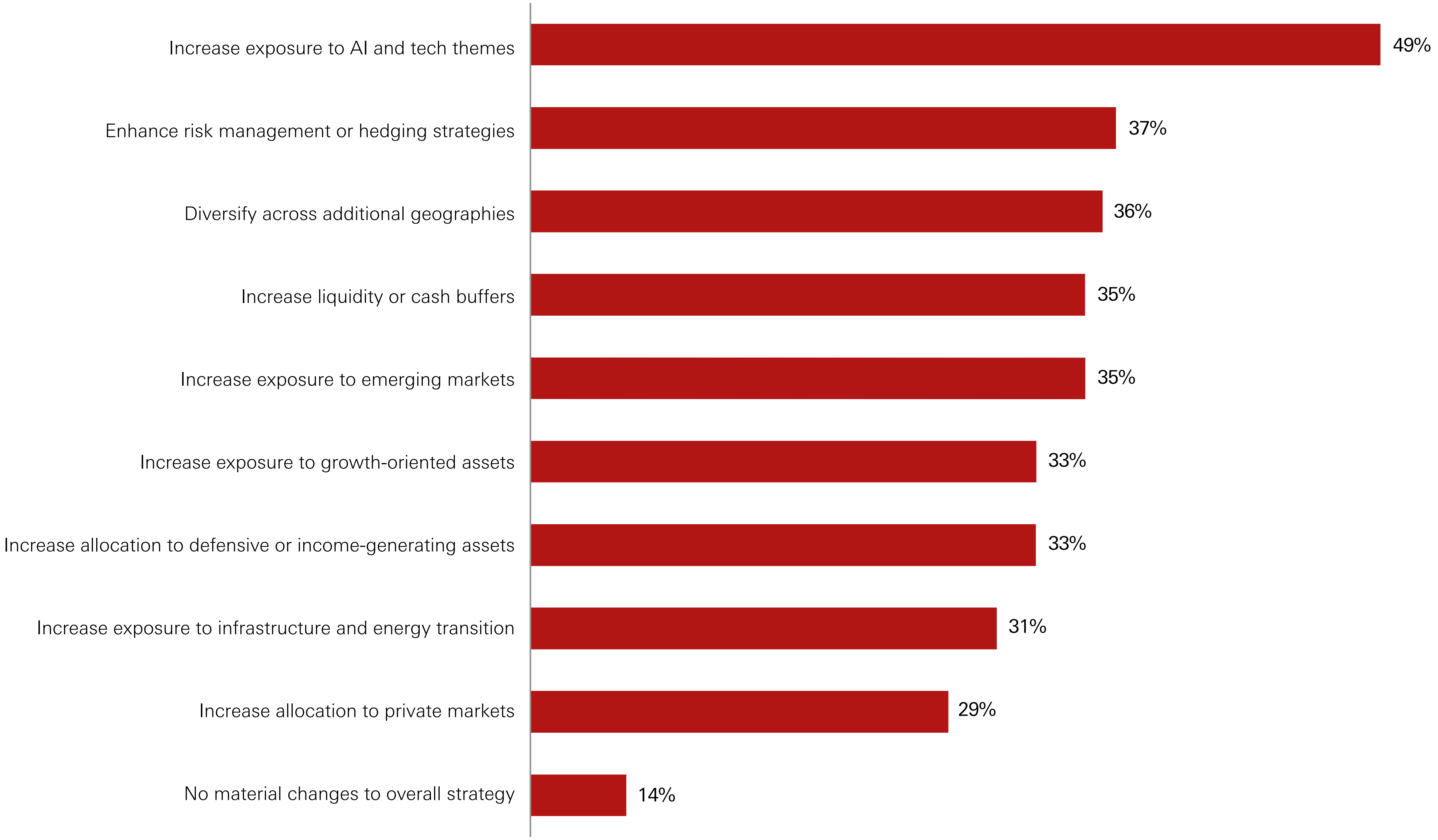


% of respondents who expect each region to become more important to their economic relationships in the next five years

At the same time, the drivers of growth are evolving. Access to technology and infrastructure (50%) is now as important as market growth and client demand (49%) in shaping international strategy.

When considering specific markets in which to increase exposure, the presence of strong AI and data-related infrastructure and attractive energy costs (51%) was almost as important as strong growth prospects and customer demand (52%).

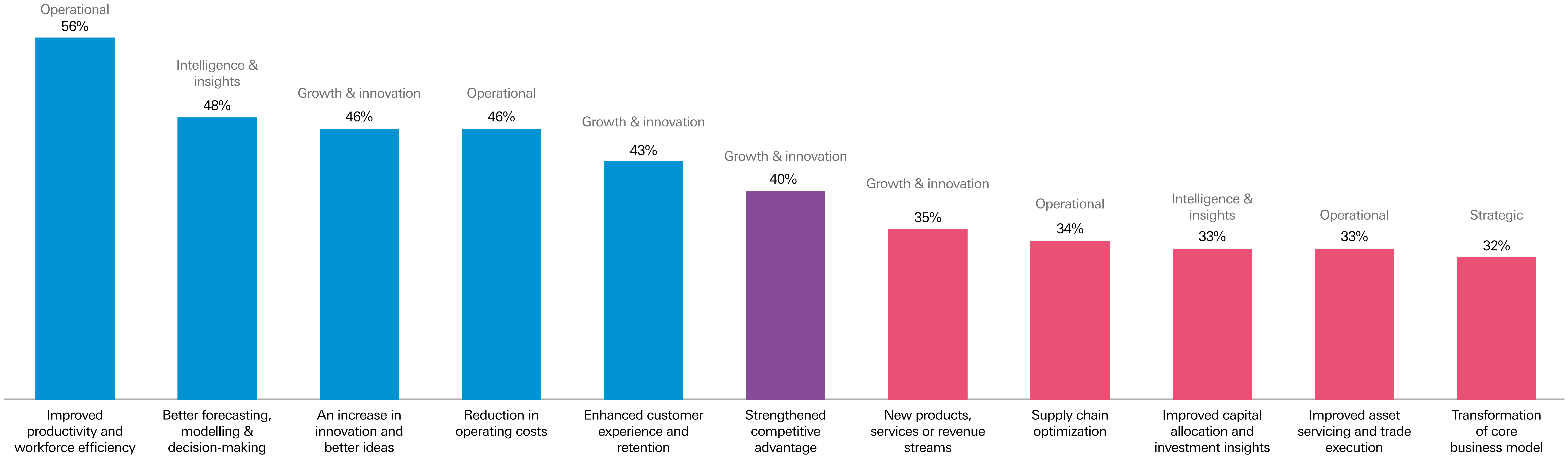
This is reinforced by how investors are positioning portfolios. AI and technology are cited as the most important factors influencing portfolio positioning in the current climate (49%), ahead of enhanced risk management and hedging (37%) and geographic diversification (36%).



How investors are positioning client portfolios in 2026 in response to the current economic climate.

Respondents also expect AI to have a wide range of potential benefits on their business models over the next three years. Approximately half expect productivity gains, better forecasting and increased innovation to have the biggest impact, while a sizeable proportion (32%) expect it to transform their core business model by 2030.

Together, these trends point to a period of active repositioning. Businesses are making deliberate choices about regions and markets to compete in and technologies to invest in to build advantage.



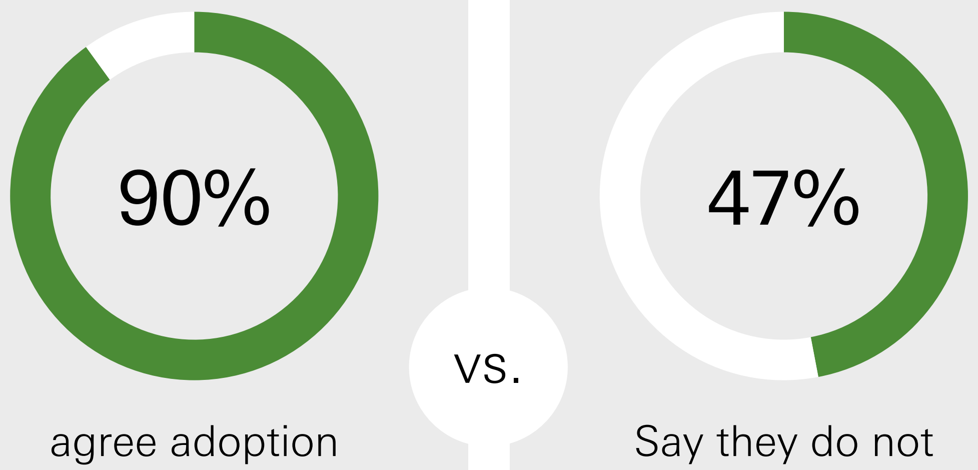
% who see each as a significant potential benefit of AI over the next 3 years.

3

Structural shifts are now emerging

As businesses reshape their strategies, the effects are becoming visible in the structure of the global financial system.

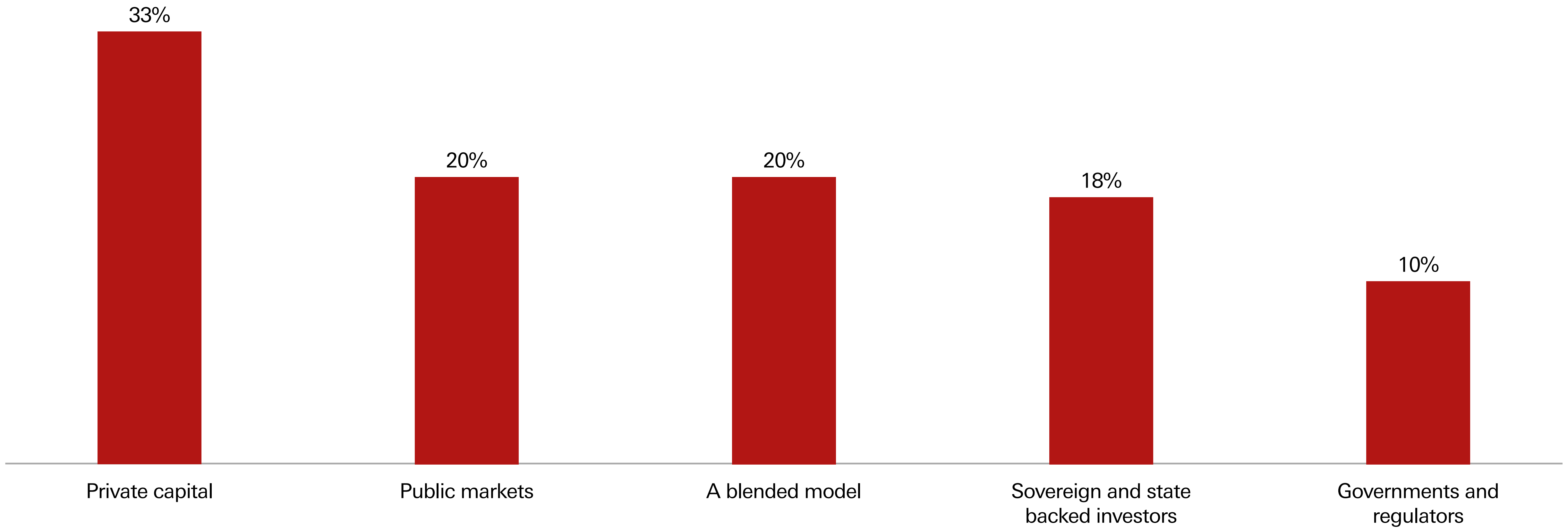
Digital finance is advancing quickly, with 90% of decision-makers expecting adoption to accelerate materially over the next five years. Over half believe digital and tokenised assets will become core market infrastructure in the same period. But this momentum is not matched by readiness. Almost half of businesses say they do not yet understand how digital finance will impact their organisation, while fewer than four in 10 are actively implementing use cases.



agree adoption of digital finance technologies will accelerate materially over the next five years.

Say they do not yet understand how digital finance will impact their business.

This shift is also reflected in how capital is being deployed. 88% of organisations say they have recalibrated their capital allocation approach in response to increased volatility. Alongside this, the role of private capital is growing as it matures into a mainstream asset class of increasing importance to the global economy. Businesses and institutional investors believe that private capital (33%) will exert the greatest influence over global capital allocation in the decade ahead, ahead of public markets and a blended model (both 20%). This reflects demand for longer-term and more flexible funding and signals a shift in how capital is deployed and controlled.



% who say by 2035 each will have the greatest influence over global capital allocation

Taken together, these developments signal an inflection point in how the global economy is financed and where liquidity flows. Capital is not retreating but becoming more selective. As a result, access to capital and the ability to connect to global investment flows is becoming an increasingly important source of competitive advantage.

Conclusion

In response to global volatility and frequent change, businesses are reassessing where they operate, how they invest and how they manage risk. At the same time, many of the fundamentals remain intact. International expansion remains central to growth strategies, with businesses focused on capturing new opportunities across markets and sectors.

What is changing is how that growth is being pursued. Greater emphasis is being placed on access to technology and capability, greater regional interconnectivity and smarter capital allocation. Businesses and investors are making clearer choices about where to compete and how to invest in response to a more complex and fast-moving environment.

Taken together, these shifts point to a global economy that is being rewired. Flows of trade, capital and investment are evolving in shape and direction. Those that adapt quickly to this ever-changing landscape will be best positioned for the future.

Our Global Investment Summit survey highlights a structural transformation in the global economy. Trade and investment flows are becoming more regional, Asia is growing in strategic importance, and technology is reshaping how and where capital is deployed.

Business leaders and institutional investors are recalibrating where they operate, invest and allocate capital as complexity rises.

Michael Roberts
CEO, HSBC Bank Plc and CEO, Corporate and Institutional Banking, HSBC

Methodology

All values are in US ($) dollars unless otherwise stated.

The HSBC New Networks of Capital: The World Rewired report is based on the insights of 2,500 senior decision-makers at businesses with international operations and 500 global institutional investors, commissoned by HSBC and conducted by British Polling accredited Savanta. Responses were collected from 9-16 March 2026 across 10 markets: UK, France, Hong Kong, Germany, mainland China, Singapore, USA, India, UAE and Saudi Arabia. The sample comprised of 250 international businesses and 50 institutional investors in each market.

Of the 2,500 international businesses, 726 reported global turnover of over USD2 billion in the past 12 months, 900 turned over between USD500 million and USD2 billion, and 874 had turnover of USD50 million to USD500 million. Of the 500 institutional investors, 164 reported that their company manages $10bn+ in AUM, 128 managed between $1bn to $9bn AUM, and 208 manage less than $1bn AUM.

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